

# THE LAST 100 YARDS

## The Crucible of Close Combat in Large-Scale Combat Operations

Edited by Col. Paul E. Berg



LARGE-SCALE COMBAT  
OPERATIONS SERIES

Army University Press



Cover image: As part of the World War II Bougainville Campaign in the South Pacific, US 129th Infantry Regiment troops advance with an M4 tank during the March 1944 Japanese counterattack on the US lodgement near Torokina. (Courtesy of US Army.)

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*The Last 100 Yards: the Crucible of Close Combat in Large-Scale Combat Operations*



**The Last 100 Yards**

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Close Combat in Large-Scale  
Combat Operations**

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Col. Paul E. Berg



**Army University Press**  
**Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Berg, Paul E., 1970–, editor. | Army University Press (U.S.), issuing body.

Title: The last 100 yards: the crucible of close combat in large-scale combat operations / edited by Paul E. Berg.

Other titles: Last 100 yards (Army University Press (U.S.) | Crucible of close combat in large-scale combat | Last one hundred yards.

Description: 1st edition. | Fort Leavenworth, Kansas : Army University Press, 2019. | Series: US Army large-scale combat operations series | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019011717 (print) | LCCN 2019012664 (ebook) | ISBN 9781940804569 (print).

Subjects: LCSH: Combat sustainability (Military science)--History--20th century--Case studies. | Operational art (Military science)--History--20th century--Case studies. | Hand-to-hand fighting--History--20th century--Case studies. | United States--History, Military--20th century--Case studies.

Classification: LCC U102 (ebook) | LCC U102 .L33 2019 (print) | DDC 355.40904--dc23 | SUDOC D 110.20:C 73.

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/201901171>.

July 2019



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Editor  
Diane R. Walker

## Foreword

Since the Soviet Union's fall in 1989, the specter of large-scale ground combat against a peer adversary was remote. During the years following, the US Army found itself increasingly called upon to lead multinational operations in the lower to middle tiers of the range of military operations and conflict continuum. The events of 11 September 2001 led to more than 15 years of intense focus on counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. An entire generation of Army leaders and Soldiers were culturally imprinted by this experience. We emerged as an Army more capable in limited contingency operations than at any time in our nation's history, but the geopolitical landscape continues to shift and the risk of great power conflict is no longer a remote possibility.

While our Army focused on limited contingency operations in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, other regional and peer adversaries scrutinized US military processes and methods and adapted their own accordingly. As technology has proliferated and become accessible in even the most remote corners of the world, the US military's competitive advantage is being challenged across all of the warfighting domains. In the last decade, we have witnessed an emergent China, a revanchist and aggressive Russia, a menacing North Korea, and a cavalier Iranian regime. Each of these adversaries seeks to change the world order in their favor and contest US strategic interests abroad. The chance for war against a peer or regional near-peer adversary has increased exponentially, and we must rapidly shift our focus to successfully compete in all domains and across the full range of military operations.

Over the last two years, the US Army has rapidly shifted the focus of its doctrine, training, education, and leader development to increase readiness and capabilities to prevail in large-scale ground combat operations against peer and near-peer threats. Our new doctrine, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, dictates that the Army provide the joint force four unique strategic roles: shaping the security environment, preventing conflict, prevailing in large-scale combat operations, and consolidating gains to make temporary success permanent.

To enable this shift of focus, the Army is now attempting to change its culture shaped by more than fifteen years of persistent limited-contingency operations. Leaders must recognize that the hard-won wisdom of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is important to retain but does not fully square with the exponential lethality, hyperactive chaos, and accelerated tempo of the multi-domain battlefield when facing a peer or near-peer adversary.

To emphasize the importance of the Army's continued preparation for large-scale combat operations, the US Army Combined Arms Center has published these volumes of *The US Army Large-Scale Combat Operations Series book set*. The intent is to expand the knowledge and understanding of the contemporary issues the US Army faces by tapping our organizational memory to illuminate the future. The reader should reflect on these case studies to analyze each situation, identify the doctrines at play, evaluate leaders' actions, and determine what differentiated success from failure. Use them as a mechanism for discussion, debate, and intellectual examination of lessons of the past and their application to today's doctrine, organization, and training to best prepare the Army for large-scale combat. Relevant answers and tangible reminders of what makes us the world's greatest land power await in the stories of these volumes.

Prepared for War!

Michael D. Lundy  
Lieutenant General, US Army  
Commanding General  
US Army Combined Arms Center



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## Introduction

Col. Paul E. Berg

Military professionals call upon experience, study, and training to prepare for the rigors of combat. When they lack personal experience, they must compensate with enhanced study and reflection upon the realities of large-scale ground combat. Today in the US Army, few leaders have experienced multi-domain large-scale ground combat against a determined near-peer or peer enemy firsthand. This volume, as part of *The US Army Large-Scale Combat Operations Series*, serves to augment military professionals' understanding of the realities of large-scale ground combat operations through the experiences of those who lived it.

History and doctrine have a complementary relationship. Informed by the lessons of history, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, directly addresses the requirements of large-scale ground combat operations. Theater armies, field armies, corps, divisions, and brigades shape operational environments, prevent conflict, prevail in large-scale ground combat, and consolidate gains to make temporary positions of advantage more permanent. The doctrine accepts that great power conflict will be more lethal and less forgiving, especially in the last 100 yards, than what any of our leaders have seen in their lifetimes. The following passage from Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, highlights this environment:

Hürtgen Forest: In November 1944, the 4th Infantry Division attacked into the Hürtgen Forest in a costly attempt to break through Nazi Germany's "West Wall" and into the Rhine Valley beyond. Opposing them were veteran German divisions, dug into prepared positions consisting of concrete pillboxes and log bunkers, all protected by a carpet of mines. These defenses were skillfully camouflaged in a planted forest that offered perfectly straight fields of fire for machine guns and small arms. On the other hand, the 4th Infantry Division had outstripped its supply lines, resulting in a lack of cold weather gear, especially rubber shoe-pacs, as the frigid and damp European winter descended.

The division failed to penetrate the German defenses, suffering 4,000 battle casualties and another 2,000 non-battle casualties in less than a month, an average of over 200 per day. In the midst of this ferocious combat, American forces could not rely on artillery support, which had difficulty penetrating the dense forest canopy,

or air support, which was likewise limited or grounded by poor weather. The attack degenerated into a close-quarters infantry fight, with the Germans using the rugged terrain of high ridges and steep gorges to excellent advantage. Supporting American armor could only use a few cleared trails, which tanks quickly churned into immobilizing, bottomless mud. Exposure to the elements, and especially “trench foot,” took a constant toll, leading to high rates of non-battle casualties, even when units were not engaged.

Despite a constant flow of inexperienced replacements, the 4th Infantry Division struggled to reach its objectives. Reduced to less than 50 percent strength, the division had to be withdrawn to a quiet section of the line, where it would hold the southern shoulder of what would soon become the Battle of the Bulge.<sup>1</sup>

This volume is a collection of historical case studies from the perspective of the last 100 yards of ground combat. Our authors each focused on a unique aspect of large-scale ground combat operations in the past to enable US Army leaders to understand the operational environment and make informed decisions at all echelons.

In Chapter 1, Lt. Gen. (Retired) Daniel P. Bolger critically discusses the US strategy during the Korean War and follows Company C, 1st Battalion, 65th Regiment. Bolger—a former division commander in combat, University of Chicago-trained historian, and North Carolina State University professor—fully narrates the deadly sparring in Korea and the Battle for Hill 167 through close fighting in trenches and the use of bayonets. Bolger describes the view from the frontlines as Company C, comprised of tough, mostly Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican soldiers, fought valiantly.

In Chapter 2, Christopher M. Rein, a historian with the Combat Studies Institute, Army University Press, describes and analyzes the 20–22 January 1944 Battle of Rapido River, which was one of the most difficult close combat actions of World War II. He describes the mountain river crossing under enemy observation from prepared positions. Rein analyzes the 36th Infantry Division struggle across the river—battling bitter winter conditions and austere support, which caused heavy casualties. He explains in detail their discipline and courage while facing extreme environments and enemy adaptations in close combat.

In Chapter 3, Lt. Col. (Retired) Thomas G. Bradbeer, the Major General Fox Connor Chair of Leadership Studies for the US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, initially analyzes

Argentinian Task Force 40 actions during the Falkland Islands invasion. Additionally, he describes the powerful air, sea, and land invasion to capture the islands from the British, the surrender of the British forces, and the British military's response to re-take the islands with its 2 Para units. Bradbeer identifies critical leadership factors from squad to battalion which assured British victory.

In Chapter 4, Robert F. Baumann, Director of Graduate Degree Programs for the US Army Command and General Staff College, analyzes Operation Spark during the 1943 Siege of Leningrad. Baumann describes the Soviet Army's offensive maneuvers involving the 67th Army of Leningrad Front and the 2nd Shock Army of Volkov Front against the Germans across the frozen Russian terrain in Leningrad, as well as the close-quarters combat which inflicted enormous casualties on both sides. Eventually five 18th Army divisions succumbed to superior Soviet combined arms coordination of artillery, air power, armor, and combat engineers. Baumann paints vivid pictures of the close fight in the streets of Leningrad as examples for a future war against a near-peer threat.

Chapter 5 is an archival general staff study from then-Lt. Col. George S. Patton titled "The Defense of Gallipoli." First published from Headquarters, Hawaii Department, Fort Shafter in 1936, Patton's original staff study uses the Turkish defense of Gallipoli to examine the methods used in defense against landing operations. This excerpt describes Suvla Bay operations—identifying the accidents and inexcusable failures through the lens of a future World War II general.

In Chapter 6, Col. (Retired) Kevin C. M. Benson, J5 Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) planner during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, explains how units need to consider how to prepare for large-scale ground combat operations. Benson explains that leaders must account for the brutality of casualties and loss of life as well as the responsibility of training to fight to win, especially in the close fight. Given these challenges, Benson concludes that our Army must continue to transform its thinking about and preparations for large-scale combat operations.

In Chapter 7, Lt. Col. (Retired) Robert J. Rielly, an associate professor for the Department of Command and Leadership at the US Army Command and General Staff College, recounts the dire conditions that the US Army faced in June 1950 during its struggle for victory in Korea. He describes Gen. Douglas MacArthur's Inchon decision and the Truman administration's effort to prevent a war with China. In regard to combat

conditions in Chosin, Rielly describes the high casualties, low supplies, and no reinforcements, and provides raw accounts of Task Force Faith's destruction and withdrawal by foot. He discusses hard decisions that must be made in combat under extreme environmental and enemy conditions and examines the mandate to never leave a fallen soldier behind.

In Chapter 8, Capt. (Canadian Army) Arthur W. Gullachsen, an associate professor at the Canadian Forces Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, analyzes the 8–9 June 1944 Battle of Bretteville. He chronicles the *Waffen-SS* battlegroup and 12th SS-Panzerdivision infantry that fought against the Canadian Regina Rifles infantry regiment defending the village of Bretteville-L'Orgueilleuse, Normandy. Gullachsen describes how the Canadian forces successfully defended their positions without artillery or armor support. This chapter provides an excellent example of how troops using heavy machine guns, anti-tank guns, mortars, and Bren guns successfully defended against German heavy tank formations. Gullachsen chronicles how a determined Allied battalion withstood a sustained infantry battle group in close combat.

In Chapter 9, Maj. Mark J. Balboni, Concepts and Doctrine Analyst at the Army War College, analyzes the 1942 Battle of Bataan, describing how Japan defeated well-trained combat units because of US operational and strategic failures. Balboni highlights the tactical success of the Philippine Scouts who benefitted from American security force assistance while other Philippine Army units struggled. These soldiers fought bravely in close combat against the Japanese Army without proper supplies or any hope of rescue.

In Chapter 10, Thomas S. Helling, Professor of Surgery at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine, and W. Sanders Marble, Historian with the Army Medical Department, review changes in battlefield surgery techniques and practices over time. The authors analyze the metamorphosis of battlefield medicine history from field hospitals to front line trenches to modern warfare and processes for collecting combat wounded during close combat. The chapter describes the care levels provided through use of morphine, splinting fractures, and attending to bleeding open wounds; how deep wounds are affected by dust and dirt; and the importance of evacuating the wounded during close combat.

In Chapter 11, Lt. Col. (Retired) Keith R. Beurskens, Deputy, Directorate of Academic Affairs at Army University, analyzes numerous World War II river crossings in support of large-scale combat against fierce ene-



my opposition. He describes the Army's 1944 Saar-Moselle River crossing as part of a movement to Metz and examines operational doctrine and river crossings conducted under fire—illustrating how infrequently our Army has conducted these operations in the last seventy years.

In Chapter 12, David Scott Stieghan, Army Infantry Branch Historian at Fort Benning, Georgia, discusses the beginning of fire and maneuver from the trenches of Meuse-Argonne in 1918. He describes the revolution of infantry tactics and organizations to prepare for the Western front during World War I. Stieghan gives examples of how the American Expeditionary Forces came of age through Meuse-Argonne—with high casualties and wounded—and how US soldiers succeeded in crossing “No Man’s Land” between the opposing forces to conduct close combat with the enemy.

In Chapter 13, Capt. (USAF Reserve) David F. Bonner analyzes the 1944 rescue of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during the Vosges Mountains Campaign. He describes the unit's role and its composition of second-generation Japanese-Americans who volunteered for military service. This chapter reviews how the 442nd Regimental Combat Team's combat effectiveness proved a decisive factor in its success—becoming the most decorated unit of its size in US history. Bonner also reflects on the “Lost Battalion” of the Texas 141st Infantry and their sense of obligation to fight for their country while being surrounded.

In the concluding chapter, Maj. Gen. Gary Brito, Commanding General of the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, and Lt. Col. Alicia Pruitt, Chief, Commander's Action Group for the Maneuver Center of Excellence, define the future of close combat. They describe how maneuver organizations will need to adapt for future conflict by engaging in advancing technologies, anticipating threats, and fully understanding the capabilities of opposing lethal ground forces. The chapter offers renewed recognition and deeper discussion of tactics to employ in multiple domains as well as the operational art to engage the next enemy in simultaneously contested domains of land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace. The lethal capabilities of the infantry and armor companies and battalions will need to remain paramount against near-peer enemies for the United States to be relevant and ready to deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars when called upon.

This work would not have been possible without the exceptional voluntary efforts and work of the authors. I owe special thanks to the staff of Army University Press for putting this volume into physical and electronic form as

part of *The US Army Large-Scale Combat Operations Series*. Special thanks to Donald P. Wright and Christopher M. Rein for production, Robin D. Kern for graphics, and Diane R. Walker for copy editing and layout.

This has been a collaboration, and these true professionals made this volume better for their contributions. As the general editor of this volume, I am responsible for any errors, omissions, or limitations of this work.

## Notes

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3.0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: 6 December 2016), 1-2.



## Chapter 1

### “¡Arriba Muchachos!”: The Fight for Hill 167 in Korea, 18–19 July 1952

Lt. Gen. (Retired) Daniel P. Bolger

*The bullet is a fool, but the bayonet is a fine fellow.*<sup>1</sup>

—Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov

What is the spirit of the bayonet?

Any graduate of Fort Benning, Georgia, knows the answer: kill. Kill! Kill! Kill! Say it loud. Say it proud. The spirit of the bayonet is to kill. It's visceral. It's primitive. And it's what you do with a bayonet.

The leaders of the US Army Infantry School and Center at Fort Benning sure think so. Since 1935, the school's shoulder patch has featured an M1905 bayonet point up on a field of blue.<sup>2</sup> It epitomizes the infantryman's commitment to close with the enemy and stick him in the gut, the spirit of the bayonet.

Well, as they say in the Bible, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Drill sergeant bravado aside, very few American foes have succumbed to the bayonet. Even during the great Civil War of 1861–65, when Northern and Southern regiments often lined up shoulder-to-shoulder and boldly charged in the Napoleonic style, regimental surgeons reported only a minuscule number of bayonet wounds.<sup>3</sup> In that war, almost all combat casualties fell to artillery shell splinters and gunshots. The Great War of 1914–18 brought machine guns and even more deadly artillery. World War II added widespread use of lethal close-air support. Bullets, fragments, blast, and fire did the grim business.<sup>4</sup> The pattern persists to this day. Bayonets don't matter much.

But to every rule there are exceptions. One of those occurred in Korea in July of 1952. True to the best tradition of Fort Benning, a handful of determined Americans exemplified the spirit of the bayonet.

### **Sitzkrieg**

In a world of jet fighters and nuclear weapons, what brought on a bayonet fight atop a Korean hill? In theory, it should never have come to that. In the wake of decisive victory in World War II, the United States stood predominant at sea and in the air. Of all of the atomic bombs on Earth, most belonged to America.<sup>5</sup>

But not all of them. The Soviet Union had the rest. Its vast ground forces dominated Eastern Europe and threatened the rest of Eurasia. The Moscow Communists had the benefit of an even more populous ally, the newly minted People's Republic of China: Chinese Communists—"Chicom" in the parlance of 1952. Only a few Russian advisors and jet pilots fought in Korea. But China committed a million troops to back up their over-matched North Korean neighbors.

So soon after World War II, few American citizens expected a messy ground war on the Korean peninsula. But US leaders didn't want to allow Communist land grabs on the periphery of Asia. After all, in the 1930s, Nazi German dictator Adolf Hitler made a habit of such provocations while Britain, France, and America did nothing. World War II resulted. In a time of nuclear arms, no leader in Washington dared risk bringing on World War III. So drawing the line in Korea became the US strategy. Americans intervened in a limited war to back their South Korean allies—and more importantly, to stand up to the Communists in the Kremlin.

The first year of the war had been hair-raising.<sup>6</sup> In July of 1950, North Korean invaders pushed aside South Korean regiments and then Americans, too. Desperate US and South Korean forces finally stopped their opponents along the Pusan Perimeter in the southeast corner of the peninsula. In September, with the North Koreans fully engaged far to the south, the United States mounted a brilliant amphibious envelopment at Inchon, near the middle of the Korean peninsula. The Americans retook the southern capital of Seoul and smashed the North Koreans. Flushed with victory, US divisions pushed north to the Yalu River and final liberation of all of Korea.

It was not to be. In late November of 1950, the Chinese entered the war. Their massive counteroffensive surprised the Americans and their allies. Pitiless Chinese infantrymen bludgeoned one US unit after another. They tore apart the 8th Cavalry Regiment, ravaged the 2nd Infantry Division, crushed the 31st Infantry Regimental Combat Team, and nearly trapped the entire 1st Marine Division near the frozen Chosin Reservoir. Stunned Americans broke contact and streamed south. Seoul fell again to the Communists. It took six months of brutal uphill attacks to reclaim shattered Seoul and claw back to a line roughly along the 38th Parallel, the prewar border. Bloodied by US firepower, the Chinese and their North Korean adjuncts agreed to talk peace.

That looked to be shaping up as a win for America. But it wasn't. The Communist side saw negotiations as just another front in the war. In the truce talks, Chinese and North Korean officers made outrageous demands,

read stilted propaganda statements, walked out for long stretches, and generally gummed up the works.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile out on the barren hills, the war dragged on. By the summer of 1952, the Korean War had degenerated into a stalemate.

Neither side moved to change things. Despite a lot of high-flown Communist rhetoric about sacrifice, the Chinese and North Koreans couldn't stomach the casualties. The Americans agreed on that point. US citizens wanted out, and the Communist knew it. With continued attrition to wear down the United States and its friends, maybe the war would end in a status quo, with the Communist North still on the map. That looked to be as good as it got for both sides. Cynical US soldiers referred to their country's strategy, or lack thereof, as "die for a tie."<sup>8</sup>

Die they did. Of the 36,574 Americans killed in the war, about half fell during the two years of "sitzkrieg" roughly athwart the 38th Parallel.<sup>9</sup> Neither side knew when it would end. Decisive victory wasn't on the table. It sure didn't seem like World War II.

Instead, it looked all too much like that other world war, notably the Western Front of 1918: trenches and bunkers, barbed wire and land mines, night patrols and raids. The Americans punished their adversaries with air strikes and field artillery. The Chinese answered with mortars and their own light artillery. Every few days, each side launched a platoon or company-scale assault to grab a key hilltop and kill a few more enemy troops. The generals said it kept up morale. Maybe so. If nothing else, it reminded both armies that the war wasn't over. For those in the middle of it, winning meant getting home alive. If slaying the enemy ensured that, so be it.

## **The Borinqueneers**

In a deadlocked no-win war, killing some hapless Chinese conscripts had almost no effect on the meandering truce talks in Panmunjom. Unable to act decisively yet determined to stay alive, American soldiers did what good soldiers have always done. They fought for their regiments, their leaders, and each other.

This held true in most outfits, but especially so in the 65th Infantry Regiment. They had something to prove to the rest of the Army. Among the dozens of US Army and Marine regiments that fought in the Korean War, the 65th was the only one drawn from a single American territory: the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. They called themselves the Borinqueneers, drawn from "Borinquen," the old Taino Indian name for the island of Puerto Rico. There aren't too many Taino people left, but the name

remains popular among modern Puerto Ricans. It means “Land of the Valiant Lord.”<sup>10</sup> Soldiers of the 65th Infantry Regiment endeavored to live up to that heritage.

Formed in 1899 in the wake of the American seizure of Puerto Rico in the Spanish-American War, the original battalion expanded to become the “Porto Rico [sic] Provisional Regiment of Infantry.” Its primary role was homeland defense. In World War I, with Puerto Rico considered secure from any hypothetical German onslaught, the regiment guarded the Panama Canal.<sup>11</sup>

The 65th’s soldiers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and some junior officers all hailed from Puerto Rico. Most of the regiment’s officers came from the continental United States. At induction, Puerto Rican recruits were designated as “black” or “white,” a distinction rarely considered on the island but of vital interest to US Army senior leaders in that rigidly segregated era. Those classified “white” joined the regiment. The others were shunted elsewhere. Whatever the regiment’s soldiers thought of themselves, the US Army didn’t really consider them part of a white organization. In the Great War, non-white American troops rarely drew combat duty. They toted that barge and lifted that bale. Accordingly, the American Expeditionary Forces leadership saw no use for the Puerto Ricans on the Western Front.<sup>12</sup> In that time, so things went for soldiers of color.

Between the world wars, the troops in Puerto Rico were reorganized as the 65th Infantry Regiment, a separate Regular Army organization not assigned to any particular division. The 65th trained to defend their homeland and worked with the US Marines on amphibious exercises at Culebra, Puerto Rico.<sup>13</sup> When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the 65th expected orders to deploy. No word came for months.

Finally, more than a year after the Japanese strike, the 65th received orders to defend the Panama Canal. One company detached to secure the port of Salinas, Ecuador. Two companies moved to protect the Galapagos Islands.<sup>14</sup> The finches and iguanas never heard a shot fired in anger. Neither did the Borinqueneers. As in World War I, it looked like the Puerto Rican infantry regiment was doomed to sit out the entire war.

The Japanese and Germans forced a reassessment. With the US Army stretched thin fighting in New Guinea, slogging through Burma, storming Pacific Ocean atolls, stalled in the Italian mountains, and about to land in Normandy and southern France, the War Department chose not to leave a full infantry regiment on the bench. Thus the 65th sailed for the Europe. On 1 October 1944, the regiment landed in Toulon, France.<sup>15</sup>



Even at this desperate stage of the war, with the Germans frantically scrambling to hold their borderlands and the Allies pressing hard, no American generals seemed to want the Puerto Rican regiment under their command. Instead, elements of the 65th ended up watching fixed sites on the lines of communications. At long last in December 1944 in the wake of the huge German counteroffensive in the Ardennes, the 65th Infantry Regiment went into the line in the French Alps. In the final months of the war in Europe, the regiment suffered three killed and eighty-seven wounded. Soldiers of the 65th earned one Distinguished Service Cross and two Silver Stars.<sup>16</sup> The regiment had done its assigned duties well. But in the minds of its veterans—and its detractors—it had not proven its full worth.

With the biggest war in history over and done, the 65th Infantry Regiment seemed like a relic from another age, a colonial anachronism of English-speaking white officers and Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican enlisted men guarding an island that nobody wanted to attack. For the rest of the US Army, the Borinqueneers languished in the same netherworld as the Jim Crow African-American outfits led (with a few junior exceptions) by white officers. When it came to getting the better barracks, the newer gear, or the premier missions, they stood at the end of the line. Very few ambitious white Regular Army officers wanted to serve in such units.

On paper, the US Army's color line had been erased after World War II. But theory didn't match practice. President Harry S. Truman thought he had desegregated the US Armed Forces with his Executive Order 9981 on 26 July 1948.<sup>17</sup> It was the right thing to do, and it even made for good election year politics. In the ranks, though, not much changed. When Truman issued his path-breaking directive, most of the US Army's senior officers—men like General of the Army Douglas A. MacArthur with his beloved mother's Virginia roots, Gen. Omar N. Bradley of Missouri, and Gen. J. Lawton Collins of Louisiana—didn't exactly move out with alacrity. Study, deliberation, and temporizing held sway. As the war in Korea began in the summer of 1950, blacks remained largely in segregated units. With a language barrier as well as darker skin, most of the US Army's Puerto Ricans continued to serve in the 65th, second-class citizens stuck in what was widely seen as a second-class regiment.

West Point graduate Col. William W. Harris reflected the conventional wisdom about the regiment that mainland officers disparaged as the "Seexy Feeftth." Assigned to take over in 1949, Harris objected: "I was outraged at what I considered being sent to pasture for two years to command what the Pentagon brass referred to as a 'rum and Coca-Cola' outfit."<sup>18</sup> To his

credit, Harris got over his prejudices and preconceptions as soon as he met his troops. He trained them hard and led them with compassion and fire. In 1950 when orders came to embark for Korea, Harris and his Borinqueneers were ready to go. In a largely unprepared US Army, they stood out.

Led by Harris and other World War II veteran officers and NCOs, the 65th Infantry Regiment joined the understrength 3rd Infantry Division. When a senior general asked Harris if the Puerto Ricans would fight, the pugnacious colonel replied: “they were the best soldiers that I had ever seen.” He went on to say that he was “prepared to go with them to do battle with anybody.”<sup>19</sup> In this war, the 65th would not be watching docks and sorting socks.

The regiment lived up to its colonel’s promise. The soldiers fought well on the Pusan Perimeter. Moving north with its division, the 65th defended the embattled enclave at Hungnam as the stout-hearted Marines and some equally tough soldiers fought their way out of the jaws of the Chinese trap at the bitter Chosin Reservoir. When the Americans had to pull out of the harbor of Hungnam under fire, the 65th Infantry Regiment held back the Chinese. The Americans and their South Korean allies got out in good shape. The regiment sustained a total of 714 casualties, including 48 soldiers killed in action. In a war that featured way too many US Army prisoners, the 65th reported only seventeen missing. The Borinquene-



Figure 1.1. In this 1951 photo, soldiers of the 65th Infantry Regiment wait in a shallow trench on a Korean hillside. Courtesy of US Department of Defense.

neers held the line time after time. As Harris put it, “the record speaks for itself.”<sup>20</sup> It did.

In the ridge-to-ridge slog back north to regain shattered Seoul and kill Chinese, the 65th Infantry Regiment fought with distinction. Harris and his Puerto Rican troops played key roles in the American offensive and stood like rocks when the Chinese lashed back in their major April and May counterthrusts. When the war settled into the fixed line that would eventually mark the post-Armistice Demilitarized Zone, the 65th stayed at it. Harris changed command on 20 June 1951.<sup>21</sup> By then, the Borinqueneers had made their name.

But as Korea settled into static trench warfare, new American colonels and generals took over. Familiar stereotypes resurfaced. Well, maybe those Puerto Ricans did OK with an exceptional commander. Still, among the old timers in the Eighth Army in Korea, long-buried misgivings lingered. Nice job near Pusan. Great work at Hungnam. Well done in the spring battles. But now we’re in a different war. What have you done for us lately?

### **Midnight on the Imjin**

As the war changed, the Eighth Army changed. The Americans hoped to keep the hard edge earned at such great cost in the awful winter of 1950–51. In World War II, the Eighth Army’s divisions, regiments, and battalions would have kept going until the enemy surrendered, feeding in replacement soldiers to join units sustained by a backbone of experienced fighters. But this wasn’t World War II. And the Chinese weren’t going to quit. The bloody hill war in Korea had no end in sight.

In a limited war of long duration, it hardly seemed fair that a few Americans should bear the burden for many. So it became necessary to swap out Americans in order to keep the Korean War going. The British and their progeny—the Canadians and Australians—resorted to the old Imperial stand-by of switching out entire battalions and brigades then backfilling each formed unit with a like counterpart, trained team for trained team.<sup>22</sup> That certainly made military sense.

Not to the Americans. The US generals convinced themselves that unit-by-unit rotations were too difficult logistically and too expensive financially—this from the world’s top logisticians and richest economy. Few asked how the cash-strapped British, Canadians, or Australians pulled it off. (Swapping over equipment proved useful.) Speaking like a man visiting his own job, Army Chief of Staff General Collins opined: “It has been, frankly, a mystery to me, how the Eighth Army has been able

to retain its combat efficiency in light of the fact that we simply cannot furnish noncommissioned officers and young officers from the States who have the experience comparable to the men whom they replace.”<sup>23</sup> Costs in blood and mission success were hand-waved. The Army that disdained unit rotations as too hard moved some 16,000 to 28,000 troops monthly.<sup>24</sup> Accountants in the Pentagon might have approved. But the constant coming and going, on top of casualties and non-battle injuries and illness, fractured American combat cohesion. Slowly, soldier by soldier, the Eighth Army degraded from tight-knit bands of battle-wise veterans to random bunches of glum rookies.

What held for the Eighth Army as a whole hit especially hard in the 65th Infantry Regiment. Because the 65th drew almost exclusively from Puerto Rico, many of its NCOs and privates came from the island’s two National Guard infantry regiments, the 295th and 296th, and from recalled Army reservists.<sup>25</sup> These soldiers came on active duty in the frantic summer of 1950. By law, such soldiers were limited to 24 months in uniform. Now veterans, they headed home in great numbers in the spring of 1952, amounting to a 100 percent turnover up and down the ranks.<sup>26</sup> To fill the depleted ranks, draftees and a few experienced leaders arrived.

One veteran National Guardsman came in to take command of the regiment on 1 February 1952. Col. Juan C. Cordero-Davila of San Juan, Puerto Rico, had been a battalion commander in the 65th during World War II. Bilingual, experienced, and energetic, Cordero knew only too well the incredibly disruptive effects of so much shuffling of soldiers. He himself was the regiment’s fourth commander in eight months—and none had been killed or wounded, just moved.<sup>27</sup> There had been similar comings and goings up and down the 65th’s chain of command. As General Collins noted, it was amazing the regiment could fight at all.

Cordero went after the turnover challenge the only way he could. He advocated a stretch in the rear area to bring in the flood of new troops and train them in basic platoon, company, and battalion tactics with special attention to the peculiarities of combat in the Korean hills. From mid-February through the end of June, minus a few emergency front-line stints by subordinate units, most of the regiment trained in the hills around Tongduchon (today’s Camp Casey). Platoons, companies, and battalions carried out a succession of demanding live-fire and umpired force-on-force exercises. It allowed a decent shakedown for the hundreds of new arrivals.

In March of 1952, among the new officers was 1st Lt. Walter B. Clark, a 1951 graduate of The Citadel. Clark came from Georgia. Yes, he was a



Figure 1.2. Soldiers of 2nd Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment pose for a picture in the spring of 1952. 1st Lt. Walter B. Clark is kneeling front and center wearing a soft cap. To his immediate left is the platoon sergeant, Master Sgt. Santos Candelario. Courtesy of US Department of Defense.

young white Southerner, raised in a time of segregation, and a graduate of The Citadel, a military college that provided plenty of officers for the Confederacy.<sup>28</sup> But the lieutenant was also smart, perceptive, and utterly fair. He judged men as individuals, not groups or classes. And he was pretty happy with the soldiers in his 2nd Platoon of Company C. Many were small in stature. Their English might be tentative. Yet they sure seemed willing to fight.

Making good use of the training regimen developed by Colonel Cordeiro, Clark went to work. He found himself “favorably impressed by the professionalism of the senior noncommissioned officers.”<sup>29</sup> There just weren’t enough of them. To fill the gap, the sharpest, most aggressive privates had to step up and learn how to be NCOs. That meant learning a modicum of military English, too. Clark worked with his NCOs in the day and night exercises around Tongduchon.

Repetitive battle drills, shooting and moving, helped bring the platoon together. But Clark wanted more. He had completed basic infantry officer instruction at Fort Benning. That gave him an idea—the spirit of the bayonet, the urge to close with the Chinese and kill them. That would give 2nd Platoon a focus, all right. Clark found a kitchen grinding stone. He directed his riflemen to fix bayonets: “¡Fijar bayonetas!” The soldiers used them on every training evolution. They sharpened their M1 bayonets daily. They even slept with the ten-inch blades. Clark made it clear that the bayonets would be used in earnest when 2nd Platoon went up to the line.<sup>30</sup>

On 3 July 1952, that happened. The 65th Infantry Regiment switched out with the 11th Regiment of South Korea’s 1st Infantry Division. As they nestled into a maze of razorback ridges and steep slopes, the Borinque-

neers faced the Chinese across a narrow valley to the west along the Imjin River and another crevasse to the north just past the Imjin's branch, the knee-deep Yokkok River.<sup>31</sup> Each side held a network of trenches fronted by key outpost bunker complexes. The opponents traded shell fire. Americans favored howitzers. The Chinese preferred mortars. Chinese and US reconnaissance patrols probed for information nightly. Sometimes raids went out to take prisoners. Mines, barbed wire, and just plain bad luck took a steady toll. It sure seemed like an unhappy rerun of World War I.

On 18 July 1952, Clark received the word. The platoon would get its chance. Company C's captain told Clark to "raid Chinese outpost positions on Hill 167 in stealth and darkness, capture prisoners, and leave a squad of volunteers on 167 to observe Chinese Main Line of Resistance (MLR) area—squad to remain for forty-eight hours." The intelligence section at battalion estimated maybe four Chinese soldiers on the objective.<sup>32</sup> It looked tailor-made for a prisoner snatch at bayonet point.

In the doctrine of that era, 2nd Platoon would mount a non-illuminated unsupported night attack followed by a withdrawal.<sup>33</sup> They would approach under cover of darkness. Given the utter lack of today's night vision devices, any attack in darkness in 1952 had to be schemed to switch to a major-league scrum, lit by flares and backed by supporting arms. So Clark and his company and battalion leadership planned illumination patterns and artillery targets just in case. In addition, the rest of Company C, backed by a section of two M-46 Patton tanks, would be ready to fire on the Chinese outpost if required. Those were insurance policies to cash in if and when required.

Sometimes soldiers on night patrols went out wearing soft caps. Clark thought not. The Chinese proclivity for liberal use of mortar fire and showers of hand grenades made steel pots a good idea. Of course, the 2nd Platoon infantrymen fixed bayonets on their M1 Garand rifles.<sup>34</sup>

The platoon assembled quietly on the southeast slope of Hill 250, a key US outpost also known as OP Queen. With the rest of Company C and the tanks in position, Clark motioned in silence. The platoon moved out, crossing through several tangles of barbed wire. They carefully skirted friendly minefields. At exactly midnight on 18 July 1952, the 2nd Platoon point man crossed the designated line of departure.<sup>35</sup>

## **Mambo**

The Puerto Rican riflemen called a big firefight a "*mambo*," borrowing the name from the fast-paced, raucous dance style popular back home.<sup>36</sup>

Clark's soldiers expected something on Hill 167 but not much of a *mambo*. A quartet of Chinese would likely throw up their hands rather than face a platoon of aggressive Borinqueneers brandishing bayonets.

A map sheet is flat, and the careful route Clark plotted ran only a couple of inches on the colored paper, a bit less than two miles or so in reality, from Hill 250 on an indirect approach to the Chinese outpost on Hill 167. But the ground played the lieutenant false, as it often did in Korea. The map featured contour intervals of twenty meters, more than sixty feet. A lot of terrain hid in those blank spots. What looked to be a two-hour approach march turned into a march to daylight, hour after hour slipping and sliding on the steep switchbacks above the Yokkok streambed. Just to add to the problem, the sun rose at 0525 on 19 July.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 1.3. During training, a soldier of the 65th Infantry Regiment carries an M1 Garand rifle with a fixed bayonet. Courtesy of US Department of Defense.

The long column snaked through the night slowly. Painfully. There were breaks in contact. There was some doubling back. Clark's soldiers kept their mouths shut. All those mock patrols near Tongduchon had taught them that much. But boots on the slick slopes dislodged sheets of pebbles. Men fell with awkward clanks, metal on metal. Clark felt sure the Chinese must have heard the platoon. But no enemy opened fire. As the privates bumbled and stumbled, they were careful to avoid their well-sharpened fixed bayonets.<sup>38</sup> That part, at least, worked out.

One other thing did, too. Even though the sun was beginning to brighten the eastern sky, Clark brought his platoon right to his chosen point of attack, the high ground at the north end of the enemy outpost. The Chinese wouldn't expect that. As Clark looked down, he saw three concentric deep trenches and a few bunkers. No Chinese. Well, like sharks in the ocean, just because you didn't see them didn't mean they didn't see you.

The platoon's point team crept slowly to the lip of the first trench.

Almost there . . .

*Wham, wham, wham, wham, wham, wham, wham, wham.*

The Russian-made DP light machine gun ripped the air, nine rounds a second every time the Chinese gunner squeezed the trigger.<sup>39</sup> Three more hostile machine guns joined in. Each was hidden under the brow of a thick earthen bunker.

Clark was on his belly. So were his men. The Chinese shot high. They usually did. It wasn't clear the enemy machine gunners could really see the Puerto Ricans. But the Chinese did not let up. Chinese riflemen joined in. A stick grenade came arcing up out of the trench, way off target.

That was enough.

Clark stood up. He bellowed “*¡Arriba muchachos!*” (“Up and at ’em, guys!”) and hopped down into the trench.<sup>40</sup>

His men followed, long bayonets fixed.

Clark threw a hand grenade into a bunker opening. The blast belched up a cloud of red dirt. A Chinese soldier appeared in the trench right in front of the platoon leader. Clark pulled his trigger. His carbine jammed. The Chinese man's PPSH-41 submachine gun did not. A 7.62-mm bullet slammed into Clark's right thigh.<sup>41</sup> Other rounds whizzed by his head.

Enraged, Clark lunged at the Chinese soldier, bowling him over onto the trench bottom. The lieutenant yanked off his steel helmet—good thing he had insisted on taking it. He started hammering the Chinese soldier on the head. The hostile figure kept squirming, pumping legs and arms. Enough. Clark pulled out his personal sidearm, a .45-caliber revolver. He finished off the enemy burp gunner.<sup>42</sup>

Two more Borinqueneers were right next to Clark. When a few Chinese began tossing stick grenades—fragments peppered the already wounded Lieutenant Clark—Cpl. Jose Otero-Gonzalez stepped over Clark, who was still on the dirt trench floor. “I'll save you,” he shouted.<sup>43</sup> Otero shot one Chinese defender face-to-face.

At the same time, a bullet hit the head of Pfc. Maximino Paoli. He collapsed immediately. Both Otero and Clark thought he'd been instantly killed.

They were wrong. So were the Chinese. Paoli leapt to his feet, lowered his M-1, and ran his long bayonet right through a Chinese infantryman. Kicking his victim to pull out the blade, Paoli then stabbed another enemy soldier. That cleared the trench.<sup>44</sup>



Similar scenes unfolded around the other Chinese emplacements. Led by Master Sgt. Santos Candelario, other Puerto Ricans shot their foes at point-blank range. Bayonets were used, too. It took over an hour to clear all of the bunkers and all three trenches.<sup>45</sup> Methodically, relentlessly, the Puerto Rican riflemen did so.

The surviving Chinese found 2nd Platoon to be too much. Leaving their fifteen dead and a dozen wounded, the rest of the panicked Chinese scrambled away down the southwest slope of the hill. As they did so, one enemy soldier waved a huge red flag.<sup>46</sup>

That wasn't done as some patriotic statement. Rather, the signal initiated a steady rain of Chinese 82-mm mortar rounds and a few 75-mm artillery shells, too.<sup>47</sup> It was more episodic than a similar American bombardment might have been, but what the barrage lacked in volume and accuracy it made up in duration. The Chinese popped projectile after projectile onto the lost outpost and across the area around it.

It made casualty treatment very difficult. Platoon medic Pfc. Demetrio Villalobos-Melendez braved the shell bursts and occasional bursts of long-range Chinese machinegun fire. He accounted for every wounded US soldier and patched them up as best he could. By Clark's orders, Villalobos treated his bloodied lieutenant last.<sup>48</sup>

The platoon had grabbed two Chinese prisoners. But those unfortunates didn't survive their side's continuing mortar barrage. The original orders envisioned leaving an American squad on Hill 167. With some fifty percent casualties in 2nd Platoon (three killed and twenty-six wounded) and Company C (-) unable to send help through the persistent hail of Chinese mortar rounds, Clark received direction to pull back to Hill 250.<sup>49</sup>

Because it was daylight, the route was obvious. The Chinese, however, could see it too. It was tricky for the rest of Company C to fire over and around the returning soldiers of 2nd Platoon.<sup>50</sup> So the walk back proved dangerous indeed.

Clark brought back every man, wounded and dead. One Puerto Rican rifleman had been badly mangled, but the lieutenant insisted that his bloody remains be evacuated. The troops knew the deal—everyone comes back. Burdened, under fire, and moving slowly—bent over like old men—it took hours for the soldiers to reach friendly lines. Bleeding from numerous grenade fragments and hobbled by his holed upper leg, Clark endured the longest walk he'd ever made in his life. Three times Chinese mortar

explosions lifted him bodily into the air. But he kept going. So did all his men. It was long past nightfall, almost 2300, when Lt. Walter Clark finally made it back.<sup>51</sup>

## Reckonings

Bringing in 2nd Platoon cost Company C four more dead and three missing in action during the final round of night clashes. Every soldier in Clark's platoon returned. Lashed by unrelenting Chinese mortar and machine gun fire, Company C's brave 1st Sgt. Rafael E. Balzac directed the final stages of the recovery of the wounded. He was among those missing, but his remains were recovered the next day.<sup>52</sup>

The Chinese team on Hill 167 turned out to be at least a platoon, maybe an understrength company. It's unclear just how many more Chinese fell beyond those hastily counted in the trench line. What is evident is that the Chinese backed off in front of the 65th Infantry Regiment. The summer monsoon rains showed up on 20 July 1952, waterlogging both sides. A month later, the 65th came off the line.<sup>53</sup>

The soldiers of Company C earned nine Bronze Stars for Valor and two Silver Stars. The late 1st Sergeant Balzac earned a Silver Star, and the battalion medical officer received a Bronze Star with "V." Lt. Walter Clark earned the Silver Star and two Purple Hearts, one for the gunshot and the other for his grenade wounds. The other eight Bronze Stars for Valor went to 2nd Platoon soldiers, including the bold medic Private 1st Class Villalobos.<sup>54</sup> Some would suggest that more recognition was merited. Probably so.

Today Hill 167 is in the North Korean portion of the Demilitarized Zone. No Americans have stood on that ground for almost seven decades. If you are allowed to go to the South Korean DMZ outposts northwest of Yonchon, and know where to look, you can still pick out that fateful slope.



Figure 1.4. Lt. Walter B. Clark, who led the platoon raid on Chinese-held Hill 167, emphasized the spirit of the bayonet. In the action on 18–19 July 1952, he earned the Silver Star and two Purple Hearts. Courtesy of US Department of Defense.

The Americans who raided Hill 167 in July of 1952 are now old men. Many are gone. Yet their heritage lives on. The 65th Infantry Regiment remains on the US Army rolls as part of the National Guard of Puerto Rico. During the Global War on Terrorism, the 1st Battalion served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Djibouti.<sup>55</sup> They know their regimental history and draw strength from it.

Did the Borinqueneers' effort on Hill 167 matter? In the grand sweep of the war, military historians would say it did not. It amounted to one more platoon action among many such engagements, another minor clash in a largely forgotten war. But those who were involved remember the deadly *Mambo* on Hill 167. It stands to this day as a tribute to the spirit of the bayonet.

## Notes

1. Gen. A. V. Suvorov was one of the greatest commanders of the Russian Empire. His 1799 campaign in the Alps rivals the exploits of Hannibal or Napoleon. He is quoted in Walter Pintner, “Russian Military Thought: The Western Model and the Shadow of Suvorov” in Peter Paret, editor, *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 367. Most consider Suvorov’s quote less an indictment of gunpowder weapons than an endorsement of the will of the individual soldier.

2. Bruce N. Canfield, “Bayonet Scabbards for U.S. M1903 Springfields,” *American Rifleman* (September 2009): 48.

3. George A. Otis and D. L. Huntington, *Volume II: Surgical History* in Brig. Gen. Joseph K. Barnes, Surgeon General of the United States Army, *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of Rebellion* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1883), 686. Nine hundred and twenty-two Union bayonet casualties were listed. This is a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands killed and wounded during the entire American Civil War.

4. James F. Dunnigan, *How to Make War: A Comprehensive Guide to Modern Warfare* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1988), 97, 470–71.

5. Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 2000), 130, 135.

6. There are many fine histories of the Korean War. Along with the excellent US Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps official histories, two fine popular accounts are T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: A Study in Unpreparedness* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963) and Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea 1950–1953* (New York: Random House, 1987). The brief summary of the first year of the Korean War is drawn from these sources.

7. Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1966), 15–51.

8. For a restatement of this phrase, and an answer to it, see President Barack H. Obama, “Remarks by the President on the 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice,” 27 July 2013, accessed 18 October 2018, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/27/remarks-president-60th-anniversary-korean-war-armistice>.

9. Frank A. Reister, *Battle Casualties and Medical Statistics: U.S. Army Experience in the Korean War* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1973), 110–11.

10. Maria Teresa Babin, *Borinquen: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Literature* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), xiv, xv, 2, 424.

11. James A. Sawicki, *Infantry Regiments of the U.S. Army* (Dumfries, VA: Wyvern Publications, 1981), 162.

12. Col. Gilberto N. Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity: The 65th Infantry in Korea, 1950–1953* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2009), 5–6, 50. The author’s father, Jesus Villahermosa, served in the 65th Infantry Regiment during the Korean War. The book’s title reflects the English translation

- of the regiment's motto: *Honor et Fidelitas*. For the color line in the regiment and in Puerto Rico, see Laura Briggs, *Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 31, 62.
13. Villahermosa, 6.
  14. Villahermosa, 8.
  15. Maj. Jose A. Muratti, *History of the 65th Infantry, 1899–1946* (San Juan, PR: US Army Forces Antilles, 1946), 12.
  16. Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 10.
  17. Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 555.
  18. Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 11.
  19. William W. Harris, *Puerto Rico's Fighting 65th U.S. Infantry: From San Juan to Chorwon* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1980), 63. Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker, Eighth Army commander, asked the question. His Texas family counted Confederate Army officers on both his maternal and paternal sides.
  20. Harris, 136–37.
  21. Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 923.
  22. Jeffrey Grey, *The Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War: An Alliance Study* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1988), 156–8.
  23. Gen. J. Lawton Collins quoted in Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 206.
  24. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 199. The rotation amounted to one to two full infantry divisions monthly.
  25. Sawicki, *Infantry Regiments of the U.S. Army*, 428–30.
  26. Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 205.
  27. Villahermosa, 181, 188–89.
  28. Baltazar Soto, “Mambo on Hill 167” in *The Borinqueneers* (15 September 2013): 1, accessed 22 October 2018, [http://65thcgm.weebly.com/uploads/6/5/3/2/6532236/\\_special\\_hispanic\\_heritage\\_report\\_-\\_the\\_borinqueneers\\_9-15-2013.pdf](http://65thcgm.weebly.com/uploads/6/5/3/2/6532236/_special_hispanic_heritage_report_-_the_borinqueneers_9-15-2013.pdf). Soto is a retired lieutenant colonel in the US Army Reserve. He interviewed the late Col. (Retired) Walter B. Clark. In most records of the time, Clark's rank is listed as 1st Lieutenant, although the divisional general order for the Silver Star reflected the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.
  29. Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 192. He also interviewed Colonel Clark.
  30. Soto, “Mambo on Hill 167.” The 65th Infantry Regiment had used bayonets before in Korea at the culmination of a two-battalion attack south of Seoul on 2 February 1951.
  31. Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 209.
  32. Soto, “Mambo on Hill 167,” 1, 3.
  33. US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 7-10, *Rifle Company Infantry Regiment with Change 1* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 16 October 1950), 218–19.
  34. Soto, “Mambo on Hill 167,” 3.
  35. Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 211.
  36. Soto, “Mambo on Hill 167,” 5.

37. Light data was calculated using <https://www.timeanddate.com/sun/south-korea/seoul>, accessed 22 October 2018.
38. Soto, "Mambo on Hill 167," 3.
39. For details on the DP series light machine guns, see David C. Isby, *Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army: Fully Revised Edition* (London, UK: Jane's Publishing, 1988), 415, 417.
40. US Department of the Army, Headquarters, 3rd Infantry Division, "General Order #352," 2 December 1952. This is the citation for the Silver Star earned by Lt. Walter B. Clark. In this document, his rank is listed as 2nd lieutenant, although all other accounts, including his own, refer to Clark as a 1st lieutenant.
41. For the effectiveness of the PPSH-41 submachinegun, see John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Continuing the History of Stalin's War with Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 78.
42. 3rd Infantry Division, "General Order #352."
43. US Department of the Army, Headquarters, 3rd Infantry Division, "General Order #362," 16 December 1952. This is the citation for the Bronze Star for Valor earned by Cpl. Jose Otero-Gonzalez.
44. US Department of the Army, Headquarters, 3rd Infantry Division, "General Order #350," 30 November 1952. This is the citation for the Bronze Star for Valor earned by Pfc. Maximino E. Paoli.
45. US Department of the Army, Headquarters, 3rd Infantry Division, "General Order #358," 13 December 1952. This is the citation for the Bronze Star for Valor earned by Master Sgt. Santos Candelario.
46. Soto, "Mambo on Hill 167," 5.
47. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 79. The Chinese fielded a mix of mortars and artillery. They mixed Russian types like the 82-mm mortar with American weapons captured from the Nationalist Chinese. The lightweight 75-mm pack howitzer was especially popular and useful in Korean War hill battles.
48. Soto, "Mambo on Hill 167," 5.
49. Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 211.
50. Soto, "Mambo on Hill 167," 5.
51. Soto, 5.
52. US Department of the Army, Headquarters, 3rd Infantry Division, "General Order #348," 27 November 1952. This is the citation for the Silver Star earned by Master Sgt. Rafael E. Balzac. See also Villahermosa, *Honor and Fidelity*, 211.
53. Villahermosa, 211.
54. Soto, "Mambo on Hill 167," 5.
55. Master Sgt. (US Air Force) Ruby Zarzyczny, "Borinqueneers Open Doors to Peace and Security," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, 23 October 2009, accessed 22 October 2018, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/40565>.

## Chapter 2

### **Attacking Unsupported: The 36th Infantry Division at the Rapido River, 20–22 January 1944**

Christopher M. Rein

The 36th Infantry Division's failed assault on the German Gustav Line defenses south of Rome in the winter of 1944 marked one of the most significant reverses for the US Army in World War II. Though the Fifth Army commander, Lt. Gen. Mark Clark, later attempted to characterize the attack as an essential operation intended to draw German reserves away from the 22 January amphibious landing at Anzio that threatened to outflank the Axis defenses, a goal which he believed fully justified the heavy losses incurred, sacrificing the fighting strength of the 36th Division in order to achieve the limited success at the easily contained beachhead near Rome ranks as one of the worst blunders of the war. The son of the 36th Division's commander, Maj. Gen. Fred Walker, though hardly a disinterested observer, later wrote that the attack would "rank high on any historical list of futile frontal assaults launched against fortified positions in the face of impossible odds."<sup>1</sup> The principals and their defenders later rehashed the details in memoirs and official accounts of the campaign, but the sheer difficulties of crossing a flooded river, in January, with the defenders in possession of excellent observation and with no prospect of combined arms to support the attack, made the crossing of the Rapido River one of the most brutal tests of close combat in World War II.<sup>2</sup>

The assaulting infantrymen had a lengthy approach to the river, over a mine-strewn floodplain devoid of cover, all while burdened with the essential engineer equipment which could not be carried in vehicles to the crossing sites due to the swampy ground and unsuitability of the few roads. They then had to cross in either unwieldy assault boats that were almost impossible to handle in the swift current or small inflatable boats that proved incredibly vulnerable to the constant artillery and small arms fire.<sup>3</sup> The night attack disoriented engineer and infantryman alike while the German defenders in a prepared defensive belt across the river, which included barbed wire, automatic weapons, and still more of the ubiquitous mines, easily contained the assault, preventing the establishment of a sufficient bridgehead to construct essential vehicle bridges for armored support and sustainment. As a result, the two assaulting regiments were virtually wiped out, losing more than 2,000 killed, wounded, and captured, all for a negligible and temporary territorial gain. While the Anzio land-

ings went ashore against light opposition the same day of the failed attack across the Rapido, available German reinforcements had already been drawn away from that area and to the Gustav Line by a successful British offensive days before. Worse, the VI Corps commander at Anzio, Lt. Gen. John Lucas, lacked the aggressiveness to exploit the surprise the landing achieved. His hesitation enabled additional German reserves, including

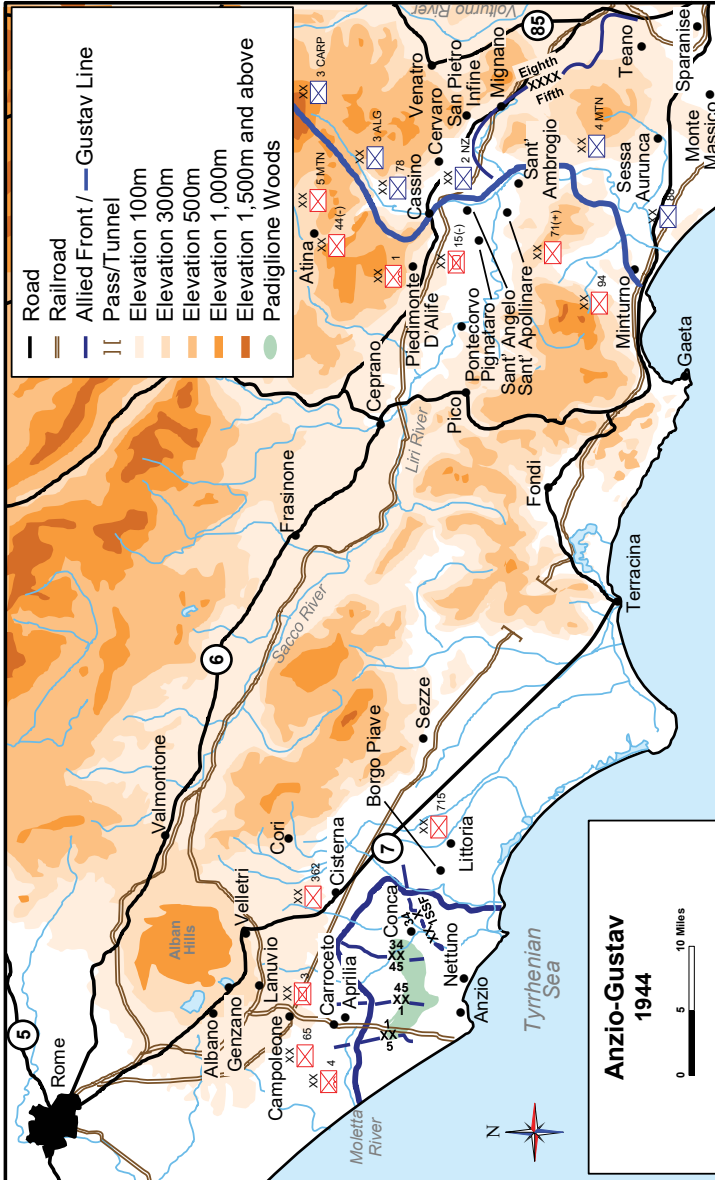


Figure 2.1. The Gustav Line and Anzio, January–May 1944. Created by Army University Press.



some released from the forces defending the Rapido, to easily contain the beachhead and prevent a linkup between the two fronts for another four months. For the soldiers of the 36th Division who made the assault across the Rapido, it was the most trying test of the war, and one which, due to a lack of thorough planning by the division staff, insufficient assets, and concerns about the wisdom of the attack against such a strong position, was doomed almost from the start.

The primary unit assigned the responsibility for making the opposed crossing was a fairly typical American infantry division in World War II. The 36th Infantry Division was a National Guard formation from Texas which had only been in combat for four months but had suffered considerable attrition during that time. The division originally contained units from both Texas and Oklahoma and the insignia, with a light blue arrowhead, representing latter state and a green “T” for the former gave the unit the nickname the “T-Patchers.”



Figure 2.2. The design of the 36th Infantry Division’s insignia prompted its nickname of the “T-Patchers.” Courtesy of US Army.

By the time it was mobilized in 1940, the three infantry regiments, the 141st, 142nd, and 143rd, hailed from south, east, and north Texas, respectively. Some units still retained vestiges of their pre-war affiliations;

the 141st's Company E from El Paso still had a large number of Spanish-speaking soldiers in its ranks, but the heavy losses in the September 1943 amphibious landing at Salerno and the months-long slog over the rugged Italian mountains from Naples to the Rapido had brought in a large number of green replacements from across the country.<sup>4</sup> Many of the officers were still pre-war National Guard officers and the division commander, Maj. Gen. Fred Walker, elected to keep many of them over the protests of the War Department. Walker also had two sons on his division staff, including his aide and his G-3, leading to criticism that his later critiques of his corps and army commander were attempts to shield them from blame for the fiasco. The division gained a bit of a reputation as a "hard-luck" outfit, after facing a strong German counterattack at Salerno and heavy losses on the Rapido but later redeemed itself when, shifted to Anzio, it performed well in the breakout from that beachhead and opened the road to the liberation of Rome. But the division that made the crossing in January had not yet completed this transformation. It had suffered heavily and gained some experience in the months after Salerno but was not yet the fully effective fighting force it became later in the war. Worse, it had suffered heavily in the December attack on San Pietro, losing more than 2,000 men killed, wounded, missing, or sick during that month; losses in the 141st, 142nd, and 143rd ran at fifty, eighty, and thirty-three percent respectively.<sup>5</sup>

Major General Walker had reservations about the planned attack and voiced them throughout the preparation phase. He felt that rather than attempting to force a crossing of the unfordable river in his sector, the Army could actually get across a shallower stretch farther upstream in the 34th Division's sector. But crossing there required a pivot through the town of Cassino to reach the Liri Valley, an open corridor that led directly to the beachhead at Anzio and eventually Rome. Walker initially lodged several protests against a direct frontal assault, especially after a supporting attack by British forces holding his left flank farther downstream failed, but later appeared to have resigned himself to the task. But questions remained about how hard Walker, and his division, would push given the incredible odds against a successful penetration and breakout into the open terrain beyond.

Amplifying Walker's concerns were the severe shortages that were already beginning to plague the Italian theater. Many troops, along with the most experienced commanders, including Eisenhower, Bradley, and Montgomery, had already been withdrawn to prepare for the D-Day landings in June and Italy became an "economy of force" theater. Walker's division went into the attack with a shortage of trained replacements, and the supporting engineers lacked essential equipment, including amphibious

vehicles and bridging equipment, that would have greatly facilitated their task. Fred Walker Jr. estimated “the infantry companies now averaged seventy-five percent of their full strength” and “fresh replacements made up thirty percent of those present for duty.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the attack on the Rapido descended from what appeared to be a militarily essential operation into a poorly conceived and weakly supported frontal assault against a strongly prepared defensive position.

The German defenders facing the 36th Division were almost the exact opposite in terms of capability. The 15th Panzer Grenadier Division defended their sector of the Rapido with two Panzer Grenadier Regiments, the 104th opposite the 143rd Infantry and the 129th opposite the 141st. These men had fought in Sicily and at Salerno, but received sufficient replacements who enabled them to fully man the defensive line. The German army commander believed these troops were “from his best division.”<sup>7</sup> They were buttressed by another entire regiment from the 44th Infantry Division, the 134th Infantry Regiment, *Hoch und Deutschmeister*, an Austrian unit with a long and distinguished history.<sup>8</sup> The 15th Panzer Grenadier Division had a total of 4,760 troops including two regiments (104th-1,470 and 129th-1,830) and one reconnaissance battalion (580), with another 1,070 troops in the 134th Infantry Regiment. They could call on thirty-seven field howitzers and 100-mm guns, twenty-one 75-mm assault guns, twenty-two medium tanks, 105 anti-tank guns, and eight *Flakvierlings*, quad-20-mm anti-aircraft mounts that could be used in a ground support role.<sup>9</sup> The defenders were highly trained and motivated, had prepared strong defensive positions, and had the advantage of perfect observation from the heights of Monte Cassino, crowned by an ancient abbey that American troops falsely believed was being used by German artillery spotters. Though not in the abbey itself, German observers had fortified caves in the slopes just below the building that offered excellent observation of the entire valley below.<sup>10</sup> They had been preparing defensive positions along the Rapido for months, with concrete and steel emplacements fitted with machine and anti-tank guns providing interlocking fields of fire protected by double-apron barbed wire and dense fields of anti-personnel mines, including the infamous wooden Schu mine, which prevented the use of metallic mine detectors. The Germans had removed all vegetation from the riverbanks, eliminating any potential cover and concealment, and had pre-registered their ample artillery, which included five conventional battalions and two *nebelwerfer* (rocket mortar) regiments, on the likely crossing sites.<sup>11</sup> Walker had good reason to be concerned about his division’s ability to make an opposed crossing of the Rapido River.

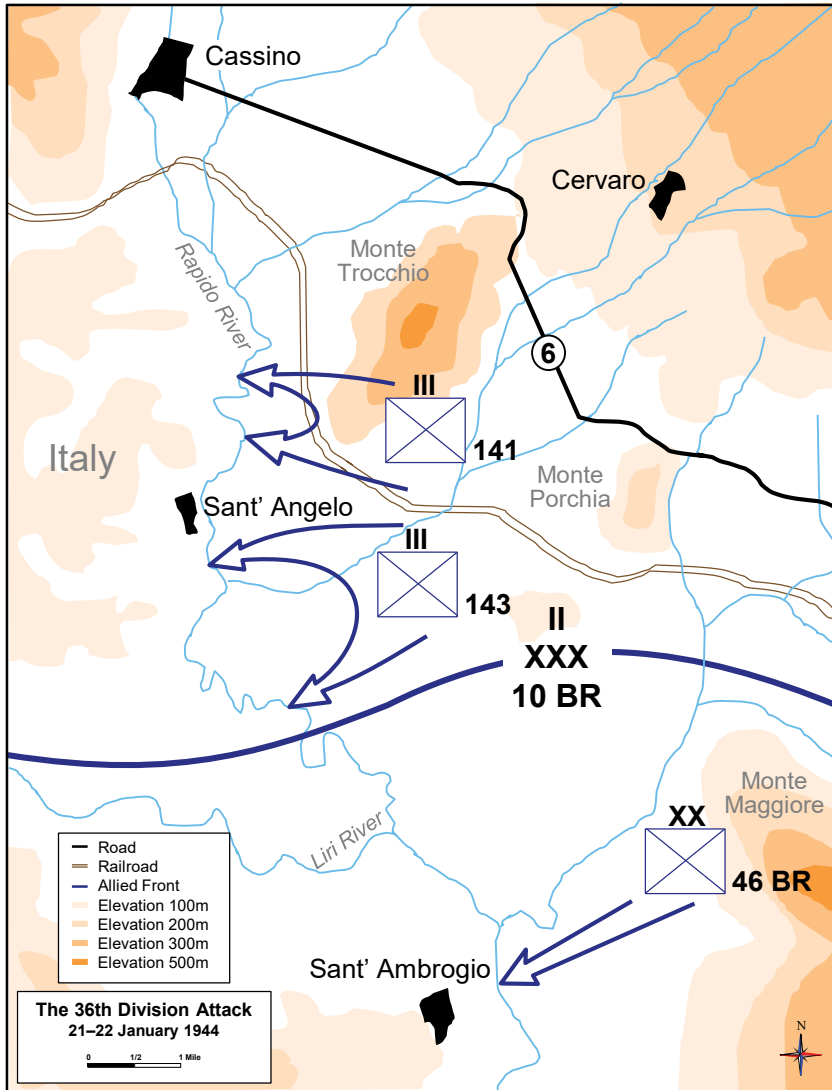


Figure 2.3. The 36th Division Attack, 21–22 January 1944. Created by Army University Press.

But the general dutifully prepared a plan calling for crossings in two-battalion strength above and below the town of Sant' Angelo, which sat on a high bluff overlooking the crossing sites. The town had been prepared as a defensive bastion along the line; the Germans had removed lighter buildings to provide clear fields of fire and observation while reinforcing heavier ones, with basements that served as effective bomb shel-

ters. In one case, the Germans even rebuilt a building around an assault gun to camouflage it from observation. Walker's final plan called for an attack by the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 141st, supported by the 2nd Battalion, 19th Engineers, above Sant' Angelo, and another by two battalions of the 143rd Infantry regiment below the town.<sup>12</sup> (See figure 2.3). Plans called for the initial attack in rubber and assault boats, with a footbridge in place an hour later to carry across the follow-on battalion, and an eight-ton infantry support bridge by midnight capable of ferrying across the 57-mm anti-tank guns, followed by a pre-fabricated Bailey Bridge.<sup>13</sup> Ideally, the two assaulting columns would complete a double-envelopment and pinch off the town itself, which provided an excellent bridging site for two additional Bailey Bridges constructed by the 16th Armored Engineers. Once the infantrymen had achieved this objective, Clark hoped to pass the 1st Armored Division, then in army reserve, through the breach and into the Liri Valley, eventually linking up with the amphibious troops at Anzio. At the very least, a strong demonstration would pin the German defenders and their reserves in place, preventing or at least reducing the strength of a counterattack at Anzio.<sup>14</sup>

While the plan appeared sound on paper, the 36th Infantry Division lacked sufficient resources, especially engineer equipment. There were no M1938 footbridges available, as the II Corps had been fighting largely in the mountains with few major streams; therefore, footbridges had to be improvised.<sup>15</sup> These contraptions, resting on inflatable pontoons, proved incredibly vulnerable to the ever-present interdiction fire and were easily destroyed. As a result, the forces across the river had poor means of receiving resupply and reinforcement, and evacuating wounded would be almost impossible. The inability to carve out a larger bridgehead prevented the construction of heavier vehicle bridges which might have brought across supporting armor and eased resupply, as the bridging sites remained under both long-range artillery and shorter-range small arms fire.<sup>16</sup> The swampy eastern bank prevented close fire support and the ever-present mist and fog, much of it provided by smoke generators to obscure the crossings from observation, precluded observed artillery fire and limited air support in the confined perimeter. In an after action report, Captain Llewellyn of the 194th Field Artillery Battalion reported, "The smoke totally obscured observation during the RAPIDO operation. Our chemical mortars laid down a sheet of WP [white phosphorus] and would repeat about the time we could start to see."<sup>17</sup> When the soldiers gained the far bank of the Rapido, they faced a pure infantry fight, with little benefit from any supporting arms.

On the night of 20 January, the assault columns arrived at engineer depots well back from the river and picked up their 400-pound plywood assault boats for the mile-long carry to the riverbank.<sup>18</sup> A preparatory artillery barrage prompted a counter-barrage from the Germans which chewed up the carefully prepared de-mined corridors leading to the riverbank, knocking down engineer tape that marked cleared lanes and causing the heavily burdened infantrymen to wander into the extensive minefields.<sup>19</sup> Many assault boats were riddled with holes and immediately sank when placed in the stream. The inability to cross the river stalled the attack, and troops waiting for engineers to bring up additional boats or install make-shift footbridges suffered additional casualties in their exposed location. Intrepid swimmers crossed the stream with cables so that lighter inflatable boats could be pulled across by hand-power, as the strong current made paddling the light boats across almost impossible. Once on the far bank, the lead elements attempted to pick their way within range of the German defensive positions. They first probed for mines and then cut their way through intact barbed wire emplacements, all under a steady fire from automatic weapons and mortars. When high casualties reduced numbers to impotence, the infantrymen sought shelter in shell craters or hastily dug shallow foxholes while awaiting reinforcements.

But difficulties at the bridging sites prevented the sustainment of combat power. Half-built footbridges sank into the icy water when shell fragments punctured the inflatable pontoons, and the assault boats suffered steady attrition from sinking or the inability to retrieve boats from the far shore. Several intact boats spun away downriver, abandoned by their crews on the far bank or untethered from the ropes intended to retrieve them. In at least one case, the 100-foot length of rope was not long enough to even complete the crossing. Tech. Sgt. "Buddy" Autrey recalled that his boat filled with water when it reach the end of its tether, well before they made it to the far bank, as a result of the current pulling them laterally downstream.<sup>20</sup> Water poured in over the transom and sank the boat; eight of the men drowned, with only Autrey and three others swimming to the far bank. As Duane Schultz described it, "Those four, soaked and without weapons, landed about five hundred yards downriver from where they were supposed to be" then had to slowly and painfully retrace their steps back upstream on the German side of the river.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the services of an entire squad of soldiers were lost due to the inability to successfully cross the water obstacle.

The footbridges proved little better. Of the four allocated to the 141st Regiment, artillery fire destroyed two en route to the river and a party carrying a third strayed into a minefield, resulting in its destruction.<sup>22</sup> The one

footbridge that was successfully installed could not be maintained; indirect fire sank the flotation supports, causing the bridge to sag into the water, as ice formed on the catwalk and guide wires before the bridge finally tore loose from its moorings.<sup>23</sup> Captain Llewellyn of the 194th Field Artillery Battalion recalled, “We found the small footbridge which had been built on rubber boats; it was in pretty sad shape, a number of the boats had been shot away and it was tilted sidewise so that we had to crawl across on our hands and knees.” Events were no better in the 143rd sector, where sunken assault boats and damaged and destroyed footbridges prevented reliable communication with the far shore.

The earlier daylight crossing on the placid Volturno River, well behind the lines, had proved an inadequate rehearsal for crossing the swifter Rapido at night, under fire and provided a false sense of security for both engineers and assault troops. Pvt. Charles Coolidge, a mortar observer with M Company, 143rd Infantry, later recalled:

I had better instinct than to cross that river when all I had to go across was a rope that already broke. And that river was swift. It was narrow. People think about, oh big river. No, fifteen feet across, maybe twenty. . . . swollen river comin’ off a high mountain. Boy! That water would take you the way you see an ocean wave hit you and carry you. That’s the way that whole river was; was an ocean wave. And if you got across, very, very few ever got back. And the ones that got back were by miracles you might say ’cause they had to come across that river without the aid of a rope.<sup>24</sup>

The commander of the 143rd, Col. William H. Martin, believed that the delays and inadequate bridging had doomed the attack and withdrew his men before dawn, when they would become vulnerable to observed fire. Less than 100 men remained across the river in the 141st sector, but none were heard from again, at least not until the war was over and the survivors emerged from German prisoner of war (POW) camps. The volume of fire gradually slackened as it grew lighter and attackers exhausted their ammunition. The Germans had contained the assault so easily that they dismissed it as merely a reconnaissance-in-force rather than a serious attempt to cross the river in strength, and did not request any reserves to meet the threat. The XIV Panzer Korps *Kriegstagesbuch* (war diary) reported, “Here some Allied troops gained a hold on the west bank of the Rapido, but a counterattack by 1st Battalion, 129th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, reinforced by two companies, 134th Regiment forced the Americans back after leaving 120 prisoners in German hands.”<sup>25</sup>



Figure 2.4. Training on the Volturno River. Courtesy of US Signal Corps.

Assessing the night's fiasco, Major General Walker found his worst fears realized. The attack had failed, both tactically and strategically. Only a few hundred men made it across the river, and they were in no condition to take on the prepared defenses. The lack of bridging at the crossing sites meant they could not be withdrawn, and the German defenders gradually reduced the number further until a few survivors who managed to escape death and capture during the day returned to swim back once darkness fell. But Lieutenant General Clark remained concerned about the Anzio landing scheduled for the following day and ordered an immediate reinforcement, in daylight. Walker's incredulous staff could not see how it could succeed when an attack with the cover of darkness and a full complement of engineer equipment and full-strength units had failed the night before. Difficulties in bringing forward additional assault boats caused a delay until after 1400 in the 143rd sector and until after dark for the 141st, but the next night's efforts yielded no better results. Both units managed to push across the river with a total of five battalions, some of which managed to advance as far as 600 yards, but they could not penetrate the German defenses, which easily pinned the attackers into a killing zone.<sup>26</sup> The men



advanced several hundred yards and reached some of the forward German positions, but had no weapons, other than their rifles and grenades, to knock out prepared positions, nor any prospect of receiving assistance in doing so. Pinned down, unable to maneuver in a confined bend of the river, and incapable of making any dent in the volume of fire opposing them, most of the division spent another costly and unproductive night across the river before withdrawing the following morning. Capt. Zerk Robinson reported his company of the 143rd Infantry crossed the river with 187 men but had only seventeen the next morning.<sup>27</sup> The two nights had cost the 36th Division a total of more than 2,000 casualties, including 1,300 killed, wounded, or missing in the icy river and another 700 captured, while the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division reported only sixty-four killed and 179 wounded.<sup>28</sup> One American officer recalled, “a stack of eighty bodies was piled up along the bank to be recovered later.”<sup>29</sup> Clark had wanted the division’s reserve, the 142nd Infantry regiment, thrown in but, when notified of Anzio’s success against light opposition, he cancelled the order, believing the attack had largely achieved its objective. With the weak offensive across the Rapido successfully contained, the Germans quickly shifted the 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and seven artillery battalions from the Rapido front to Anzio to help contain the landings there.<sup>30</sup>

Post-mortems on the Rapido began almost immediately and continued well into the post-war period. Sensitive to charges that they had failed to get the assault troops across the river, the 19th Engineer Regiment completed a detailed after action report chronicling equipment deficiencies, inadequate combined training, including the replacement of the regiment one battalion had trained alongside with another in the actual attack, and the inability to gain and hold the near shore, which prevented mine clearance and improvement of the bridge approaches prior to the crossing.<sup>31</sup> One engineer officer assigned as a liaison to an infantry company later wrote:

[R]eports from both Infantry and Engineer officers undoubtedly justify the statement by a key Infantry officer that “Everybody had their share of f\*\*\*-ups.” However, much equipment was lost by shelling and some personnel and equipment were lost by mines. These unfortunate facts did not stop the assault but did contribute to a lowered morale among the Infantrymen and definite lack of confidence in the Engineers.<sup>32</sup>

Officers in the 36th Division were even more defensive, believing that a National Guard division had been sacrificed to serve the West Point-trained Clark’s ambition of reaching Rome.<sup>33</sup> Before the war ended, a group of officers met and resolved to initiate an investigation once the war

concluded, which they achieved with a Congressional inquiry in 1946. The War Department provided a strong statement that the attack was necessary and that it was conceived and executed as well as possible given the circumstances, exonerating Clark, but the affair did stain his reputation. Clark went on to serve as commander of all of the United Nations forces in Korea but never ascended to the position of Chief of Staff of the Army—blocked, some believe, by Texas’s congressional delegation.<sup>34</sup>

The operation certainly demonstrates the difficulty of attacking prepared defenses, especially behind a river line, but successful breaches of much larger barriers—including the Roer and Rhine rivers in Northwest Europe and the Po River in Italy in 1945—make the smaller Rapido look less formidable by comparison. In explaining the reasons for the failure, the relative conditions and numbers of the attackers and defenders must be taken into account, as well as the unimaginative assault plan that headed directly into the teeth of the defenses. Duane Schultz related an incident during the post-battle truce to collect casualties in which one German officer allegedly commented, “You lads certainly don’t conduct river crossings like I was taught at Leavenworth,” reflecting experience gained during a pre-war exchange assignment.<sup>35</sup> The inability to call on supporting arms, including armor, artillery and air support, which was virtually non-existent during the battle absent one pre-planned strike on Sant’Angelo, also stands out. It was an infantry-only, or rather an infantry and engineer fight, that did not generate sufficient combat power on the far shore to break through the defenses. The low, swampy nature of the terrain, cold and wet conditions that sapped strength, strong prepared defenses manned by well-trained and motivated troops, and rush to conduct the operation on a strict timetable governed by the Anzio operation that precluded detailed planning or adequate supporting attacks on either flank all contributed to the failure. As usual, the cost was borne most heavily by the infantrymen on the front lines, who found their numbers reduced in the approach to and crossing of the river and, therefore, insufficient to break through a well-prepared defensive line or maneuver around it. Held at arm’s length by the enemy, they endured devastating casualties from long-range fire, being pinned in a killing zone until finally forced to surrender due to lack of ammunition or the inability to evacuate casualties.

The Rapido was a costly failure and offers a cautionary tale for future “forlorn hope” attacks intended to crack virtually impregnable positions. In the end, the truly surprising thing about the Rapido attack is not that it failed but that it came as close as it did to succeeding. For most of two regiments to get across the river and stay there for any length of time,

given the poor planning and appalling lack of resources and support, was nothing short of a miracle. It is surprising that such a horrible plan should have enjoyed any success at all. Clark, Keyes, and Walker all deserve their fair share of blame for the incident: Clark for ordering such an ineffective demonstration, or poorly supported assault, if that was his true intention, and Walker for not protesting more vigorously if he felt his division was being sacrificed for no good reason. Keyes failed to manage the disagreement between his superior and subordinate, allowing the attack to proceed, but neither insisting upon nor providing sufficient resources to ensure its success. Charges of straggling and lack of aggressiveness dogged the soldiers of the 36th after the episode, but their commanders bear some of the responsibility for not enforcing stricter discipline within their commands and allowing their doubts about the wisdom of the attack to filter down into the ranks.<sup>36</sup>

Postwar historians have generally defended Clark against criticism. In the Army's official history of the campaign, author Martin Blumenson exonerated Clark and criticized Walker for the attack's failure, and followed up in a second separate volume that similarly defended his benefactor. In citing the litany of planning failures, including the long approach march over an unsecured route which fatigued the assault troops, the strong German defenses, and poor infantry-engineer coordination, he argued, "firm direction was lacking, and a strong hand at the helm was missed," presumably Walker's.<sup>37</sup> Blumenson concluded, "the anxieties of the division commander, his pessimism, his expectation of failure had somehow, imperceptibly, permeated his troops and robbed them of their belief in victory and the will to win."<sup>38</sup> The general's son, Fred Walker Jr., refuted these charges, noting that a later successful attack in the sector had required four divisions with ample support, and that "the missing ingredient for success in the earlier attack had not been an intangible feat of leadership but rather a very tangible need for an adequate scale of time, resources, and tactical support."<sup>39</sup> But the concerns about the troops' willingness to carry out the assault recur in several sources. Duane Schultz recorded significant numbers of troops shirking, or purposefully falling into the river to prevent their having to cross.<sup>40</sup> An engineer battalion commander later recorded, "Engineers cannot put the Infantry across. They must have a will to cross which is partially acquired by training."<sup>41</sup>

Writing from the British perspective on the later Battle of Cassino, Fred Majdalany placed much of the blame on the division staff for putting the regimental commanders in a straightjacket and failing to ensure the approach route had been cleared. He concluded Walker's "Divisional Staff

had committed a number of elementary mistakes in planning the operation,” believing “the assignment was a difficult one but not impossible” and that “these American divisions in Italy were still relatively inexperienced in battle.”<sup>42</sup> In the division staff’s defense, Fred Walker Jr. pointed out that, after reaching the banks of the Rapido, “the time allowed for preparation appeared plainly inadequate . . . the detailed intelligence, planning, engineering, rehearsals, and other work required for such a complex assault on fortifications would be out of the question.”<sup>43</sup>

More recent studies have been more forgiving. Duane Schultz’s *Crossing the Rapido*, the best single-volume work on the subject, is more sympathetic toward Walker and the task Clark assigned him. But Schultz is more interested in chronicling the impact on the individual soldiers who participated in the attack and the life-long scars they bore—some physical, others psychological—for the rest of their lives. Whoever should shoulder the blame, individual soldiers bear the burden of command decisions. Leaders should ensure that everything that can be done is done to provide the greatest possible chance for success in close combat, and soldiers must be able to trust their leaders and make every effort to achieve their assigned objectives. In his *Day of Battle*, the second volume in his trilogy on the liberation of Europe, Rick Atkinson found, “Every senior officer at the Rapido had committed sins; none emerged unstained,” and summed up the operation with a quote from a British general later charged with attacking in the same area: “Nothing was right except the courage.”<sup>44</sup>

## Notes

1. Fred L. Walker Jr., “Mission Impossible: The First Assault across the Rapido River near Cassino in World War II January 1944” (unpublished manuscript, Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS, n.d.).

2. Major General Walker, the division commander, offered his version of the events in his memoir, *From Texas to Rome: A General's Journal*, (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1969). The official view defending Gen. Mark Clark came from Martin Blumenson first in his official history of the campaign, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), and later in a separate volume, *Bloody River: The Real Tragedy of the Rapido* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).

3. The 19th Engineer Regiment After Action Report found that the six-man Pneumatic Float, “Proved to be the backbone of [the] crossing” as it was “an excellent and versatile boat which is very popular with infantry (and engineers) because it is light, maneuverable, and readily adaptable to many uses. . . . The one disadvantage is vulnerability. Losses were extremely high;” “19th Engineer Regiment After Action Report (AAR),” Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, MO, n.d.

4. Duane Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido: A Tragedy of World War II* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2011), 142, 187.

5. Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 105. John Huston’s documentary, *The Battle of San Pietro* (accessed 12 October 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OLJZvgIx5w>), was not released until after the war due to the high casualties depicted in the film (Schultz, 108).

6. Walker, “Mission Impossible,” 3.

7. Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 132.

8. “The Rapido River Crossing: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs,” 79th Congress 32 (1946), accessed 16 October 2018, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015031933628;view=1up;seq=6>.

9. “The Rapido River Crossing: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs,” 79th Congress 65 (1946).

10. Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 138.

11. “The Rapido River Crossing: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs,” 79th Congress 41–43 (1946); Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 134–36, 148.

12. Headquarters, 141st Regimental Combat Team, “Field Order No. 16,” 19 January 1944, Rapido River Files, Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, MO.

13. Headquarters, 141st Regimental Combat Team.

14. Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 139.

15. “19th Engineer Regiment After Action Report.”

16. The 19th Engineer Regiment After Action Report found, “Regardless of willingness to risk and accept heavy casualties, construction of vehicle bridges cannot proceed under accurate small arms fire, direct or indirect. Construction

can however proceed, with varying degrees of difficulty, under harassing fire from artillery or mortars, if effectively screened from observation;” “19th Engineer Regiment After Action Report.”

17. “Artillery at Rapido,” Combined Arms Research Library N7245-B, John W. Casey Army Ground Forces Board, Allied Force Headquarters, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Report No. 126, 2 March 1944.

18. Schultz describes the M-2 assault boat as, “thirteen feet long and five feet wide” and “weighing 410 pounds.” They were “horribly vulnerable to enemy fire and hard for inexperienced crews to handle, particularly in a fast-flowing stream.” Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 149.

19. Walker, “Mission Impossible,” 10; Lt. Col. D. S. Nero, 2nd Battalion, 19th Engineer Regiment, “Rapido River Crossing,” 6 February 1944, Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, MO; Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 164.

20. Schultz, 159–60.

21. Schultz, 159–60.

22. Nero, “Rapido River Crossing.”

23. Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 166.

24. Charles Coolidge, Oral History Interview, 20 April 2010, Center for the Study of War and Society, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.

25. “XIV PanzerKorps Kriegtagesbuch, 16-23 January 1944,” quoted in Congressional Report 43; Philip A. Crowl, “XIV Panzer Corps Defensive Operations Along the Garigliano, Gari, and Rapido Rivers, 17–31 January 1944,” N17500.1027, Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS, accessed 16 October 2018, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/4473>.

26. Walker, “Mission Impossible,” 11.

27. “The Rapido River Crossing: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs,” 79th Congress 16 (1946).

28. Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 207; “The Rapido River Crossing: Hearings Before the Committee on Military Affairs,” 79th Congress 45 (1946).

29. Schultz, xii.

30. “The Rapido River Crossing: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs,” 79th Congress 48 (1946).

31. On 9 January 1944, the 36th Division Headquarters issued Training Memorandum No. 3, which directed that the 1st Battalion, 19th Engineer Regiment would support the 143rd Infantry and conduct training on 11 and 12 January while the 2nd Battalion, 19th Engineer Regiment would support the 142nd Infantry and train on 14 and 15 January. The later substitution of the 141st infantry for the 142nd meant that the 141st did not benefit from the river crossing training and that the 2nd Battalion, 19th Engineer Regiment had not trained with the unit it would actually support in the crossing. 36th Infantry Division, “Training Memorandum No. 3,” 9 January 1944, Rapido River files, Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, MO. The exercises included a day of training, including in the use of infantry assault boats, constructing foot-

bridges, crossing in five-man rubber floats, and erecting cables while the second day included a simulated assault crossing.

32. Capt. Thomas J. Campbell, "River Crossing Operations," 13 February 1944, Rapido River Files, Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, MO.

33. "The Rapido River Crossing: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs," 79th Congress 41 (1946).

34. Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 253.

35. Schultz, xiii.

36. Schultz, 130, 176–77.

37. Blumenson, *Bloody River*, 131.

38. Blumenson, 132.

39. Walker, "Mission Impossible," 13.

40. Schultz, *Crossing the Rapido*, 130, 176–77.

41. Nero, "Rapido River Crossing."

42. Fred Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1957), 76–77.

43. Walker, "Mission Impossible," 8.

44. Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2007), 348, 350.





## Chapter 3

### 2 Para and the Battle of Darwin-Goose Green, May 1982

Lt. Col. (Retired) Thomas G. Bradbeer

*I've waited twenty years for this, and now some f\*\*\*ing Marine's cancelled it.*<sup>1</sup>

—Lt. Col. H. Jones on being told the brigade commander had cancelled his battalion's raid on Goose Green

### The Falklands War Begins

At 0430 on Friday, 2 April 1982, a company of Argentinean Marine Commandos landed about five kilometers south of Port Stanley, the capital of the Falkland Islands, as part of Operation *Rosario*. They were the advanced element of Task Force 40, a powerful air, sea, and land invasion force that had been tasked with capturing the Falkland Islands (*Malvinas* to the Argentineans) from the British. Within five hours the British governor ordered the two detachments of British Royal Marine Commandos (68 men) to surrender after they had put up a “respectable defense” against overwhelming odds defending the airfield and beaches around Port Stanley.<sup>2</sup> The following day, elements of Task Force 40 also captured South Georgia Island but only after a very determined fight from twenty-two Royal Marine Commandos led by a young lieutenant. When word reached Buenos Aires that the *Malvinas* had been liberated, there was euphoria in the streets. A massive country-wide celebration followed for the next several days. In London, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher met with her cabinet and stated that she would attempt to use diplomacy to solve the crisis but simultaneously a military task force would be deployed to re-take the Falklands if diplomatic efforts failed.<sup>3</sup>

The Falklands are a series of islands in the South Atlantic with the two most significant islands in the group being East and West Falkland. The capital, Port Stanley, is located on the eastern coastline of East Falkland. A third island, South Georgia, is a dependency of the Falklands. The islands are located in the southwest corner of the South Atlantic Ocean, approximately 500 kilometers east of Patagonia in southern Argentina and 245 kilometers north-northeast of the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. More importantly for the British decisionmakers, East and West Falkland were more than 13,000 kilometers south-southwest from the British Isles. The terrain on the islands consists of barren and rocky ground, and the East



Figure 3.1. Map of Falklands Islands in relation to the United Kingdom and Argentina. Created by Army University Press.

Falkland landscape is dominated by the Sussex Mountains. In 1982, the population consisted of 1,800 British citizens with the majority living in or around the capital of Port Stanley.

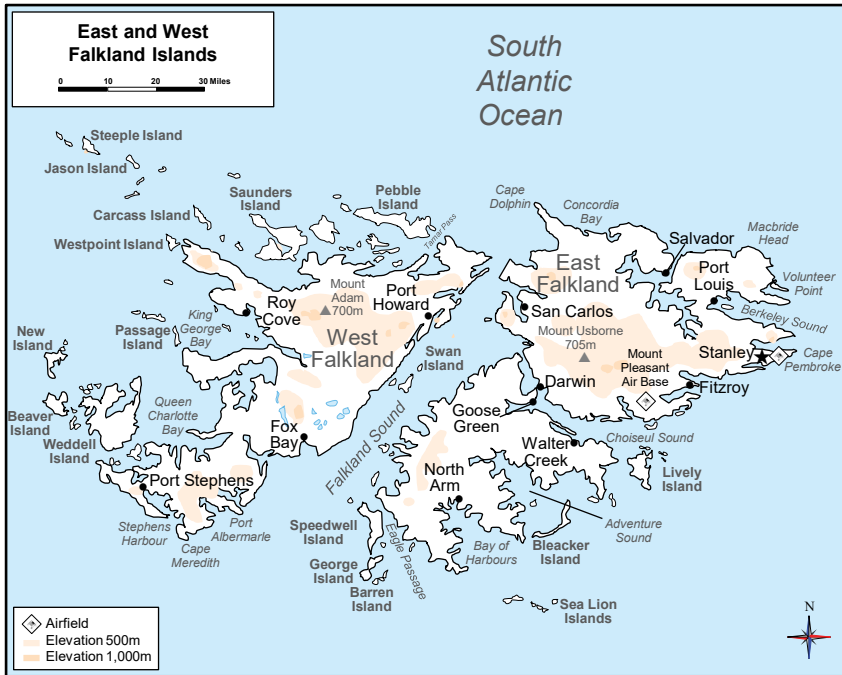


Figure 3.2. Map of East and West Falkland Islands. Created by Army University Press.

The British took control of the islands from Spain in 1833 and established a colony there. Relations between Britain and Argentina were historically very close dating back to the early 1800s when Britain supported Argentina in its war of independence against Spain. This relationship was culturally and economically beneficial to both nations for more than 160 years. There was only one problem that gnawed at Argentina like a canker sore: ownership of the Falklands. Argentina believed that after gaining independence from Spain, it also would regain Spanish possessions in and around Argentina. Instead the British claimed East Falkland, West Falkland, and South Georgia as part of the British Empire then established a colony on East Falkland in 1833. Between 1910 and 1981, the Argentinians had repeatedly tried to diplomatically convince the British and later the United Nations to return the islands to Argentinean control. As late as 1980, several British government leaders stated they were willing to

renounce their claim on the islands; but by 1982, negotiations between the two countries over this issue had broken off. Prime Minister Thatcher condemned any thought of ceding the Falklands Islands and its nearly 2,000 British citizens over to Argentina.

The military *junta* controlling the government of Argentina (led by Army Gen. Leopoldo Galtieri) realized that their diplomatic efforts had failed and made the decision to seize the Falklands by force. They were convinced that the British had already made the decision to abandon its territories in the South Atlantic when it recalled and did not replace the Antarctic Protection Vessel *Endurance*, a sophisticated intelligence-gathering ship that had served for more than a decade as a symbol of Britain's determination to maintain its interest in the South Atlantic. Other evidence convinced them that the British would not fight to recover the *Malvinas*. The British government had already approved drastic cuts to the ship strength of the Royal Navy. Additionally, they were seriously considering eliminating the Royal Marines as a service. With these and other forthcoming defense budget cuts, the *junta* concluded that the British did not have the capability or the will to prevent an Argentinean invasion of the islands.

### **The British Response: Operation Corporate**

Six days after the Falklands were captured, the British began to deploy military forces to the South Atlantic as part of Operation Corporate. The 3rd Parachute Regiment (3 Para) along with 40 and 42 Commando set sail aboard a converted ocean liner, the *Canberra*. The 2nd Parachute Regiment (2 Para), scheduled to deploy to Belize, had its orders canceled and sailed on 26 April for the Falklands onboard another commercial ship, the *MV Norland*. In all, the British Army would deploy the 5th Infantry Brigade with three infantry battalions and one attached airborne battalion (2 Para) while the Royal Marines deployed 3 Commando Brigade with three Commando battalions and one attached airborne battalion (3 Para). Artillery, engineer, air defense, and aviation units as well as logistics units began to deploy as part of Task Force South as well.

Negotiations between Britain and Argentina were mediated by the United States with Secretary of State Alexander Haig conducting "shuttle diplomacy" between the three capitals. While negotiations were being conducted, the Argentineans reinforced Task Force 40 and its army and marine units on East Falkland. Simultaneously, the British mobilized more units for deployment. The Royal Navy put two aircraft carriers, HMS *Intrepid* and HMS *Hermes*, back into service. *Hermes* was to have been decommissioned in late 1982, and *Intrepid* was to be sold to Argentina.

Additionally, Britain requisitioned civilian commercial ships such as the *Atlantic Causeway* and *Atlantic Conveyor* as well as the cruise ship *RMS Queen Elizabeth 2* to serve as troop transports.

## **2 Para Lands on East Falkland**

From Lt. Col. H. Jones's perspective, things had gone from bad to worse since his 2 Para battalion had made an amphibious landing on the west coast of East Falkland five days before. They were supposed to land at 0430; instead it was well past 0630 before his men finally disembarked. It had been a miserable experience for airborne soldiers who were used to arriving by parachute but instead had to wade ashore in frigid temperatures with their clothing and equipment soaking wet. The Navy was supposed to land them on the beach but lowered the ramps of the landing craft twenty meters from shore, forcing the paratroopers to walk through one-meter-deep water before reaching the beach. To make matters worse, it took more than thirty minutes for the platoons and companies to form up. The only good news was that the landing was unopposed. The six 2 Para companies finally began to move away from the beach in what proved to be a long, slow uphill walk to their positions on the slopes of Sussex Mountain eight kilometers away.<sup>4</sup> The paratroopers were loaded down with an average of 90 pounds in their Bergen rucksacks. To ask them to do anything more than walk was unrealistic.

After deploying from Portsmouth on 26 April, 2 Para arrived at Ascension Island on 6 May where they met their battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Jones, before linking up with the ships of Task Force South and sailing for the Falklands the next day. The soldiers of 2 Para had been at sea for twenty-five days and were eager to "get on with the war" when they landed at Blue Beach Two, Bonners Bay on the morning of 21 May.

The parachute battalion consisted of a headquarters company commanded by Maj. Mike Ryan; three rifle companies (A, B, and D) commanded by Maj. Dair Farrar-Hockley, Maj. John Crosland, and Maj. Phil Neame respectively; C Company (also known as Patrol Company) commanded by Maj. Roger Jenner; and Support Company, commanded by Maj. Hugh Jenner (no relation to Roger). With attached artillerymen, air defense, and engineers, the battalion strength was 690 soldiers when they landed at Blue Beach Two. Each of the three rifle companies had a headquarters platoon and three rifle platoons totaling nine rifle platoons available for combat operations.

Major Farrar-Hockley had been in command of A Company for almost a year. He was thirty-five years old and had served in the Parachute

Regiment for 15 years. He was a graduate of the Army Staff College and had already served as a brigade major. He came from a distinguished military family. His father, Gen. Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley, was a World War II and Korean War veteran and was serving as the colonel commandant of the Parachute Regiment at the time of the Falklands War. Officers and enlisted men within the battalion recognized that Farrar-Hockley was “fiercely ambitious.”<sup>5</sup> There had been some growing pains between Lieutenant Colonel Jones and Major Farrar-Hockley during Jones’s first year in command; more than once Jones had counseled and corrected his A Company commander in public during training exercises. Several journalists and historians have stated that there was bad blood between the two officers, but in a letter to his wife just prior to landing in the Falklands Jones wrote: “Thank God for Dair [Farrar-Hockley] and John [Crosland]. I don’t know what I would do without them.”<sup>6</sup>

Maj. John Crosland was the most experienced of the six company commanders. He had served in combat while detached to the Special Air Service (SAS) during the Oman crisis in the late 1960s. His soldiers had the deepest respect for him and appreciated his relaxed personality and keen sense of humor; he brought laughter even to tight situations. “I know I have the right initials, but even I can’t walk on water,” he would joke.<sup>7</sup> Largely because of his combat experience, Crosland was also the only one of the six company commanders who could flout Jones’s orders on occasion and get away with it. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Jones ordered every soldier in the battalion to wear his steel helmet prior to the assault on Darwin-Goose Green, but Crosland wore a black wooly hat throughout the battle and the entire campaign in direct contravention to Jones’s order. Major Crosland’s leadership style did not fit any type or style that was analyzed or discussed at Sandhurst. His subordinate leaders described his leadership style as “unique . . . [more like] an exercise in instilling confidence. . . . [I]nitiative was the order of the day.”<sup>8</sup> His leadership style can be characterized as democratic in nature. He developed a climate within his company that ensured open dialogue and effective listening. Crosland expected his subordinates to use their initiative to make decisions. He also expected his subordinate leaders to assist him in gaining situational awareness so he could achieve situational understanding. From there he could frame the problem and make a decision.

D Company was commanded by Maj. Phil Neame. Like Farrar-Hockley, Neame came from a distinguished military family. His father, Lt. Gen. Sir Philip Neame, had earned the Victoria Cross in the First World War at the 1915 Battle of Neuve Chapelle as a Royal Engineer lieutenant. The

younger Neame had begun his military career with the Royal Air Force (RAF) Regiment before transferring to the Parachute Regiment. A passionate and experienced mountaineer who had climbed Mount Everest, he was the most physically fit of the six company commanders.

Unlike the three rifle companies, C Company (Patrols Company) contained only two platoons: Recce Platoon and Patrols Platoon which contained six four-man patrols teams within each platoon totaling fifty-five men in the company. These two platoons served as the eyes and ears of the battalion commander and while the Recce Platoon was commanded by a lieutenant, the Patrols Platoon was commanded by the most experienced captain in the battalion. C Company was commanded by Major Roger Jenner. At the time of the battalion's deployment to the Falklands, Jenner had served in the Parachute Regiment for twenty years. He had risen from private to Regimental Sergeant Major before being commissioned. At Darwin-Goose Green he was actually commanding the company he had joined as a private in 1962.<sup>9</sup>

Support Company contained the battalion's heavy and specialist weapons with three platoons: Mortars (eight 81-mm), Medium Machine-Gun (six general-purpose machine guns) and Anti-Tank (six Milan anti-tank launchers). The company was commanded by Maj. Hugh Jenner, who had joined the Parachute Regiment at the age of thirty-six after spending more than fifteen years in the Cheshire Regiment. The fact that Jenner was able to pass the mandatory two-week preparatory course before attending the three-week parachute course was a testament to his physical fitness and determination. Support Company also included an Assault Pioneer Platoon (twenty-four men) as well as a sniper section (twelve two-man sniper teams).

Lastly, Headquarters Company was commanded by Maj. Mike Ryan, who at age forty-two was the same age as his battalion commander. Ryan had the most combat experience of any officer in 2 Para. He had joined the British Army in 1962 but resigned when he was not allowed to compete for the SAS. He then served in the Rhodesian Army and also in Oman as a contract officer. Ryan rejoined the British Army in 1971. Due to his experience and leadership style, Lieutenant Colonel Jones designated Ryan to be the battalion's "third-in-command" if anything happened to either the battalion commander or his second-in-command. Not only did Headquarters Company provide command and control elements of the battalion, it also provided the logistics support to the other five companies in 2 Para. All six company commanders had served under Jones for at least a year when 2 Para deployed to the Falklands.

2 Para's Second-in-Command was Maj. Chris P. B. Keeble. Commissioned into the Royal Leicestershire Regiment in 1963, Keeble joined the Parachute Regiment in 1971. He quickly learned that the airborne forces were "far more professional than most infantry units. In an infantry battalion, there is an undefined limit about what you can do. The philosophy of the Parachute Regiment is that there is nothing you cannot do. I find that very attractive. There are no limits."<sup>10</sup> Age forty at the time of the Falklands War, Keeble had only joined 2 Para in February 1982, nearly a year after Jones took command of the battalion. Keeble and Jones had previously served as instructors together at the School of Infantry but worked in different departments so only knew each other professionally. Though Keeble got along well with his commanding officer in their few months together before the deployment to the Falklands, his leadership style could not have been more different than his commander's. Both leaders led by example, were demanding, and expected subordinates to accomplish any mission assigned in a timely manner; Jones led using a combination of authoritarian (not to be confused with authoritative), pacesetter, and coercive styles of leadership. Not only did Jones possess a fiery temper, he was also very restrictive by nature, most especially with the delegation of authority or allowing subordinates to use their initiative. According to Keeble, "Jones himself showed a lot of initiative; his company commanders had very little room to manoeuvre—they were almost like pawns."<sup>11</sup>

As the unit's second-in-command, Keeble's first priority in peacetime was to train the unit and secondarily to take command of the battalion in the absence of the commander.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Jones, Keeble led using a combination of authoritative and democratic leadership styles. He not only welcomed input and recommendations from subordinate leaders but he expected them. While Jones was restrictive in nature and liked to control everything that was going on within his span of control, Keeble was much more flexible, open to dialogue, and noted for his effective communication skills.

Lieutenant Colonel Jones "was a black and white person who did not recognize compromise. He was certainly an impatient man, quick to anger when he felt he was being thwarted or frustrated . . . had a tendency to want to jump in and do things for himself if he felt something could be done better. On exercises he was always to be found at the front, often with the leading section wanting to know what was happening, wanting to see for himself, and always pushing to keep things moving."<sup>13</sup> Though Jones's and Keeble's leadership styles were very different, the contrast was a major reason they worked well together and formed a strong and effective command team.



With Secretary Haig's failed diplomatic effort, the 2 May sinking of the cruiser *General Belgrano* by a British nuclear submarine and resulting loss of 368 sailors, and the Argentinean Air Force initiation of an intense bombing campaign against Royal Navy ships nearing the Falklands, the largest air and sea battle since World War II had begun.<sup>14</sup> Between 21 and 25 May, Argentinean air attacks sank or badly damaged eight British warships and transports. In London, pressure was mounting on Thatcher's government over the lack of results so far in the conflict. Her critics believed there was a noticeable lack of progress by marine and army units on the ground. From their perspective, the units had been ashore for more than four days and their commanders seemed content with "sitting on the beach."<sup>15</sup> Thatcher needed a victory and a quick one to stifle her critics and maintain the country's support for the war. Thus, Northwood (British High Command headquarters outside London) issued orders; on 23 May, the British land forces commander (Maj. Gen. Jeremy Moore, Royal Marines) directed Brig. Julian Thompson (commander, 3 Commando Brigade) to initiate the attack on Port Stanley. That same day Lieutenant Colonel Jones received orders to prepare to conduct "a raid" on Darwin-Goose Green to eliminate the threat from Army and Argentinean Air Force units located there.<sup>16</sup> On 24 May—hours after the lead 2 Para units had begun their movement to secure Camilla Creek House, their initial objective prior to attacking Darwin and Goose Green—Thompson cancelled the operation. Jones's comment shown at the beginning of this chapter was made immediately after he received the cancellation order. Thompson made the decision when he learned that the bad weather and poor visibility would prevent artillery designated to support 2 Para's attack from being airlifted into support positions.<sup>17</sup>

However, the situation changed after the *Atlantic Conveyor* was damaged and subsequently sank. The ship carried a large portion of the task force's helicopters (six Wessex, three Chinook, and one Lynx as well as spare parts), all of which were desperately needed for British ground forces to accomplish their overall mission. Two days after the initial cancellation order, Thompson received a direct order from London to undertake two major operations simultaneously: send 2 Para to Darwin-Goose Green to the south and the remainder of 3 Commando Brigade to invest Port Stanley in the east.<sup>18</sup>

### **Battle of Darwin-Goose Green: On Again, Off Again, On Again**

On the afternoon of 26 May, Jones was directed to report to brigade headquarters to attend an orders group (mission brief). Here he learned that the attack against Darwin-Goose Green was back on. This was ex-

tremely good news for Jones. His battalion had been dug-in on an exposed mountain side in extremely harsh conditions for the better part of five days. They had been unable to patrol forward of their positions since D Squadron, SAS was conducting operations in that area. Each day his unit watched as the Argentinean Air Force attacked Royal Navy ships patrolling in San Carlos Bay. The bad weather was beginning to impact his men physically. Trench foot was becoming a major ailment for each of his companies. "We were slowly deteriorating," Jones commented. "H's natural impatience was beginning to turn to real concern. . . . On the fourth day, H declared flatly, 'We are not winning, we are losing.'"<sup>19</sup>

Intelligence indicated that the Argentineans had only an under-strength battalion defending the settlements and the airfield there. Brigadier Thompson was not an advocate for attacking the two settlements. He believed that sending 2 Para on a supporting attack in the opposite direction of his primary objective (Port Stanley) would not only strip him of critical combat power but that the two settlements were "strategically irrelevant."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, he felt that moving one battalion with its required fire support would be extremely difficult. Thompson needed the limited resources he had ashore for his main effort. Therefore, 2 Para would only receive a half battery of artillery (three 105-mm light guns) and a frigate, HMS *Arrow* with its lone 4.5-inch gun, to provide additional fire support. The few helicopters available would only be able to move the three light guns and a limited amount of ammunition into position during the hours of darkness. As a result, 2 Para would have to make the twenty-five-kilometer move to Darwin-Goose Green on foot.

The senior artilleryman present at the brief, Lt. Col. Mike Holroyd-Smith, commander of 29 (Commando) Regiment, Royal Artillery, advised Jones to insist on more fire support, but that would mean delaying the attack until more assets were available. "I am not delaying anything," Jones responded.<sup>21</sup> Major Keeble did send a request to brigade for the use of a troop of Scorpion and Scimitar armored reconnaissance vehicles. However, the request was denied for two reasons: limited fuel was available for the vehicles and it was believed (later proved wrong) that the tracked vehicles would have trouble traversing the wet, boggy ground.

Returning to his main headquarters, Jones issued the same plan for the battalion's movement to Camilla Creek House that he had briefed three days previously. Once there, 2 Para would lay up until darkness before launching its attack on Argentinean forces that were dug in around Darwin-Goose Green. The only change from the original plan was in the combat load each soldier would carry forward into battle. Based on

the battalion's struggles off the beach to their initial positions on Sussex Mountain—which both Jones and Keeble had determined was largely due to the large loads each soldier carried in their rucksacks (on average about 100 pounds per man)—Jones gave the order to have his men move in light fighting order, leaving their rucksacks behind. They would only carry the maximum amount of ammunition plus water and enough twenty-four-hour rations to last two days.<sup>22</sup>

Following a successful night march, 2 Para arrived at their initial staging area, Camilla Creek House, in the early morning hours of 27 May 1982. D Company had secured the large abandoned white farmhouse and a half-dozen farm buildings and sheep shearing sheds located in a hollow that was invisible on all sides to anyone more than several hundred yards away. The structures were halfway between Sussex Mountain and Goose Green. Several officers voiced concerns about concentrating all six companies in the same area, but Jones was confident that the unit was hidden from view. The farmhouse and its attached sheds would also provide both cover and shelter for the men. The paratroopers were able to cook breakfast and get some sleep while Jones found a room for himself where he wrote out the operations order for his unit's attack on the two settlements. Jones also ordered two Recce Platoon patrols forward to find the enemy and report back their observations.

At around 1000, Jones and most of the Headquarters Company leadership were listening to the BBC World Service when a news bulletin reported that 2 Para was at that moment eight kilometers from Darwin settlement and preparing to attack Argentinean positions located there and at Goose Green.<sup>23</sup>

Jones had hoped to achieve the element of surprise in his attack and was incensed that that possibility was now gone (assuming that the enemy was monitoring the BBC, which they were). He gave the order for the battalion to deploy and dig in away from Camilla Creek House and its outlying buildings, believing the structures might now become a target for Argentinean aircraft. Convinced that the Argentinean garrison at Goose Green was now alerted to his unit's presence, Jones confronted his embedded reporter, Robert Fox from the BBC, who denied having anything to do with the report. Jones was so enraged that he threatened to sue the secretary of state for defence, the prime minister, and the BBC if any of his men were killed in the forthcoming battle.<sup>24</sup>

Jones was already in a bad mood when he called for an orders group to be held at 1100; when he arrived, several officers were missing, one of

them a company commander. Jones exploded at his staff and postponed the briefing until 1500. The briefing was pushed back another hour when one of the Recce Platoon patrols captured four Argentinean soldiers, including the commander of the enemy's reconnaissance platoon. Through interrogation, Para 2 soldiers learned the enemy force at Darwin was much stronger than the "understrength" battalion that 2 Para had been briefed was there.<sup>25</sup>

When the orders group finally began, there was less than an hour of daylight left. Jones presented his plan: "a six-phase day-night, silent-noisy battalion attack to capture Darwin and Goose Green."<sup>26</sup> Briefly, C Company (Patrol Company) was to conduct a reconnaissance of the last 6.5 kilometers to the start line and secure the area. A and B companies would then advance south and assault the Argentinean positions on the eastern and western sides of the narrow two-kilometer-wide isthmus, respectively. D Company would pass through B in the second phase and then in turn be passed by B for the attack on Boca House. Time was to be a critical factor; Jones anticipated that he had fourteen hours of darkness available to cover the remaining fourteen kilometers from Camilla Creek House to Goose Green. Jones's plan had a sixth phase starting at first light—0630 the next morning, which would begin the daylight assault for Darwin and Goose Green.

In sum, 2 Para would advance to contact in darkness and because of the limiting terrain of the isthmus, conduct a frontal assault against the enemy positions in daylight and secure the settlements to minimize civilian casualties amongst the reported 125 civilians living in Darwin and Goose Green. "Silence would be maintained until the first assault, which of course would be noisy."<sup>27</sup> In each of the six planned phases, Jones would maintain at least one company in reserve to provide some flexibility. He finished the orders group by stating that "All previous evidence suggests that if the enemy is hit hard, he will crumble."<sup>28</sup> The orders group lasted about ninety minutes; it was dark when the company commanders returned to their units to brief their subordinate leaders.

## **The Attack on Darwin-Goose Green**

Around 1800, C Company began their advance to the start line as rain began to fall. The rest of the battalion followed at 2200. It took four hours in the dark to move the three 105 Light Guns of 8 (Alma) Commando Battery, Royal Artillery, by air along with 320 high-explosive (HE) rounds for each gun into position to support 2 Para. The guns were ready to provide fire support by 2400.<sup>29</sup> At 0235, A and B companies crossed the start line, with each having two platoons forward and one behind. Farrar-Hockley's

men were advancing steadily toward their first objective: Burntside House. When they were 500 yards short of the house, the soldiers began laying down heavy machine gun fire, assuming that the house was occupied by enemy forces. The Argentinean platoon that had been occupying the area around the house had displaced on first contact, leaving two dead soldiers behind. Unknown to 2 Para, four British civilians remained in the house; fortunately, they were not hurt in the fusillade of fire.

B Company on the battalion's right began its attack at 0310 and came under fire thirty minutes later when the soldiers entered several trenches defended by Argentinean troops. The platoons fought through the area and secured their initial objectives without loss. D Company, which was in reserve, moved up behind A and B companies. The guns of 8 Commando Battery were conducting counter-battery fire against the Argentinean artillery located in and around Darwin and Goose Green while HMS *Arrow* and its 4.5-inch gun supported the infantry attacks with high-explosive and illumination rounds until a fault in the turret stopped the naval gunfire support for more than thirty minutes.

The progress of the three rifle companies in the dark was going as well as could be expected even though enemy artillery fire was steadily increasing. Jones was in high spirits even though the timeline of his plan was beginning to fall behind schedule. A Company had occupied Coronation Point when at first light (0630) Jones directed Farrar-Hockley to begin the assault on Darwin. His lead two platoons were crossing open ground approximately 500 meters from Darwin Hill when they were caught in the open by heavy machine-gun, mortar, and artillery fire. The lead platoons, as well as company headquarters, were forced to seek cover in a re-entrant (draw) that allowed them to avoid direct fire but provided little protection from the indirect fire that was falling all around them. Eight hundred meters to A Company's right, B Company was also caught by both direct and indirect fire on the forward slopes overlooking their objective: Boca House. "The whole momentum of the battalion's attack had ground to a halt on the bare, coverless ground. The casualties continued to increase and the ammunition stocks to dwindle."<sup>30</sup>

As 2 Para's advance came to a grinding halt at what was now recognized to be the Argentinean main line of defense, Lieutenant Colonel Jones became frustrated and his patience was running out. To make matters worse, none of his artillery forward observation officers (FOOs) could locate where the enemy artillery was firing from and 8 Commando Battery was having little success suppressing or neutralizing the enemy artillery. His own mortars were running very low on ammunition, and the close air support he expected

from Royal Navy Harriers had been cancelled due to fog at sea. Jones and 2 Para were on their own. It was at this time that the battalion commander had to make several critical decisions to break the stalemate.

Jones and his tactical headquarters (TAC 1) element—consisting of three officers and eight soldiers—had been following behind A Company during its advance and were caught in the open by the enemy fire that was hitting A Company.<sup>31</sup> According to one of the men who was part of the battalion commander’s personal security detachment, Sgt. Barry Norman, “The CO stood up and said ‘Right, we can’t stay here all day.’ And went into the inlet and, with a mixture of crawling, running, sprinting, and diving, we all got out of the killing ground and into the inlet and the protection of a bank, which luckily was not mined.”<sup>32</sup> Although they were behind cover, Jones and his TAC 1 were still taking fire. Moments later, two Argentinean Pucara ground attack aircraft flew over A and B companies and attacked Camilla Creek House and 8 Commando Battery.

With gorse bushes around both companies on fire from burning phosphorus grenades, soldiers from various platoons within the companies became intermingled in the narrow gully in front of and between Darwin Ridge and Darwin Hill. Argentinean sniper fire was also taking its toll—killing several 2 Para soldiers, all shot through the head. Jones assessed the situation and ordered C Company to move up and join D Company with the intent of moving his reserve into position to possibly commit them to the fight.

D Company had, in fact, moved atop a low ridge 700 meters due north of Jones and his TAC 1. Major Neame reported his location to his battalion commander, who then ordered him to “stay put:”

H [Jones] made it crystal clear that I was not to get any closer to the action. We went to ground . . . and after a while it became apparent to me that some Argentinian artillery was trying to register us as their target. Shells started to land some way off, and then slowly to creep nearer and nearer. . . . I decided to risk H’s wrath and move [D Company] forward a bit into the lee of the next hill where I thought any OP [observation post] would not be able to see us. This proved a timely decision. Literally within moments of leaving, a full fire mission landed precisely where we had been sitting.<sup>33</sup>

The battalion commander observed D Company moving forward against his express orders and once more instructed Major Neame to keep out of the battle: “Where the hell do you think you’re going?” he asked over the radio. Neame explained the rationale for the move and then sug-

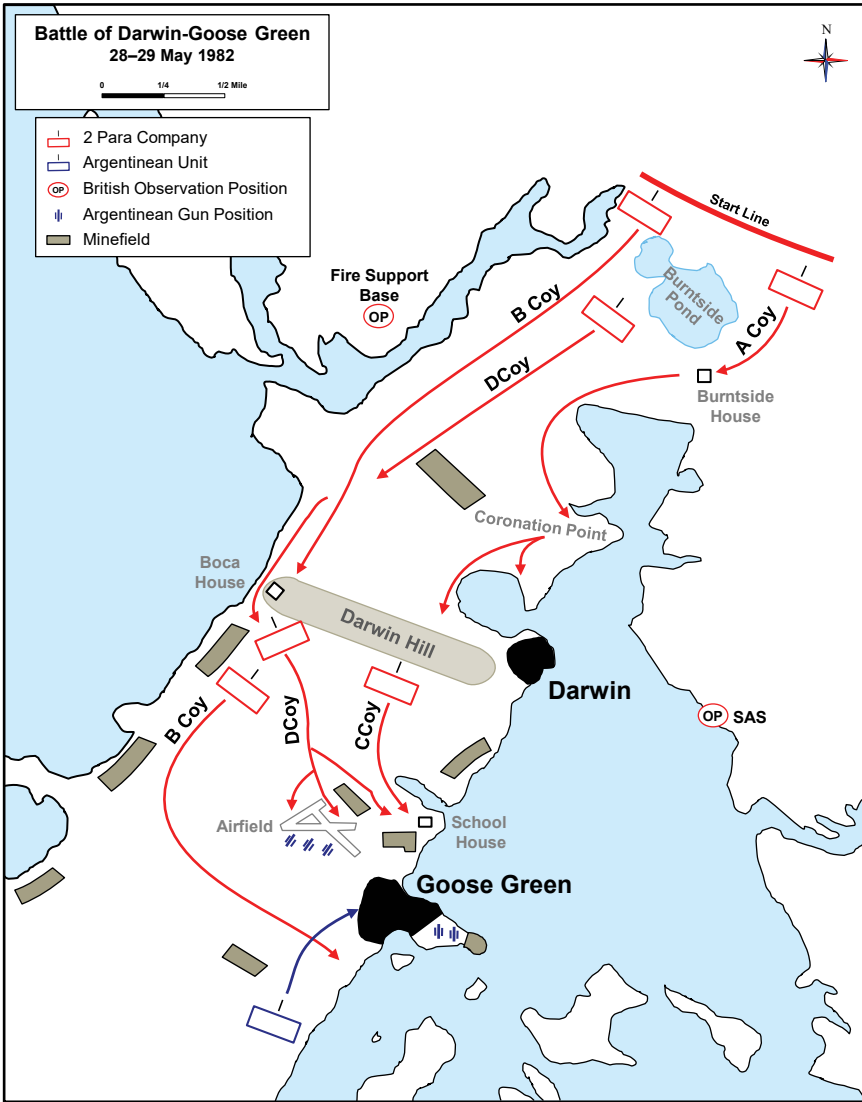


Figure 3.3. Map of Battle of Darwin-Goose Green, 28–29 May 1982. Created by Army University Press.

gested that his company be allowed to conduct a right-flanking move along the shoreline to enfilade the Argentinian positions that were holding up A and B companies. Neame’s recommended course of action was ignored by Jones who responded: “Stop clogging the net; I’m trying to conduct a battle.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time C Company was moving to the left (east) of D Company and west of Coronation Point, the company second-in-com-

mand, Lt. Peter Kennedy, assessed the situation. Realizing A Company was pinned down in front of Darwin Hill, he set up his company machine guns to provide supporting fires to A Company. To prevent a friendly fire incident, Kennedy attempted to coordinate with Major Farrar-Hockley on the battalion command net to confirm the actual positions of A Company's positions. He was ordered off the radio by the battalion commander, who stated once more that he "was trying to fight a battle. So was I, and found it frustrating to be ignored when we could so obviously help."<sup>35</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Jones spent most of an hour in the inlet, and it must be assumed he believed it was too early in the fight to commit either of his two reserve companies (C and D), and Support Company was still moving south from the Camilla Creek House area. With both A and B companies unable to advance because of the intense fire they were taking, Jones made the decision to join A Company and personally assess why they could not continue the advance:

A Company's attack started floundering after they cleared up the Argentine first platoon position. The CO [commanding officer] got on the radio and told them to get a grip, speed up, and continue the movement, which they couldn't. So he said: "I'm not having any of this" and decided to go up and join A Company. To say he got a little pear-shaped would be an understatement. When he made up his mind that a thing was going to be done, then it was going to be done, and off he went all the way round the edge of the inlet.<sup>36</sup>

With his sergeant major and the rest of TAC 1 following, Jones, his battery commander Maj. Tony Rice, and his personal security detachment used phosphorus grenades to provide some concealment as they moved over nearly 200 meters of open ground to join A Company. Farrar-Hockley's men were able to clear several enemy positions by the time Jones linked up with his main effort company commander, but A Company was still unable to break the stalemate. A high volume of fire from enemy trenches along the ridge on their left flank was still inflicting casualties amongst Farrar-Hockley's men.

Observing what was happening to A and B companies, Major Neame was convinced that an attack along the beach would outflank the entire Argentinean defensive position. He tried to convince his battalion commander of the merits of that course of action only to be rebuked a second time. "Don't tell me how to run my battle!" Jones said with some emotion over the battalion command net.<sup>37</sup>



Eager to break the deadlock between the two forces which had now lasted more than two and a half hours and frustrated at how far behind schedule his attack plan had fallen, Jones “seemed determined that A Company would win, [and] would roll up the enemy line along the central position of the ridge.”<sup>38</sup> Jones ordered Farrar-Hockley to take the high ground at the top of the spur and clear out the enemy positions located there. The A Company commander quickly assembled fifteen men to attack the high ground and called for smoke from the mortars to cover their advance. After a brief smokescreen was established, the mortars ran out of ammunition. As the attack began, the wind began dispersing the smoke screen. As the small group crawled toward the top of the high ground, they began taking casualties. Capt. Chris Dent, second-in-command of A Company; Cpl. David Hardman; and Captain Wood, the battalion adjutant, were all killed within seconds of one another.<sup>39</sup>

Once a unit is in combat, it is understood that within the art and science of command that the commanding officer can influence events in three ways: first through the use of firepower; second, the use of reserves; and third, through personal presence. With firepower not having provided him the support required to break the stalemate and having made the decision that it was still too early in the battle to commit his reserve units, Lieutenant Colonel Jones decided that by his personal presence he would turn the tide of battle. Jones turned to Lt. Mark Coe, Cpl. David Abols, and A Company’s headquarters element and shouted “Come on A Company, get your skirts off” and then he yelled “Follow me” as he dashed around the spur to lead an assault on the trenches to his left front.<sup>40</sup>

Sergeant Norman and Major Rice moved to follow their battalion commander as Jones reloaded his submachine gun and began moving uphill to a trench to his left and above him. Seconds later, Jones was struck by a single bullet below his right shoulder blade from an enemy machine gunner located several hundred meters to the right of the advancing British soldiers. Jones was knocked to the ground, where he lay mortally wounded. Sgt. Guy Blackburn, Lieutenant Colonel Jones’s radio operator, notified the battalion second-in-command, Major Keeble, as well as 2 Para’s six company commanders that Jones had become a casualty when he sent the message: “Sunray is down.”<sup>41</sup> It was approximately 0900, 28 May 1982.

It was several minutes before Sergeant Norman could reach his fallen commander. He was drawing heavy enemy fire and was unable to move until Sergeant Major Price and Corporal Abols fired 66-mm anti-tank rockets on the Argentinean trenches where the intense fire was coming from.

Abols scored two direct hits; moments later, a number of Argentinian soldiers emerged from the trenches with their hands in the air. When Norman reached Jones's body, the commander was barely conscious and in deep shock. The young sergeant administered an IV drip as every soldier in 2 Para had been trained to do. He then administered a second drip as other soldiers made a makeshift stretcher and carried their wounded commander to cover while Major Farrar-Hockley called for a casualty evacuation helicopter. Lt. Col. H. Jones died of his wounds before the helicopter arrived.

### **Major Keeble Takes Command of 2 Para**

Maj. Chris Keeble, located with the battalion headquarters 1,500 meters to the rear of A Company, had been monitoring the battalion command net for several hours. It was not an easy task trying to follow what was taking place. He could tell by the battalion commander's angry exclamations that the operation was not going according to his plan. He did know that A Company had been stopped and pinned down for more than ninety minutes and that Lieutenant Colonel Jones had gone forward to get the unit moving again toward Darwin Hill and Goose Green.

Once the Argentinean forces opened fire and pinned A Company down, Keeble recognized that Jones's detailed plan of attack was no longer feasible. Based on his understanding of where A and B companies were located, Keeble began to formulate a plan that would set the conditions for 2 Para to regain the initiative and complete their mission of capturing Goose Green. First and foremost, he had to gain situational understanding of what was taking place at Darwin Hill. Second, unlike Jones, he would allow the company commanders to make recommendations based on what they were seeing and how best their units could maneuver against the enemy defenses. His first decision as 2 Para's new commander was to direct Major Crosland, B Company commander, to assume command of the battalion until Keeble could move forward and join him. He also directed that additional ammunition be sent forward to the two companies in contact and for Major Rice's 105-mm battery to register their guns on targets in and around Darwin Hill and Goose Green.<sup>42</sup>

Keeble took his radio operator and the 3rd Brigade liaison officer, Spanish-speaking Maj. Hector Gullan, with him. Gullan was keeping the 3rd Brigade commander, Brig. Julian Thompson, up-to-date on what was happening with 2 Para's attack. Upon linking up with Major Crosland, Keeble took command of 2 Para. Crosland then briefed him on the current situation. From this, Keeble quickly developed his plan to continue the attack. He "coordinated the action started by B and D Company with a small

fire base of Milan[s] at B Company's rear [to] complete the turning of the enemy's flank."<sup>43</sup> With B Company in the lead and attacking toward Boca Hill, they came under intense fire. Major Neame and his D Company were in trail behind B Company. Having received the equivalent of "mission orders" from Major Keeble, Neame moved his company to the right of B Company and—using his machine guns to lay down a base of fire on the enemy positions around Boca House—ordered six rounds be fired from his Milan anti-tank weapons. The Milans pounded the Argentinean trenches; realizing that at least two companies of paratroopers were maneuvering on them convinced the Argentinean soldiers defending Boca House that further resistance was futile. White flags appeared as Neame's men moved across the open terrain to accept the Argentinean surrender. Even better news for Keeble was that by 1330, his outnumbered and outgunned force was still on the offensive; in his estimation, the enemy was focused on defending its trenches and had missed the chance to launch counterattacks against his battalion.<sup>44</sup>

With D and B companies advancing, A Company was able to seize Darwin Hill after a light anti-tank weapon (LAW) destroyed an Argentinean bunker that was the centerpiece to the hill's defense. Keeble made the airfield at Goose Green his primary objective. Relying on the superb training and cohesion of each subordinate unit in 2 Para as well as the leadership of his junior officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), Keeble orchestrated the final assault on Goose Green. Major Crosland's B Company moved around C and D companies and began clearing the trenches one by one en route to their final objective. Keeble's assault had become an advance to contact which some military critics have argued it probably should have been from the outset.<sup>45</sup>

As darkness began to fall, the Argentineans attempted to reinforce their units defending at Goose Green. One hundred and twenty-five men from Task Force *Solari* were airlifted by helicopter to a position south of Crosland's B Company. Out of anti-aircraft missiles, the situation looked grim for the paratroopers of 2 Para. Fortunately, Captain Ash, a forward observation officer (FOO) was with B Company. He and his radio-telephone operator (RTO) sent a call for fire to the 105-mm battery. The battery's rounds were on target and dispersed the Argentinean force. Task Force *Solari* lost cohesion and played no further role in the battle.

At last light, six Argentinean aircraft made a series of attacks against C and D companies. One aircraft crashed trying to avoid heavy ground fire from D Company and a second was shot down by a blowpipe missile from

Darwin Hill. The other four aircraft made strafing runs, and at least one dropped napalm but did not hit any 2 Para units. In response to Keeble's own request for air support, three RAF Harriers attacked the Argentinean artillery at Goose Green at dusk. Though the Harrier attacks caused little physical damage to the Argentinean forces, Keeble was convinced the frightening sound of their jet engines low to the ground as well as the violent explosions of their cluster bombs and rockets had a major psychological effect on the defenders of Goose Green.<sup>46</sup>

With the light gone, both sides settled down for the night. Keeble reassessed his battalion's situation. On the plus side, his units were now in position to seize and capture Darwin Hill and Goose Green at first light. On the negative side, his companies were exhausted, hungry, miserably cold, low on water and ammunition, and had suffered sixteen dead and thirty-one wounded.<sup>47</sup> He was convinced that one final assault in the morning would see 2 Para achieve its mission, but at what cost? Keeble was not sure that attacking was the best course of action. He considered another option: negotiating with the enemy commander and convincing him to surrender. If that failed, he could launch a final assault.<sup>48</sup>

Keeble called for an orders group once it became dark; he presented his two plans for the next morning to his subordinate commanders and battalion staff. Surrounded by gorse bushes behind Darwin Hill, Keeble told his leaders "that the way to crack the problem was to walk down the hill the next day and tell the bloody Argies the game was up and defeat inevitable. . . . [I]f that failed, well we could launch a massive assault with aircraft, artillery, and infantry and destroy the settlement."<sup>49</sup> He knew that to accomplish this would require much more air support, artillery, and fresh troops, so Keeble contacted Brigadier Thompson and laid out his courses of action. Thompson supported both and promised to provide a Harrier strike as well as an artillery and mortar bombardment if the negotiations failed. He also alerted J Company, 42 Royal Marine Commando to prepare to support 2 Para's attack the next day.<sup>50</sup> Keeble then directed that ammunition, food, water, medical supplies, and dry winter clothing be sent to the three maneuver companies. Like most of his men, Keeble had not slept in more than sixty hours.

Shortly after first light on 29 May, Keeble sent two captured Argentinean NCOs with a message for their commander in Goose Green. The message stated that the Argentineans had until 0830 to comply with his surrender demands or he would unleash a massive air and artillery attack on their positions. Well before the 0830 deadline for a response, the Argentinean

NCOs returned and notified Keeble that the Argentinean commanders were willing to meet near the airfield to discuss surrender terms. Keeble took his command group as well as two embedded reporters to meet with Lt. Col. Italo Piaggi, the commander of Task Force Mercedes and Vice Commodore Wilson Pedroza, the Goose Green air base commander. They met in a small corrugated iron hut on the airfield. Keeble emphasized that the Argentineans had fought well but now the only sensible option was to accept an honorable surrender. Through an interpreter, Pedroza surrendered the Argentinean Air Force contingent to Keeble while Piaggi surrendered his soldiers.<sup>51</sup>

At 1130, the Argentinean troops began to muster on the settlement's sports field. Unbeknownst to the Argentinean forces, Major Neame and D Company had moved into overwatch positions to ensure the surrender went off without any problems. Pedroza formed up his 250-man contingent and had his men sing the Argentinean national anthem. He then had them ground their helmets and weapons. Then Pedroza did an about face and stepped forward to where Keeble stood. He saluted Keeble and handed over his pistol and belt, saluted again, and walked away. Next, Lieutenant Colonel Piaggi formed up his men. Keeble and his command group were more than shocked when more than 800 men began to assemble in front of the British battalion commander. Weapons were grounded and then Piaggi dismissed his soldiers to collect their personal gear before marching off into captivity. It must have been even more humiliating for the Argentineans to realize that May 29th was the Argentinean Army's National Day. Keeble then directed that the Union Jack be raised above Goose Green. The battle was over.<sup>52</sup>

The fighting for Darwin-Goose Green resulted in the first British victory of the war and set the stage for what was to follow. During the 36-hour fight, the British suffered eighteen dead and thirty-three wounded. The Argentineans sustained fifty-five dead and eighty-six wounded, and 1,536 became prisoners of war.<sup>53</sup> For his actions at Darwin Hill, Lt. Col. H. Jones was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, Britain's highest award for gallantry in combat. Ever the humble and loyal follower, Maj. Chris Keeble praised Jones after the battle, "The victory, however, was H's. The inspiration of 2 Para came from him, and my role was merely to act on his behalf in his absence."<sup>54</sup> Reflecting on the outcome of the Battle of Darwin Hill and Goose Green, Keeble concluded that the Argentineans lacked the will to fight, which was why they lost.<sup>55</sup>

After five battalion-size engagements between British and Argentinean forces during the first two weeks of June, 2 Para—led by its new command-

er, Lt. Col. David Chaundler—entered the capital, Port Stanley, on 14 June. That night the Argentinean commander, Maj. Gen. Mario B. Menendez surrendered his forces to the British Commander Land Forces Falklands Islands, Maj. Gen. Jeremy Moore. The ten-week Falklands war was over.

## **Conclusion**

Why did 2 Para win the battle of Darwin-Goose Green when so much went wrong prior to and during the actual fighting which took place over a thirty-two-hour period on 28–29 May 1982? The day prior to the attack, the Argentinean leadership commanding units defending the Darwin and Goose Green positions had been made aware of the impending British attack by a BBC broadcast, so the element of surprise was lost before the battle began. With minimal allocation of naval gunfire and air support—further limited by poor weather conditions and only three howitzers assigned to support the assault forces—2 Para crossed seven kilometers of rough terrain and assaulted an enemy force that had superior firepower and was ensconced in a series of well-prepared defensive positions. Within the first few hours of the attack and with several of his companies pinned down and suffering casualties by heavy fire, the 2 Para battalion commander was killed attempting to get his unit moving forward again.

By nightfall, the situation looked bleak for 2 Para. The soldiers had endured nearly twenty hours of hard fighting in near-freezing temperatures, with little to no sleep over the previous three days. Short of water and ammunition, 2 Para had suffered sixteen paratroopers killed in action and another thirty-one wounded. It may be argued, however, that the death of Lt. Col. H. Jones was the turning point of the battle.

With the death of the battalion commander, 2 Para's second-in-command, Maj. Chris Keeble, assumed command and made several critical decisions which postured his forces to regain the initiative, seize Darwin, and encircle Goose Green. This and the subsequent air attack by Royal Air Force Harriers against the enemy positions set the conditions for the Argentinean surrender the following morning.

In subsequent after-action reviews conducted by the British (as well as other North Atlantic Treaty Organization armies, including the United States), 2 Para's victory was the result of several "unquantifiable factors—leadership, training, morale, esprit de corps, and fighting spirit."<sup>56</sup> Each of these critical factors was developed and inculcated in all activities by the 2 Para leadership from squad to battalion level during peacetime as the unit continuously prepared for the day it would be called

upon to protect British interests around the globe. Darwin-Goose Green also vindicated the demanding training regime that Lieutenant Colonel Jones had established within the battalion during his first year of command. In sum, the British victory at Darwin-Goose Green is a tribute to the professionalism as well as physical and mental conditioning of every soldier who fought there, but most especially to the junior leaders, both NCO and officer, who led their men through the crucible of close combat in an extreme operating environment.

## Notes

1. Mark Adkin, *Goose Green: A Battle is Fought to be Won* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), 68.
2. William Fowler, *Battle for the Falklands (1): Land Forces* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1983), 2–3. See also Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1983), 72–4.
3. The Sunday Times of London Insight Team, *War in the Falklands: The Full Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 97–102.
4. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 63.
5. John Wilsey, *H Jones, VC: The Life and Death of an Unusual Hero* (London: Hutchinson, 2002), 260.
6. Wilsey, 237.
7. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 23.
8. Spencer Fitz-Gibbon, *Not Mentioned in Despatches: The History and Mythology of the Battle of Goose Green* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1995), 33.
9. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 25.
10. Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 235.
11. Fitz-Gibbon, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 21.
12. Max Arthur, *Above All Courage: Personal Stories from the Falklands War* (London: Cassell & Co., 1985), 186.
13. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 15.
14. Duncan Anderson, *The Falklands War, 1982* (London: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 40.
15. Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 229.
16. Julian Thompson, *No Picnic: 3 Commando Brigade in the South Atlantic* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), 66.
17. Thompson, 68.
18. Anderson, *The Falklands War*, 49. See also Thompson, *No Picnic*, 71.
19. Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 236. During the initial five days on Sussex Mountain, 2 Para evacuated twenty-seven men for sickness as well as ankle and knee injuries. Additionally, twelve were evacuated for trench foot.
20. Hastings and Jenkins, 237.
21. Hastings and Jenkins, 237.
22. John Frost, *2 Para Falklands: The Battalion at War* (London: Sphere Books, 1984), 45.
23. Wilsey, *H Jones, VC*, 253–54.
24. Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 239–40.
25. Mark Adkin, *Goose Green*, 100–1. See also Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 239–40.
26. Hastings and Jenkins, 239–40.
27. Wilsey, *H Jones, VC*, 259.
28. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 122.



29. Thompson, *No Picnic*, 75.
30. Thompson, 78.
31. Tac 1 consisted of Lieutenant Colonel Jones; 2 Para's adjutant, Captain Wood; the battery commander, Major Rice; the Mortar officer, Capt. Mal Worsley-Tonks; Sergeant Norman and Lance Cpl. Ian Beresford, Jones's personal security detachment; Sergeant Blackburn; and four other enlisted radio men.
32. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 100–1.
33. Adkin, 177.
34. Adkin, 177.
35. Adkin, 178.
36. Michael Bilton and Peter Kosminsky, *Speaking Out* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), 133. See also Adkin, *Goose Green*, 178.
37. Adkin, 180.
38. Adkin, 178.
39. Frost, *2 Para Falklands*, 76.
40. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 183.
41. Wilsey, *H Jones, VC*, 279.
42. Fitz-Gibbon, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 136–37.
43. David J. Kenney, *2 Para's Battle of Darwin Hill and Goose Green* (Privately published, 2005), 168.
44. Kenney, 169–70.
45. Kenney, 173.
46. Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Goose Green 1982: Battle Story* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, UK: The History Press, 2013), 111–12. See also Fitz-Gibbon, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 176.
47. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 260.
48. Arthur, *Above All Courage*, 192.
49. Arthur, 192.
50. Thompson, *No Picnic*, 81. See also Adkin, *Goose Green*, 261.
51. Kenney, *2 Para's Battle for Darwin Hill and Goose Green*, 176–77. See also Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 250–51; Arthur, *Above All Courage*, 193; Frost, *2 Para Falklands*, 98–99.
52. Adkin, *Goose Green*, 260.
53. Anderson, *The Falklands War*, 53–54.
54. Kenney, *2 Para's Battle for Darwin Hill and Goose Green*, 194. Keeble would be awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his leadership and actions at Darwin-Goose Green.
55. Fitz-Gibbon, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 184.
56. Anderson, *The Falklands War*, 55. See also Brian Steed, *Armed Conflict: The Lessons of Modern War* (New York: Ballantine Publishing, 2003), 103–21; and Fremont-Barnes, *Goose Green 1982*, 136–51.



**Chapter 4**  
**Breaking the German Encirclement at Leningrad:**  
**Operation Spark, January 1943**

Robert F. Baumann

*During defensive tasks, the enemy typically attempts to slow and disrupt friendly forces with a combination of obstacles, prepared positions, and favorable terrain. . . . The enemy is likely to defend in depth, and when provided time, will continuously improve positions in ways that better protect enemy defending units, make attacks against them more costly, and allow the enemy to commit the minimum amount of ground combat power forward.<sup>1</sup>*

—Field Manual (FM) 3.0, *Operations*

*A single operation may contain several forms of maneuver, such as a frontal attack to clear an enemy's disruption zone followed by a penetration to create a gap in enemy defenses.<sup>2</sup>*

—FM 3.0, *Operations*

**To Leningrad**

*Ahead! Ahead! We have a right to revenge!*

*Let our triumph say:*

*To Leningrad! To the city of Russian fame,*

*To the life and honor of my nation!*

*There is a flag drenched with blood above us,*

*The eternal city of the Neva is ahead of us,*

*To Leningrad, the great and wonderful!*

*The hour of revenge has struck!*

*Our enemies will not live, we will never forgive them!*

*All our valor requires this—*

*Don't let them survive, don't let them go!*

*Don't give them anything but death!*

*The hour has struck, and with stern courage,  
We are moving, shoving aside thousands of obstacles,  
The pride of glorious Leningrad,  
Commander Poliakov's soldiers.*

*Holy revenge takes us to a bloody battle.  
Let's now win the battle, comrades!  
To Leningrad! To the city of Russian fame,  
To Russia, to our Motherland!*<sup>3</sup>

—Alexander Prokofiev  
(Translated by Shushanna Baumann)

Executed from 12 through 30 January 1943, the Red Army's Operation Spark (*Iskra* in Russian) resembled an arctic version of the Battle of Stalingrad, which was in its final stages around the same time. The operational objective was to reconnect besieged Leningrad, the cradle of the Russian Revolution, with the rest of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> Most striking was the concentration of combat power in a small but strategically vital sector of the front. Encircled by the German Wehrmacht, with an assist from Finnish forces in the autumn of 1941, Leningrad had been almost completely cut off from the rest of the Soviet Union for nearly a year and a half. Operation Spark marked the fifth attempt overall to relieve the city and the third attempt to do so in the Siniavino salient that is the focal point of this analysis.<sup>5</sup>

Named for the strategically located village of Siniavino, the salient resembled a wedge with the pointed end adjoining the shore of Lake Ladoga in the north, while the southern end fused with the broad expanse of German-held territory under the control of 18th Army and Army Group North. About fifteen kilometers across from east to west at its mid-section and perhaps twenty-five kilometers long on a north-south axis, the salient separated the Soviet Leningrad and Volkhov fronts and in so doing severed Russia's land communications with besieged Leningrad.

Having repelled repeated Soviet breakthrough attempts, German forces were well dug-in and fully able to defend in both easterly and westerly directions. They formed three defensive lines entailing a labyrinth of trenches and strong points. This sound defensive scheme had proved effective against previous Soviet assaults from outside the encirclement. However during Spark, in contrast to previous attempts to dislodge German forces from the salient, the Red Army would mount a powerful con-

verging attack from within the encircled zone to the west as well as from Soviet-controlled territory from the east. Conducted as part of a series of offensive or counteroffensive actions up and down the Eastern Front, Spark would contribute to a decisive turn in the fortunes of the war.

The density of combat formations, lack of maneuver space for armor, concentrated destructive force by all means including artillery and aerial attacks, and high casualties all characterized the ferocity of battle in the Siniavino salient. Closing with the enemy—advancing the “last hundred yards”—was a constant requirement to achieve the Red Army’s mission while from the German defenders’ point of view, retreat was not an option. Therefore, this case study serves as a stark reminder in a contemporary doctrinal context of the nature of high-intensity military operations.

This analysis of Operation Spark examines combat in the Siniavino salient in light of important topics raised in FM 3.0 concerning surprise and operational security, as well as basic forms of maneuver including envelopment, flank attacks, frontal attacks, sustainment, and flank security.<sup>6</sup> At the Siniavino salient adjoining the city of Leningrad, operations in 1943 required a perilous river crossing, breaching numerous obstacles, bypassing strongpoints, frontal attacks, maneuver in narrow corridors, overcoming rough terrain and severe cold, and repeated episodes of close—even hand-to-hand—combat in tight spaces.

## **German Forces**

German Eighteenth Army under the command of *Generaloberst* Georg Lindemann was part of Army Group North and in all included twenty-six divisions distributed along a front of about 450 kilometers. As noted by historian David Glantz, “Severe force shortages caused Lindemann to deploy virtually all of his divisions in a single line, with each division defending roughly a seventeen-kilometer front.”<sup>7</sup> *Feldmarschall* Erich von Manstein’s redeployment of Eleventh Army southward toward Stalingrad in late November seriously impaired German capabilities in the north. Under the circumstances, defense of the Siniavino salient fell to XXVI Army Corps, which controlled five divisions within or adjoining the targeted area of the salient. These included the 170th, which had earlier fought the Soviets at Odessa and Sevastopol, the 96th and the 227th as well as a police division and elements of the 5th Mountain Division. The 223rd Infantry Division stood just to the south of the base of the salient near Mishkino but would be fully committed to its own fight.<sup>8</sup> At best, the Germans could call upon between 50,000 and 60,000 soldiers to hold the salient. There were no division-level reserves, and no reinforcements

could be spared from other points on the front that was buckling under the weight of Soviet offensive operations.

Though the battle would not be fought in classic urban terrain, the Siniavino salient featured a number of physical advantages for a resourceful defender. First, the ground itself had few roads due to the prominence of bogs and densely wooded areas. Vehicular movement during most of the year was notoriously difficult. Normal traffic was confined to several corridors weaving through an array of so-called workers dormitories, called settlements, and other structures suitable for fortification. The Germans established layered lines of trenches and strongpoints, reinforced with logs and exploiting every natural feature of the landscape. The central line of the defense connected Workers Settlements 1 and 5 with the village of Siniavino itself. Defenses in every building were arranged to allow for fire in any direction.<sup>9</sup> The western flank of the salient enjoyed a significant natural barrier in the form of the Neva River, some 500 to 600 meters in width. Even when covered with ice, which enabled foot traffic, the river surface offered little cover for attacking forces. At the northwestern extremity of the salient, where the river joined Lake Ladoga, stood the old town of Shlisselburg, which occupied the northwest corner of the Siniavino salient and featured an adjoining island fort. Though insufficiently hardened to withstand massive bombardment by Soviet artillery, it nevertheless presented a significant obstacle to infantry advance.

## **Soviet Forces**

Because Operation Spark was, in a sense, a simultaneous breakout and break-in, it entailed massive forces assaulting German positions from both east and west. Leningrad Front, which controlled forces within and around the encircled city, would conduct a breakout attack across the Neva River from the west. The 67th Army under the command of Maj. Gen. M. P. Dukhanov formed two attack echelons including eight rifle divisions, three tank brigades, two ski brigades, and five separate rifle brigades as well as numerous engineer and other supporting elements.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile attacking from the east, the 2nd Shock Army under the Volkhov Front aimed to drive through frozen bogs and intermittent forests to seize German-held strongpoints in the salient. Ultimately, army commander Lt. Gen. V. Z. Romanovskii had at his disposal eleven rifle divisions along with four tank brigades, two ski brigades, a separate rifle brigade, and even a pair of aerosleigh battalions armed with light machine guns to conduct reconnaissance and strike behind German lines.<sup>11</sup>

In total as of early January, the shock groups of the combined Leningrad and Volkhov fronts consisted of 282,000 soldiers and officers, 4,300 guns and mortars, 214 antiaircraft guns, 530 tanks, and 637 rocket launchers. In addition, the 13th and 14th Air armies supported the operations with approximately 900 aircraft, mostly for ground attack, while elements of the Baltic Fleet and Leningrad border forces contributed supporting fires.<sup>12</sup> From the Leningrad side of the salient, Soviet forces positioned 144 gun and mortar tubes per kilometer of front, while the Volkhov side of the salient featured even greater fire density with 180 tubes per kilometer. Baltic Fleet artillery included more than 100 large-caliber guns. In total, the bombardment surpassed that of the offensive at Stalingrad.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the two Soviet fronts enjoyed enormous ratios of superiority over their German opponents: 4.5 to 1 in infantry, 6-7 to 1 in artillery, 10 to 1 in tanks, and 2 to 1 in aircraft.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to numerical advantages, Soviet forces enjoyed much stronger logistical support than during previous efforts to pierce the salient. 2nd Shock Army and 67th Army had fuel reserves sufficient to refuel the thirsty engines of combat vehicles two or three times. Moreover, each had twenty or more days of rations.<sup>15</sup>

## Operation Spark

*A wet-gap crossing requires special planning and support. The size of the obstacle and the enemy situation will dictate how to make the crossing. Attackers should strive to cross rivers without loss of momentum regardless of how they get across. Only as a last resort should the attacking force pause to build up forces and equipment.*<sup>16</sup>

—FM 3.0, *Operations*

The timing of the launch of Spark depended in part on ice conditions. Although preparations were essentially finished by the start of the new year, the Soviet High Command, or *Stavka*, delayed execution until 12 January when the ice on the Neva had solidified enough to support movement of light tanks.<sup>17</sup> German forces had successfully repelled an attempted crossing in September and in so doing demonstrated the importance of armor support for Soviet attackers. One critical consideration for both 2nd Shock Army and 67th Army was that armored forces would have very little maneuver space. As a result, both armies confined tank forces from brigade to battalion-size to the role of infantry support.<sup>18</sup>

Soviet forces spent the majority of December 1942 in preparation. Rehearsals by forces of the Leningrad Front included assaults with storm

ladders against wooden ramparts and mock strongpoints modelled after those employed by the Germans. Moreover, by night Soviet engineers labored to develop concealed departure points for the actual assault as well as secure lines of communications up to the riverbank. Light tanks would lead the way, but Soviet engineers constructed portable tracks consisting of wooden rails fastened with steel crampons and reinforced by ice to permit medium T-34 tanks and even thirty-ton KV (named for Kliment Voroshilov) tanks to follow the assault.<sup>19</sup> A number of the construction detachments engaged in assembling these improvised tracks consisted primarily of women from Leningrad.

From 15 to 18 December 1942, Leningrad Front conducted a war game to closely examine the probabilities of a combined arms breakthrough by 67th Army against prepared defenses. Almost concurrently, a comparable game took place behind the lines of 2nd Shock Army on the eastern edge of the salient. Both exercises took full advantage of comprehensive aerial photography by Soviet reconnaissance pilots. Commanders at regimental and division levels were thus able to examine in detail the objectives seemingly concealed just behind the front.<sup>20</sup>

Training for special units, such as the 34th Ski Brigade, which included many new recruits, faced special challenges. During December, it was still impossible to anticipate with certainty whether Lake Ladoga, the Neva, or the bogs in the salient would be frozen over and thus traversable. Therefore, soldiers practiced walking in their skis over extended distances. Also, many soldiers required retraining in marksmanship skills in order to fire accurately while on skis. In addition, soldiers had to master orientation at night in a forested area and learn how to make ad hoc shelters to withstand the cold. At the same time, scouts were discreetly probing German defenses. Upon moving to their departure point in late December on the shore of Lake Ladoga, the unit also had to become more familiar with its propeller-driven sledges.<sup>21</sup>

Preparation was no less meticulous on the Volkhov Front, where Col. P. I. Radygin and his chief of staff—dressed as enlisted personnel—personally reviewed the terrain where the 372nd Rifle Division would spearhead an attack that would result in the first linkup of forces with 123rd Rifle Division of 67th Army. Operational security was a paramount concern. Contact among the deploying divisions was forbidden, while false radio broadcasts created a false picture of the front.<sup>22</sup>

The Red Army began its artillery preparation around 0930 on the morning of 12 January. During the first week from 12 through 18 January,



2nd Shock Army alone fired about 630,000 rounds, supplemented by about 15,500 heavy rounds contributed by the Baltic Fleet. In all, they poured on two to three rounds per square meter of enemy defensive positions.<sup>23</sup> The 2nd Shock Army command post at Kolokolnaya Height afforded an excellent perspective on the assault. Intercepts of German signals gave strong indications of surprise and chaos bordering on panic. Reports included references to lost positions and frantic requests for counter-battery fire.<sup>24</sup> One captured German from the 227th Infantry Division reported flight and the surrender of trenches as the first assaulting Russians arrived.<sup>25</sup>

Previous experience indicated that in such tight confines, when a frontal assault was the only possibility, it was essential to have an exceptionally powerful strike force in the lead attacking echelon.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, 67th Army attacked with four divisions in the first echelon, backed by a tank battalion and four or five mortar regiments. Two more rifle divisions followed in the second echelon. The 2nd Shock Army in turn led with six divisions in the first echelon, each bolstered by three to five regiments of artillery and sappers. One division of heavy tanks and an additional tank brigade also joined the attack. Four rifle divisions formed the second echelon, and two more divisions constituted a reserve.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Assault of Workers Settlements 8, 5, and 1**

Facing formidable German defenses at Workers Settlement Number 8 just across the line of departure, the 372nd Division made good use of envelopment to support a frontal attack. Taking advantage of the broken terrain as well as the bitter cold, which kept most of the German forces holed up for warmth, the division sent a battalion under the command of Capt. N. K. Smirnov to envelop the German position from the southeast. For the frontal assault, storm detachments of 100 to 150 men were typically formed within the rifle regiments. Each included a sapper platoon, machine guns, a rifle platoon, antitank weapons, and artillery observers.<sup>28</sup>

Broadly speaking, elements of the 2nd Shock Army pushed forward two to three kilometers by the end of the first day, but their objectives were far from met. The 372nd and the 98th Tank Brigade had not yet fully surrounded Workers Settlement Number 8. In many places the ground was completely impassible for tanks, which sometimes sank in the not fully hardened ice of area bogs. To make matters worse, some of the entrapped tanks were visible from German positions at the Siniavino Height or from concealed positions in the forest. Some stuck Soviet tanks served as immobile firing platforms to help the infantry go forward. Eventually, Soviet

tankers discovered that they could exploit the existing railroad track that crossed the salient between Workers Settlements 8 and 5.<sup>29</sup>

Waging an active defense, the German command moved to salvage a deteriorating situation. In response to Soviet advances, the Germans diverted elements of the 96th and 61st Infantry divisions situated south of junction at Mga into the salient to help keep lines of communication open with 18th Army.<sup>30</sup> Fierce fighting ensued the following day, and Soviet progress slowed.

Meanwhile, the 372nd renewed its attack on 13 January but without great success. One factor was snowfall and cloud cover, which restricted aerial capabilities. However, as the second echelon joined the attack, Soviet commanders could envision forward movement. Before the end of the day, 67th Army directed the 372nd to bypass Workers Settlement Number 8—leaving reduction of the German strongpoint to follow-on forces. The next task for the 372nd, along with the 98th Tank Brigade and the 18th Rifle Division, was to advance to Workers Settlement Number 1 located several kilometers farther to the west.<sup>31</sup>

Several kilometers south along the front, the 327th Rifle Division under Col. N.A. Poliakov managed to break through to the Kruglaia Wood within a few hours. Capture of this point had large tactical significance since the woods controlled one of the access routes to the Siniavino Height.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, the 256th Rifle Division advanced between the 372nd and the 327th. Here Col. F. K Fetisov's forces marched into heavy fire from three barriers formed from logs and ice. Facing this obstruction to their immediate front, they circled around the flank of Workers Settlement Number 8. Along the way, they provided flank support to the 256th at Kruglaia Wood.

Soviet forces encountered numerous German counterattacks in the 2nd Shock Army sector. Workers Settlements 7, 4, and 8 as well as the area around the village of Lipka were the scenes of furious combat. In more than one instance, Soviet air power played a crucial role, striking at German reserves, artillery batteries, and various strongpoints. One group of *Shturmovik* aircraft detected a German transport column and another took on a camouflaged German military train.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time to the rear, Soviet engineer units facilitated a river crossing by the 252nd Tank Brigade employing ice-reinforced pontoons. For its efforts, the 42nd Pontoon Battalion was re-designated as the 1st Guards Pontoon-Bridge Battalion.<sup>34</sup>

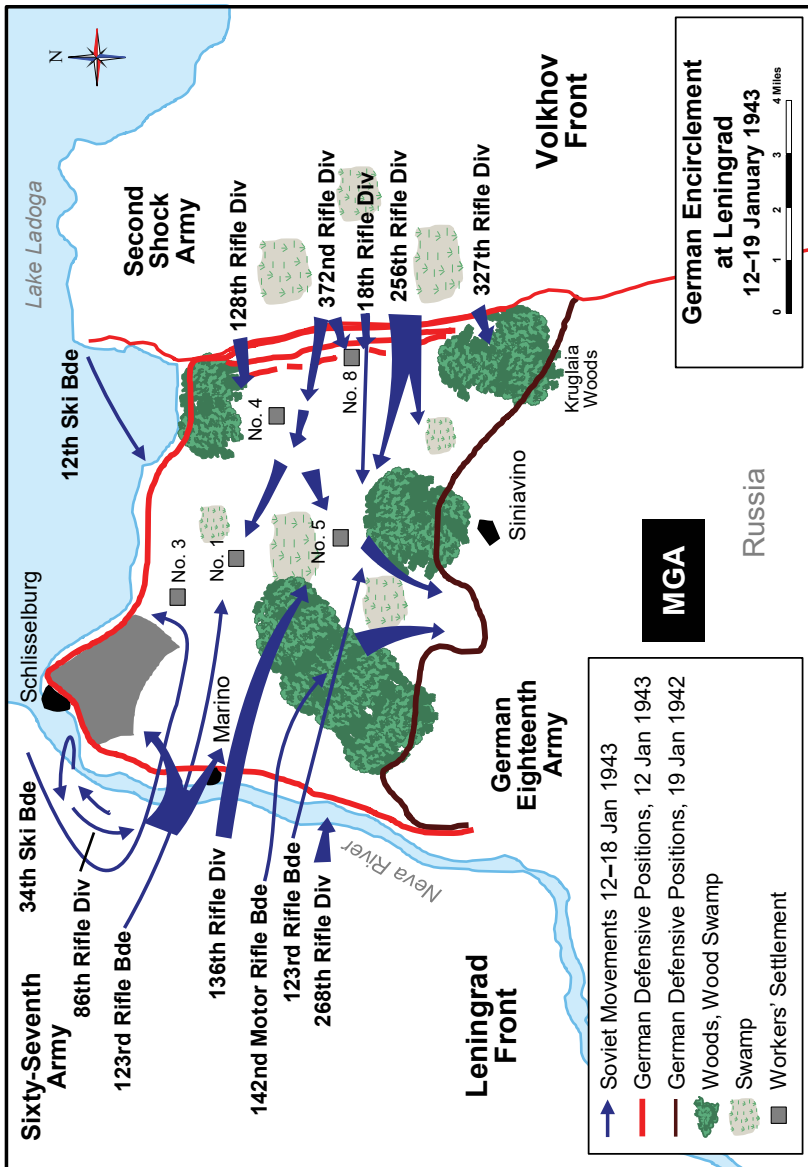


Figure 4.1. German Encirclement at Leningrad, 12-19 January 1943. Created by Army University Press.

## Soviet Attack from the West

Within minutes of the attack signal at 1145, the final mortar volley fired and the assault commenced. From the western bank of the Neva River, assault groups and sappers from the 268th and 136th Rifle divisions managed to scramble to the eastern side, covering a distance of about 600 meters. In fact, some units may have started early, mistaking a signal rock-

et at 1142 for the signal to attack.<sup>35</sup> The Soviets had spared no effort to ensure that the troops were highly motivated. Political officers gave numerous lectures on Soviet patriotism and the duty to the Motherland or *Rodina*. Planners had estimated that the crossing around Shlisselburg and Workers Settlement Number 2 would require about nine minutes. On 12 January, the actual crossing under fire—conducted to the accompaniment of the inspirational strains of the “Internationale” blasted by loudspeaker—took only six to seven minutes.<sup>36</sup> Apparently the well-known melody achieved the intended psychological effect. The Soviet regime officially adopted the “Internationale” as its national anthem in 1944.

Aerial and artillery support were carefully directed so as to avoid dropping explosives on the Neva ice and thereby potentially disrupting the entire operation. Also, to minimize the risk of “friendly fire,” the Soviet barrage slowly rolled eastward several hundred meters ahead of advancing ground troops. Directly opposing the Soviet assault across the Neva was the German 170th Infantry Division. Some of the first storm detachments to reach the defenses resorted to hand-to-hand combat in a desperate struggle to take German defensive positions. Those who departed early might have reached German trenches before the bombardment ceased, thereby gaining a few crucial moments of additional surprise.

In his memoirs, Gen. Georgy Zhukov, sent personally by Stalin to oversee Operation Spark, commented that the artillery fires came with such intensity and from so many directions that it was nearly impossible for the defenders to ascertain where the attacks were coming from. Moreover, the sheer destructive force—manifested by splintered trees, heaving earth, and clouds of gray smoke—inevitably had a disorienting effect.<sup>37</sup> Zhukov, incidentally, would receive the rank of field marshal on 18 January, the day forces from the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts met in the middle of the salient.

Elements of the 268th and 136th Rifle divisions used metal crampons and claws as well as lightweight ladders to gain purchase on the eastern bank. A desperate close fight ensued as Russian troops reached the forward German trench line. Thus by the end of the first day, Soviet forces had achieved a hard-won bridgehead on the eastern bank along a five-kilometer stretch south of the fortress at Shlisselburg. In some places Soviet penetrations reached three to four kilometers into German defenses.<sup>38</sup>

One captured German defender described the preparatory fires in stark terms: “I cannot forget the impression made by the destructive fires of the

Russian guns. As I remember that deadly roar, the bursting shells, over and over still make me shudder. I have never seen such nightmarish fire.”<sup>39</sup>

The 136th achieved the great success under the command of Gen. H.P. Simoniak, who had seen combat during the Russian Civil War (1918–21). One constituent unit of the 136th was the highly decorated 270th Rifle Regiment, which had first formed in 1918. Innumerable small episodes of individual heroism on both sides were lost to history, but a few—especially on the Soviet side which, of course, was victorious—were duly recorded. Soviet sources note the exploit of D. S. Molodtsov, a communications specialist with the 270th Regiment. A company of Soviet troops was advancing toward a German 305-mm battery position when it came under machinegun fire on its flank. As Soviet troops were pinned down, Molodtsov, at great personal risk, managed to creep forward toward the source of fire and lobbed several grenades at the gun port of the concealed enemy position. When the firing did not cease, he literally threw his own body up against the gun port and interrupted German fire long enough to enable his comrades to assault the battery successfully.<sup>40</sup>

Just to the south, the 268th Rifle Division also made solid progress on the first day. After gaining a foothold on the left bank of the Neva, the 947th Rifle Regiment encountered intense enemy fire near *Gorodok* Number 2, but two sister regiments, the 952nd and 942nd, successfully enveloped the position and pushed forward into the enemy defenses. Taking advantage of the river crossing of the 86th Tank Battalion under his command, Col. S. N. Borshchev immediately pressed his division to provide infantry support. When the day concluded, the 268th was three kilometers deep into German defenses. This meant that the 268th and 136th Rifle divisions were well on the way to facilitating a meeting with forces of the Leningrad Front approaching from the opposite side of the salient.<sup>41</sup>

To be sure, the going was tougher on the northern and southern flanks of the penetration. On the right flank of the 268th, the 45th Guards Motor-Rifle Division met fierce resistance and had to pull up after an advance of about half a kilometer. In turn, the 86th Rifle Division, operating on the left flank of the 136th on the north side of the penetration, was among those Soviet units formed from people’s militias, which frequently included older veterans.<sup>42</sup> The 86th, along with the 34th Ski Brigade, tried to force its way across the Neva and into the forest just below Shlisselburg. There, however, the infantry had to hug the icy surface of the Neva under withering German fire. They received the command to withdraw to their point of departure on the west bank. Meanwhile, second echelon elements were tasked to trail the 136th, thereby bypassing some of the opposition strongpoints.<sup>43</sup>

The 45th Guards Rifle Division renewed its attack on 13 January, but had no sooner begun to move than a German counterattack slammed into its flank. The 45th fought off the assault only to face additional counterattacks throughout the course of the day. The 268th also found its movement slowed by well-organized German resistance. In this instance, German forces were actually attempting to slice through the 268th to create a path back to the river. German tanks appeared, and a furious duel ensued against Soviet anti-tank artillery.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, the commander of the German XXVI Army Corps, Gen. Karl Hilpert, acted promptly to reinforce the 170th Infantry Division between Siniavino and the Neva River by diverting a portion of the 96th Division from the junction at Mga at the southern base of the salient.<sup>45</sup>

Still, Leningrad Front's 136th Rifle Division, with the 86th trailing close behind, pushed ahead toward Workers Settlement Number 5, and thus within only a few kilometers of Red Army elements approaching from the east. The 86th exploited the momentum to draw near Workers Settlement Number 3, part of the German defensive system around Shlisselburg.<sup>46</sup>

On 13 January, Volkhov Front extensively employed armored forces in search of a breakthrough. That evening the 98th Tank Brigade, in close coordination with the 18th Rifle Division, bypassed Workers Settlement Number 8, aiming to pierce a gap in German defenses to attack Workers Settlement Number 5. Depending on the degree of success, movement toward Siniavino might be possible as well. Striking the southern edge of Workers Settlement Number 5, the 98th found itself exposed to enemy guns and took heavy losses. Two tanks bogged down in the swamp where they were hit but continued to fight as stationary platforms. Meanwhile, three medium T-34 tanks and two T-60s left the road and attempted to provide infantry support. They became stuck in a quarry and saw little action.<sup>47</sup> Overall, tanks were unable to get closer than 300 to 400 meters from Workers Settlement Number 5 and could offer only limited fire support. Most tried to keep a low profile while maneuvering through quarries, craters, and canals. Only after three hard days of fighting would the settlement fall to constant Red Army pressure. Despite the extremely difficult conditions, the 98th Tank Brigade received credit for destroying 14 German bunkers, an entire mortar battery, and six field artillery pieces.<sup>48</sup>

The 67th Army committed its second echelon into the fight on 14 January. The 123rd Rifle Division led the way with support from the 152nd Tank Brigade, the 102nd Rifle Brigade, and one regiment from the 13th Rifle Division. Fierce cold temperatures—minus 28 degrees Celsius by one re-

port—put a strain on attackers and defenders alike.<sup>49</sup> By day's end, only four kilometers separated elements of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts. In the meantime, the Germans moved to reinforce their strongpoint at the Shlisselburg Fortress, and even managed to launch counterattacks. In one instance, the German 283rd Infantry Regiment attacked Soviet forces besieging the power station to facilitate the escape of embattled comrades there.<sup>50</sup> By this point, it was clear that German hopes to hold out depended heavily on holding not only the fortress but also Workers Settlements 1 and 5.

Twice on 16 January, elements of the 136th Rifle Division fought their way into Workers Settlement Number 5 only but were unable to overrun this well-defended position. Three night attacks by the 18th Rifle Division coming from the opposite direction also failed to dislodge the defenders.

Success was greater along other sectors of the front line. The 123rd Rifle Division, with support from the 152nd Tank Brigade, broke through several strongpoints and took out several German tanks.

The 34th Independent Ski Brigade, only recently formed in the fall of 1942, carried out an attack along a secondary railroad line in support of the 86th Rifle Division and then stole ahead along the Old Ladoga Canal to cut off the southeastern line of retreat from the Shlisselburg Fortress. For many young men from Leningrad seeing their first combat action, the day marked significant success under trying circumstances. Supported only by 45-mm cannons and 82-mm mortars, they destroyed a number of German firing points and tightened the noose around enemy positions. In one notable instance, a platoon commander from a mortar company, Aleksei Bondarev, found his unit pinned down between two machine guns while trying to shift its firing position. Reacting quickly, he spotted a small depression in the ground about thirty meters away and led his team under fire to the safer location. From there, they successfully suppressed the threat from the German positions and secured the advance.<sup>51</sup>

Subsequently, at the near approaches to Shlisselburg, Lt. Vasilii Goltsev took charge of a company under duress after his commander was mortally wounded. Unable to advance closer to the enemy trenches due to withering fire, he split his force. Leaving part of his company in place, Goltsev directed two platoons to envelop the German position from behind. The result was a number of enemy soldiers killed and the capture of eighteen prisoners.<sup>52</sup>

Elements of the 2nd Shock Army were concurrently edging forward toward an increasingly inevitable linkup between the two fronts. From this direction, the 12th Independent Ski Brigade attacked across Lake Lado-

ga despite heavy enemy artillery fire. Fighting their way ahead for every meter under severe weather conditions for four days without rest, they successfully established fighting positions along the lake shore.<sup>53</sup>

The 17th of January brought new successes for the Red Army as the Volkhov Front claimed capture of Workers Settlements 4 and 8, as well as the railroad station at Siniavino. With a rupture of the German encirclement tantalizingly close, the commander of the 67th Army directed the 136th Rifle Division—reinforced by four artillery and mortar regiments, the 61st Tank Brigade and a battalion of the 138th Rifle Brigade—to conduct a decisive attack and link up with approaching elements of the 2nd Shock Army at Workers Settlement Number 5.<sup>54</sup>

In the meantime, Leningrad Front's 123rd Rifle Brigade (not to be confused with the 123rd Rifle Division operating just a few kilometers to the south) followed up the capture of Workers Settlement Number 1 by advancing to meet the 372nd Rifle Division of 2nd Shock Army. This event, which occurred at 0930 on 18 January, officially marked the end of German encirclement. As the offensive across the Siniavino salient continued, the 136th Division seized Workers Settlement Number 5 from the south and north, followed by the declaration of a link-up at 1145 on 18 January.<sup>55</sup> Soldiers of the 136th and the 18th Rifle divisions marked the occasion of their meeting with the signal of weapons raised above shoulder level and an exchange of passwords: "Victory" and "Death to Fascism."<sup>56</sup>

Though initial link-ups were hugely significant in opening a new lifeline to Leningrad, operational success was not complete as long as German forces held on at the Shlisselburg Fortress, possession of which kept alive the possibility of restoring the encirclement. German reinforcements, the 151st and 161st regiments of the 61st Infantry Division, had arrived from Siniavino to bolster the defense. All usable buildings in the town, in addition to the island fortress, were prepared. The print factory, school, church club house, and other stone structures formed part of a coordinated defensive system with cross fires at every intersection.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, elements of the 34th Ski Brigade proceeded along the Old Ladoga Canal and cut all avenues of exit from the fortress. In cooperation with the 128th Rifle Division and the 12th Ski Brigade, the 86th Rifle Division, and the 61st Tank Brigade, they systematically cleared the fortress after hours of close fighting.<sup>58</sup> Some German forces managed to break out in the direction of Siniavino on 18 January, assisted by artillery fire from the Siniavino Height, which remained in German hands.<sup>59</sup> Out of ammunition, the East Prussian troops somehow fought their way past Workers



Settlement Number 5 using hand grenades, shovels, and anything else at hand. Remarkably, a large number reached German lines at the Siniavino Height.<sup>60</sup> This modest, if courageous, exploit could not retrieve the overall situation, however. Russian forces restored complete control over Lake Ladoga and with it an important line of supply for Leningrad. In a similar instance, the 12th Ski Brigade crossed the ice of Lake Ladoga on 14 January to help prevent German soldiers at Workers Settlement Number 1 from withdrawing to join their comrades to the west.

An important related event in the takedown of Shlisselburg was the seizure of the tactically important height at Preobrazhenskaia just south of the town. On 14 January, Col. G. I. Seredin, commander of the 330th Regiment of the 86th Rifle Division, received the directive to take the height. Preobrazhenskaia not only served as a defensive strongpoint covering defenses in the town, but was a collection point for supplies bound for Shlisselburg. A frontal assault launched earlier in the day failed badly. Seredin believed surrounding wooded areas offered just enough cover to attempt a turning movement.<sup>61</sup>

To compensate for attrition suffered during the past two days of fighting, the regiment consolidated its three battalions into two. The regimental battery, as well as a machine gun battalion and two batteries of the 128th Independent Tank Destroyer Division, provided supporting fire for the attack. The preparatory artillery fire would commence at about 0800 under twilight conditions—quite typical for winter in Leningrad, which is situated just south of the Arctic Circle. The infantry assault by two battalions began at 0930. Assisted by crucial tactical information provided by a captured German captain from the 170th Division, Russian troops quickly forced the collapse of German perimeter defenses, forcing the enemy to withdraw behind a nearby railroad embankment. Fire from a 76-mm battery took out two vital defensive strongpoints, and the infantry cut the phone line between the Height and the town. One battalion engaged German positions from the front, while the other formed to attack from behind. Using several machine guns mounted on tractors to lead the way, infantry took the hill with the aid of concentrated gun and mortar fire.<sup>62</sup>

Soviet forces enjoyed success across the salient as outgunned German defenders scrambled to find an exit. As a bonus for their efforts, Soviet forces managed to gain possession of a new German Tiger Tank, presumably part of the 1/501 Panzer Battalion. The Tiger was the latest super-weapon unleashed by Hitler to help make up in quality for what he no longer possessed in quantity. Soviet artillery actually crippled the tank on 14 January between Workers Settlements 5 and 6. Having recognized this

trophy as a potential intelligence coup, Red Army troops on the ground met fierce German resistance as they tried to extricate the hulk on the night of 17 January. Indeed, the Tiger turned out to be a recent experimental model of considerable importance.<sup>63</sup>

For their performance in the fierce fighting at the Siniavino salient, twenty-five Soviet soldiers received the Hero of the Soviet Union decoration. In terms of unit distinction, the 136th and 327th Rifle divisions were redesignated the 63rd and 64th Guards Rifle divisions, and the 61st Tank Brigade became the 30th Guards Tank Brigade.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusions

Although the heroism of Soviet ground forces takes center stage in this analysis, it must not be forgotten that air and naval power played an important role as well. During the seven days of fighting to break the blockade, Soviet aircraft from the 13th and 14th Air armies carried out more than 9,000 attacks. At the same time, coastal artillery of the Baltic Fleet expended 15,500 large-caliber rounds with devastating effect.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the fighting in the Siniavino salient took place amidst what was perhaps the most intense and destructive air and naval fire to this point in the war on the Eastern Front.

The Soviet estimate of German losses during the seven-day fight for the salient was 19,000 soldiers killed or wounded, and another 1,275 captured. In addition, Soviet forces seized 272 guns, 1,200 machineguns, and more than 300 mortars.<sup>66</sup> The Germans themselves admitted to the loss of about 12,000 killed and many more wounded.<sup>67</sup> The Operation Spark offensive resumed on 20 January and would result in further securing Soviet positions. Even so, German forces did not withdraw from the Leningrad region, and much heavy fighting remained for the spring and summer. Indeed, from a Soviet perspective, Operation Spark failed to realize the lofty hopes of its planners, who expected to drive German forces farther to the west and completely eliminate the direct threat to Leningrad.

To begin, the new corridor between Leningrad and Moscow remained only about ten kilometers in depth, subject to German artillery fire from the Siniavino Height and still at some degree of risk to German counterattacks. Also, failure to capture the rail junction at Mga meant that the Soviets had to construct a new rail line through the existing corridor in order to supply Leningrad. Moreover, the offensive ran out of steam even as it exacted a high toll on Soviet forces. Soviet units endured 33,940 killed in action, while over 80,000 more ended up missing or wounded.<sup>68</sup>

Even so, Operation Spark marked a dramatic shift in the Soviets' favor. Morale in Leningrad soared, and the restoration of rail communications meant that the city's vast industrial potential could once again come into play. German planners might have contemplated plans to cut the Siniavino corridor once more, but they were unrealistic. Other Soviet offensive operations up and down the front ensured that the Germans had no ability to concentrate except in emergency reaction to Soviet initiatives. By spring, Soviet forces would be threatening to recapture the Dnieper River line in the south, and Germany was reduced to counterpunching.

Surveying the results of the Soviet offensive at Leningrad, several salient conclusions emerge. In contrast to previous failed attempts, this time the Soviets massed sufficient forces, firepower, fuel, and food to press and sustain their attacks. The pressure on German defenders, who were severely inferior by almost any numerical measure, was relentless. Fighting in extremely harsh weather and across difficult terrain, Soviet forces maintained high morale, ever conscious of the strategic implications of the fight and of the terrible suffering long endured by the civilian population in besieged Leningrad. Hundreds of thousands of the city's inhabitants perished during the horrible winter of 1941–42. Breaking the blockade in January 1943 was critical to preventing a repetition of those disastrous events.

Also noteworthy was the fact that Soviet forces converged from both sides of the salient, a rare occurrence in military history when besieged forces attacked from within an encirclement to meet a penetrating attack from the outside. Given the relatively small area of the salient, German forces were subject to constant fire and had few avenues of retreat. Though capably led, they faced formidable odds. German defenders made excellent use of terrain, both human and natural, to ward off attacks—a task successfully accomplished on previous occasions. As noted above, however, this time Soviet forces massed overwhelming assets; with the hindsight of history, the outcome appears to have been a foregone conclusion.

The fighting for the salient was over and over conducted at close quarters. Soviet forces had to overcome “the last hundred yards” to take every tactical obstacle. Fighting proceeded street to street, and room to room. Every crate or pile of rubble became an objective. The struggle often devolved into hand-to-hand combat, neither side expecting any quarter from their opponent. From its onset in 1941, combat on the Eastern Front exemplified extraordinary brutality driven by deeply held hatred nurtured by Nazi ideology, and that would soon be fully reciprocated by Stalin and the Soviets. Soviet army and division commanders, under direct pressure from

Zhukov himself to force their way through every obstacle, were ready to accept massive casualties against German defenders prepared to charge a steep price in blood for each lost position. Victory in large-scale operations against a technologically capable peer adversary would not come cheaply.

Even so, the Red Army effectively illustrated a number of points emphasized in FM 3.0. Every form of offensive maneuver by a ground force was on display, from penetration to envelopment and flank attacks to turning movements. Despite the lack of maneuver space and decent roads, even Soviet armored forces exerted great influence on the battle. Typically employed in small groups of two to three, or sometimes six to eight, the light T-60 enjoyed a maneuver advantage against the few, but much heavier and more powerful, German tanks.<sup>69</sup>

One stark fact that emerged from Operation Spark was that the Red Army had progressed tremendously since the disastrous summer of 1941 when German forces enjoyed almost uninterrupted success. The coordination between the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts, particularly the synchronization of ground maneuver and the coordination of fires from multiple directions, provided evidence of the maturation of Soviet officers and staffs. From the fall of 1942, Soviet tactical and senior headquarters carefully studied the experiences of every major operation. Thus the events of January 1943 marked the transition to a high level of operational art that Soviet forces would exhibit in 1944.

One postwar Soviet study of the operational significance of the fight at Leningrad noted that “the breakthrough of a strongly fortified defense can be achieved only with the condition that the tempo of its execution and development surpasses the tempo of counter-maneuvers by the defenders.”<sup>70</sup> On the first day, superior operational security, bolstered by classic *maskirovka* or deception, kept German forces in doubt while the ruthless speed and shock of Soviet attacks threw them into disarray. Yet, Soviet forces were unable to sustain such close combat operations during the long hours of darkness at this northerly latitude in January. Thus, the Germans gained some precious reaction time. Also, the length of the front resulted in some unintended dispersal of Soviet second-echelon forces, thereby also slowing the momentum of the attack. Nevertheless, the well-executed Soviet onslaught presaged huge gains up and down the entire Eastern Front. Soviet units would perform better in battles yet to come. The valor and sacrifice of the Red Army were finally producing impressive results.

## Notes

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3.0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: 6 October 2017), 7-6.

2. FM 3.0, 7-95.

3. Alexander Prokofiev, "To Leningrad" in *Operatsiia Iskra* (Leningrad: Lenizdat 1973), 474; translated by Shushanna Baumann, 2018. The Poliakov referred to in the poem was N.A. Poliakov, commander of the 327th Rifle Division. Prokofiev became a renowned poet after the war and served as a journalist during the fighting around Leningrad. To minimize confusion, readers should be aware that transliteration from the Cyrillic alphabet in this study generally adheres to the Library of Congress (LOC) system with minor exceptions in the interest of simplicity for those unfamiliar with Russian. For example, the name Prokofiev is generally more recognizable to readers than the LOC alternative, which would be rendered as Prokof'ev. Also throughout the text, the author uses Shlisselburg rather than Shissel'burg. Otherwise, this article adheres to LOC. Similarly, General Romanovskii, according to LOC, is often elsewhere written as Romanovsky. Or Georgi Zhukov, as spelled in this study, is often written as Georgy Zhukov. Readers should be aware, meanwhile, that the Siniavino salient as spelled according to the LOC system is often spelled Sinyavino in other English language studies.

4. Robert F. Baumann, "Terrain. Operation Spark: Breaking Through the Blockade at Leningrad" in *Combined Arms in Battle Since 1939*, edited by Roger Spiller (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1992), 259–67. In writing this article, the author has departed significantly from the original piece, which was relatively brief and focused specifically on the impact of terrain in combat. In this article, the author has expanded and deepened the original approach, and focused more attention on the challenges of high-intensity close combat in spaces with limited opportunity for maneuver. To be sure, the terrain features remain of interest, but the direction of analysis differs. The author would also note that he had the opportunity to travel to the Siniavino salient and walk the ground where the actions described here took place. The author is thankful to the Tarasov family in St. Petersburg for their kind assistance in conducting an informal historical staff ride.

5. Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 392.

6. Department of the Army, FM 3-0, 7-94, 7-95.

7. David M. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad 1941–1944: 900 Days of Terror* (Osceola, WI: MBI, 2001), 127.

8. Werner Haupt, *Army Group North: The Wehrmacht in Russia 1941-1945* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 1997), 160.

9. D. K. Zherebov and I. I. Solomakhin, *Sem' ianvarskikh dnei* [Seven Days in January] (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1987), 14.

10. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 129.

11. Glantz, 129–30.

12. Zherebov and Solomakhin, *Sem' ianvarskikh dnei*, 19.
13. Zherebov and Solomakhin, 24–25. For an in-depth look at the role of the Baltic Fleet, see V.I. Achkasov, ed. *Krasnoznamennyi baltiiskii flot v bitve za Leningrad 1941–1944* [The Red Banner Baltic Fleet in the Battle for Leningrad 1941–1944] (Moscow: Nauka, 1973).
14. Iu. Perechnev, “Operativnoe iskusstvo v operatsii ‘Iskra’” [Operational Art in Operation Spark], *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* (January 1983): 14.
15. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 131.
16. Department of the Army, FM 3.0, 7-243.
17. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 129.
18. Glantz, 130.
19. Zherebov and Solomakhin, *Sem' ianyarskikh dnei*, 21.
20. Perechnev, “Operativnoe iskusstvo v operatsii ‘Iskra,’” 15.
21. Ia. F. Potekhin, “Boevoi ekzamen” [The Test of Combat] in *Operatsiia ‘Iskra’* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1973), 488–89. Potekhin served as a colonel in command of the 34th Ski Brigade during Spark.
22. L. Zaitsev and A. Borshchov, “Taktika nastupatel’nogo boia pri proryve blokady Leningrada” [Tactics of offensive battle during the Breakthrough of the Leningrad Blockade], *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* (January 1983), 21.
23. Zherebov and Solomakhin, *Sem' ianyarskikh dnei*, 24–25.
24. N. Kislitsyn and V. Zubakov, *Leningrad Does Not Surrender* (Moscow: Progress, 1989), 228–29.
25. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 133–34.
26. Zaitsev and Borshchov, “Taktika nastupatel’nogo boia pri proryve blokady Leningrada,” 21.
27. Perechnev, “Operativnoe iskusstvo v operatsii ‘Iskra,’” 14.
28. Zaitsev and Borshchov, “Taktika nastupatel’nogo boia pri proryve blokady Leningrada,” 22.
29. A. I. Babin, ed., *Na volkhovskom fronte 1941–1944* [On the Volkhov Front 1941–1944] (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 183–84.
30. N. I. Baryshnikov, L. G. Vinnitskii, and V. A. Kreinin i dr., *Istoriia ordena Lenina leningradskogo voennogo okruga* [History of the Order of Lenin Leningrad Military District] (Moscow: Voенное izdatsl’stvo, 1988), 251.
31. Babin, *Na volkhovskom fronte 1941–1944*, 184.
32. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, *Istoriia ordena Lenina leningradskogo voennogo okruga*, 250–51.
33. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 252.
34. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 252.
35. Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 394, and Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days. The Siege of Leningrad* (London: Pan, 2000), 542, 547.
36. Zherebov and Solomakhin, *Sem' ianvarskikh dnei*, 29.
37. G. K. Zhukov, *Vospominaniia I razmyshleniia* [Memoirs and Reflections] (Moscow: OLMA Media Grupp, 2013), 410.
38. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, *Istoriia ordena Lenina leningradskogo voennogo okruga*, 249.

39. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 249.
40. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 249–50 and V.M. Koval’chuk, *Doroga pobedy osazhdenogo Leningrada* [The Road to Victory in Besieged Leningrad] (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984), 41.
41. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 250.
42. S. P. Kniazev et al., *Na zashchite nevskoi tverdini* [In Defense of the Leningrad Stronghold] (Leningrad: Lenizdat’, 1985), 432.
43. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, *Istoriia ordena Lenina leningradskogo voennogo okruga*, 250, and Koval’chuk, 41.
44. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 251.
45. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 132.
46. Glantz, 133.
47. Babin, *Na volkhovskom fronte 1941–1944*, 184.
48. Babin, 184.
49. Haupt, *Army Group North*, 162.
50. Haupt, 162.
51. Potekhin, “Boevoi ekzamen,” 491–92 and Baryshnikov, 253.
52. Potekhin, 492–93.
53. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, *Istoriia ordena Lenina leningradskogo voennogo okruga*, 253–54.
54. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 254.
55. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 254.
56. Kniazev et al., *Na zashchite nevskoi tverdini*, 433.
57. Haupt, *Army Group North*, 163 and G.I. Seredin, “Osvobozhdenie shlissel’burga,” [The Liberation of Shlisselburg] in *Operatsiia Iskra* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1973), 501.
58. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, *Istoriia ordena Lenina leningradskogo voennogo okruga*, 254.
59. Haupt, *Army Group North*, 163.
60. Haupt, 164.
61. Seredin, “Osvobozhdenie shlissel’burga,” 500–1.
62. Seredin, 502–5.
63. Zhukov, *Vospominaniia I razmyshleniia*, 412 and Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, *Istoriia ordena Lenina leningradskogo voennogo okruga*, 254.
64. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 255.
65. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 256.
66. Baryshnikov, Vinnitskii, and Kreinin, 255.
67. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 137.
68. Glantz, 137.
69. Zaitsev and Borshchov, “Taktika nastupatel’nogo boia pri proryve blokady Leningrada,” 23.
70. Perechnev, “Operativnoe iskusstvo v operatsii ‘Iskra,’” 19.





## Chapter 5

### The Defense of Gallipoli: Suvla Bay Operations

Lt. Col. George S. Patton Jr.

#### The Combat

The chapter of accidents, or better of inexcusable failures, which marked the British landing and subsequent attack at Suvla Bay is one of the most depressing and yet instructive in military history. Compared to Suvla Bay, the first battle of Bull Run was a masterpiece of effective leadership.

The following quotation from Gen. [James] Wolfe, with which the British history prefaces the chapter on this operation, is too apposite to be omitted, "Experience shows me that, in an affair depending upon vigor and dispatch, the Generals should settle their plan of operations so that no time may be lost in idle debate and consultations when the sword is drawn; that pushing on smartly is the road to success, and more particularly so in an affair of this nature; that nothing is to be reckoned an obstacle to your undertaking which is not found really so upon trial; that in war something must be allowed to chance and fortune, seeing it is in its nature hazardous and an option of difficulties."

The 32nd Brigade (Gen. [Henry] Haggard) and the 33rd Brigade (Gen. [R.P.] Maxwell), together with division headquarters, less divisional troops, started to disembark at 1730 on 6 August and had landed four battalions at "C" Beach by 2200, with only one casualty resulting from the single rifle shot fire by the Turks.

While these battalions were forming up, preparatory to attacking, they received some fire from the Turkish platoon east of Nibrunesi Point, which then fell back on Lala Baba, while continuing a desultory fire. As the two companies who attacked Lala Baba neared a hill, a red flare went up from its summit and a heavy fire met the British who, nonetheless, stormed it with bayonets and completed its capture by midnight. A report of this act went to 32nd Brigade Headquarters shortly after midnight but, due to the death of the runner, was not received until after daylight and then could not be deciphered.

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This chapter is an excerpt from then-Lt. Col. George S. Patton Jr., "The Defense of Gallipoli" (general staff study, Headquarters, Hawaiian Department, Fort Shafter, HI, 31 August 1936), 51–61, <http://www.pattonhq.com/pdf/files/gallipoli.pdf>.

The capture of Lala Baba marked the beginning of the end of British successes. The next objective was Hill 10, which was to be taken by a combined attack participated in by the 32nd Brigade, two battalions of the 33rd Brigade, and by three battalions of the 34th Brigade (Gen. [William] Sitwell) which was supposed to be landing at "A" Beach. However, before the 34th Brigade started to land, the flare went up from Lala Baba and a beacon was lighted by the Turks on the north end of the bay—the Turks were alerted. Due to darkness, and a tie-up by the Navy, the landing took place not at "A" Beach as scheduled, but at a place just south of the cut. Further, the battalions landed in an inverted order from north to south.

One battalion got ashore by 2330 but, due to the grounding of the Beetle Boats on reefs, the others were delayed until after 0300. Owing to the fact that the landing was not at the place it was supposed to be and because the order of the Beetle Boats was reversed, the troops who did get ashore got lost. However, one battalion (the 11th Manchesters) designated to attack Gazi Baba was more fortunate and by 0300 had advanced against stiffening resistance along Kiretch Tepe Ridge to a point two miles east of Suvla Point where it was stopped by a company of the Gallipoli Gendarmes. This ended the only success of the 34th Brigade under General Sitwell.

All during these operations, and until well after daylight, the only resistance offered by the Turks in the vicinity of "A" Beach consisted of small arms fire. But, this fire was quite accurate and accounted for many of the officers and noncommissioned officers.

After the success of the Manchester Battalion on the left, things happened in a most amazing way; companies got lost and immediately laid down and waited. For just what they waited is not apparent. Those detailed to attack Hill 10 could not even find it. The same moonlight which helped the Turks in the vicinity of Sari Bair also helped them here and, according to their own account, they were further aided in delivering effective fire by the white brassards worn by the British.

All this time, six battalions reposed quietly at Lala Baba. At 0330, some of the British of the 34th Infantry Brigade, north of the Salt Lake, got panicky and came rushing back, followed by a few Turks. These Turks were stopped, but the incident had its effect on the none-too-brilliant courage of General Sitwell.

At about 0300, four companies of the 32nd Brigade at Lala Baba were sent to help the 34th Brigade who, as we have seen, was not at "A" Beach but at a point south of the cut. When these four companies got to the cut,

they found so much confusion that they too laid down to wait for things to clear up.

At 0400, General Sitwell showed his one burst of fire by sending six platoons of his brigade to attack Hill 10, which the gathering daylight had apparently revealed. Unfortunately, this attack was sent against the wrong hill and the error was not discovered until the hill was taken and the real Hill 10 came into view 400 yards to the north. The attacking troops kept on 200 yards when the major in command was hit and the attack stopped.

At daylight, or say about 0430 to 0445 on 7 August, the following wonderful mix-up existed among the troops of the 11th Division:

- On the extreme right, two battalions of the 33rd Brigade were dug in from “B” Beach to the southeast corner of the Salt Lake, opposed by nothing except some fire from the Infantry Battalion on Chocolate and Green Hills at a range of 1,700 yards.
- The other two battalions of the 33rd Brigade and the division troops were located near Lala Baba where was also half of the 32nd Brigade and twelve guns (eight mountain and four field).
- Just south of the cut were two battalions of the 34th Brigade.
- In the general vicinity of Hill 10 was one battalion of the 34th and four companies of the 32nd. At Kiretech Tepe Ridge was a fourth battalion of the 34th Brigade.

As a result of this masterly deployment, the beach was under shell and rifle fire and only three of the twelve battalions ashore had been seriously engaged.

If we now note what the landing orders prescribed, we will see how really bad the situation was. In paragraph three of the IXth Corps order for the landing, we find this: “The troops will secure Suvla Bay as a base of supply; having accomplished this primary objective, the Commanding General IXth Corps will endeavor to give direct assistance to the Commanding General Australian and New Zealand Corps in his attack on Hill 971 by an advance on Anafarta Byiuk with the object of moving up the east to the spur of that hill (Hill 971).”

“The Corps Commander considers that the security of Suvla Bay will not be assured until he is in position to deny the enemy the heights which connect (refers here to Tekke Tepe Ridge).” Further along in the same order, under paragraph six, we find this: “With a view to the successful accomplishment of the task allotted to the IXth Corps, the force under Major

General [Frederick] Hammersley (11th Division) having taken steps to safeguard the landing beaches “A,” “B,” and “C” will:

- Secure the enemy posts at Lala Baba and Gazi Baba and establish a footing on the ridge running northeastwards along the coast (Kiretech Tepe Ridge).
- Occupy the positions Chocolate Hill and “W” Hill.
- Seize the road junction at Backa Baba and establish connection northward between this point and such troops as had been detailed under above. (Note: this last sub-paragraph could under a very broad interpretation be assumed to demand the occupation of the Tekke Tepe Ridge, but the wording is not explicit.)
- Subsequent action of the whole force will be governed by correct appreciation of the situation which is dependent on accurate information of the strength and disposition of the enemy. This can only be obtained by full reconnaissance pushed forward by all bodies of troops.

(Note: There was throughout the whole operation an utter disregard for this last injunction.)

Turning now to the 11th Division Landing Order, under paragraph five, we find task allotted to 11th Division:

- To secure the landings on “A,” “B,” and “C” Beaches.
- To secure Suvla Bay for the disembarkation of the 10th Division and its stores.
- With these objects the general officer commanding intends:
  - To secure his right flank with the 33rd Infantry Brigade less two battalions.
  - To seize Lala Baba with the 32nd Infantry Brigade.
  - To seize Gazi Baba and the heights in the vicinity with the 34th Infantry Brigade, which will subsequently attack Chocolate and “W” Hills.

If we turn now to the last sentence from the original instructions to the IXth Corps, we find what very weak soup the order had become as a result of being repeated by the corps and division. This paragraph, written by GHQ [general headquarters] states, “It is of first importance that Chocolate Hill and “W” Hill should be captured by a ‘coup de main’ before daylight in order to prevent the guns which they contain being used against

our troops on Hill 971 and to safeguard our hold of Suvla Bay.” Certainly nothing in either the Corps or Division orders indicates any appreciation of time or makes any mention of the fact that Chocolate and “W” Hills were to be taken before dawn.

### **Turkish Dispositions**

Turning now to the Turkish dispositions and actions, we are forcefully reminded of Napoleon’s saying that, “In war men are nothing, a man is everything.” Here Major Willmer is the man. He deployed his meager forces as follows:

The Gallipoli Gendarme battalion held the north half of his sector to a line from “The Cut” to Hill 10 exclusive, with detachments at Suvla Point and Gazi Baba and a company at Karakal Gagh.

Two companies supported by a platoon of mountain guns were at the entrenched strong point on Green Knoll and one company was in the brush about a mile southeast of Green Knoll.

Hill 10, in the center, was held by the Brusa Gendarme Battalion while Lala Baba, Chocolate, and Green Hills were held by the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry. One company was at Lala Baba and the rest at Chocolate and Green Hills supported by a battery of mountain guns. The two remaining batteries of field guns were deployed along the west slope of the Tekke Tepe Ridge. The troop of cavalry was in the plains of Suvla acting as connecting groups between the infantry units.

When Lala Baba was attacked and taken by the British, the company of infantry holding it (called the outpost company) fell back and rallied at Chocolate Hill. Meanwhile, the company of the Gallipoli Battalion had delayed the attack of the British and finally stopped it along the Kiretech Tepe Ridge without permitting the British to locate the strong point at Green Knoll.

At 0600 on 7 August, Maj. [H. G.] Willmer sent Gen. [Liman] von Sanders the following message, which is a model of concise brevity:

The enemy landed at Nibrunesi Point about 9:30 p.m. last night. Outpost companies evacuated Lala Baba in the face of superior enemy force and joined 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry on Chocolate Hill. The Kiretech Tepe-Chocolate Hill position is firmly in our hands.

Covered by numerous men of war, the disembarkation of hostile forces continued. Am holding the position as ordered but urgently request reinforcements.

By way of contrast we will now return to the British. General Hammersley, commanding the 11th Division, landed at 1245 but owing to the climate was quite exhausted and did nothing. Gen. [Frederick] Stopford, the corps commander, on the cruiser *Jonquil*, sat up until midnight and then went to bed. No one from his staff was sent ashore to find out what was going on and it was not until 0400 that a naval officer, Cmdr. [Roger] Keyes, came on board to report the utter confusion ashore and to ask what was to be done with the 30th and 31st brigades, 10th Division, which were to arrive at dawn.

As "A" Beach was out of the question, a conference was held and it was decided to search for another beach. In the meantime General Stopford returned to bed.

At GHQ in Lemnos at 0200, the first and only message received over a period of many hours came in as follows, "A little shelling at 'A' has now ceased. All quiet at 'B.'" This was not from General Stopford, but from one telegraph operator to his friend. At 0500, the six battalions of the 10th Division, four from the 31st and two from the 30th Brigade arrived (all under Gen. [Felix] Hill, 31st Brigade). They were intended to land at "A" Beach, but as that was impossible they were directed to land at "C" Beach and were placed under the command of General Hammersley. Before they had effected a landing at "C" Beach, Commander Keyes had found another landing at Gazi Baba and suggested that the 10th Division be sent there.

This was opposed by General Stopford on the grounds that as orders had already been issued for them to go to "C" Beach, a change would cause confusion. As if that could happen? Hill's command, the six battalions of the 10th Division, were sent to Hammersley with the direction that he should place them on his left, from where they could later rejoin the rest of their division at Gazi Baba. Disobeying this order, he put five of them in on the right. The 6th Battalion from the 31st Brigade was not landed at "C" Beach, because when its turn came to land, some shelling occurred and the battalion was sent to Gazi Baba.

At 0730, the remaining two battalions of the 30th Brigade, 10th Division, and the divisional engineers and all other divisional troops except the artillery (which were still in Egypt) arrived and were landed at Gazi Baba. Here additional delay was caused by the first troops ashore stepping on some land mines. When everyone was finally ashore, the 10th Division was split up as follows:

On the left, near Gazi Baba, were two battalions of the 30th Brigade, one battalion of the 31st Brigade, and the divisional engi-

neers, while one battalion of the 34th Brigade from the 11th Division was also present.

Of the remaining nine battalions of the division, five were on the extreme right, while the 29th Brigade was at Anzac.

In the meantime, General Haggard (32nd Brigade), had collected a mixed group from the 32nd and 34th Brigades to the number of about ten companies and between 0600 and 0700 attacked the now visible Hill 10 and took it from a party of 100 of the Brusa Gendarmes which still remained there, the rest of the battalion having left at 0600 and their departure having been reported at that hour although the report was not received until noon. (The Turks who left Hill 10 went to Backa Baba.) The troops who eventually took Hill 10, increased by two more companies, now moved off to the northeast to a point 1,600 yards from the shore where their commander reported that he was not being opposed. He suggested that he move on and take Tekke Tepe Ridge.

But General Sitwell, who was in actual command, decided on a defensive attitude even after he found out that he was being reinforced by five additional battalions of the 10th Division. This particular decision was probably the most disastrous event in the whole operation for, at that time, Tekke Tepe Ridge was to be had for the asking and with it in British hands even General Stopford might have won a victory.

The succeeding British operations on 7 August are even less excusable than those so far described.

General Hammersley, commanding the troops ashore, resting at the foot of Lala Baba one mile from the scene of action, received no information with respect to operations of the two attacking brigades (the 32nd and 34th) from 0530 until 0920, when a message arrived from General Sitwell, above referred to, recommending the occupation of a defensive position. But, during this time General Hammersley had not been idle, since in the space of four hours he had issued three orders, each countermanding its predecessor.

Order No. 1, issued at 0800, directed the 32nd and 34th Brigades, along with the 31st Brigade, 10th Division, on the left to push on vigorously and attack Chocolate Hill from the north.

Since this order was predicated on the arrival of the 31st Brigade, which had just started to land, it insured that an attack could not be initiated before 1100 at the earliest.

Order No. 2, issued at 0835, reads as follows: "Reference my G. 98, Reserve Troops, 32nd Brigade and 31st Brigade, will push vigorously on to Chocolate and "W" Hills. Understand situation has changed since my G. 98. What news have you of 34th Brigade?"

This order No. 2 is a gem for several reasons. It failed to allot zones of action and since at this time the 31st Brigade was on the right of the 32nd, it seemed to reverse the order as given in No. 1, in which the 31st was to be on the left of the 32nd. Further, it was only sent to the commanding general of the 32nd and 31st brigades, although order No. 1 had been sent to General Sitwell (34th Brigade), who was in command of the attack.

Order No. 3, issued at 0905, went only to the commanding general of the 31st Brigade. However, it should be stated that the commanding general of the 31st Brigade had also been given an oral version of it considerably different from the written one. The order reads as follows:

31st Brigade, of six battalions, now on way to Hill. On its arrival 32nd and 34th Brigades will move on to Chocolate Hill. 31st Brigade proceeding with the right on 'W' Hill, protecting the left of the 32nd and 34th Brigades from direction of Backa Baba. . . . You will cover north flank of advance.

As an outcome of the three orders above referred to, General Hill (31st Brigade) issued an attack order at 1030 for his brigade to attack Chocolate Hill. He then went to see General Haggard (32nd Brigade) who was to attack covering his left, and heading on "W" Hill. General Haggard told him that General Sitwell was in charge, and on seeing Sitwell, Hill was told that the 34th Brigade was needed to insure the safety of the beach and so could not cooperate.

General Hill then halted his troops and went to Division Commander General Hammersley with his troubles. General Hammersley told him to go on with his attack and that Sitwell would support him. Due to the lack of horses for generals, staff officers, and messengers to move about on (and the fact that no telephones were laid at this time), it was now 1430 and it was half an hour later before Hill's 31st Brigade started its attack.

At this time, Hill sent the division the following message, which shows that even then Sitwell had failed to obey orders: "Have just seen General Sitwell. No battalions of 32nd or 34th Brigades are operating on my left flank. Sitwell tells me he will send two battalions forward. There is a good deal of opposition on my left flank and am sending the 6th Battalion, Irish Fusiliers, to strengthen my line and have one battalion in reserve." The resistance he refers to on the left flank of the 31st was being caused by



the battalion of Brusa Gendarmes from Backa Baba at a range of approximately 2,500 yards and apparently was sufficient to stop the advance of the 31st Brigade.

As a result of this message and of some shelling which struck near him, killing two of his force, General Hammersley issued his fourth order, again changing his scheme and omitting the attack on “W” Hill. This order reads as follows:

G. 123 The advance will be suspended for the present. It will be resumed at 5:30 p.m. 33rd Brigade, less two battalions, will leave its present position and move with its right north of the Salt Lake so as to come on the right of the 31st Brigade. General direction, Chocolate Hill. This advance will be supported by all troops of the 32nd and 34th Brigades, which have not suffered heavy casualties. General Sitwell to command the attack. 31st, 32nd, and 34th Brigades will report to General Sitwell for orders. Artillery has been ordered to cover attack beginning at 5:15 p.m.

It is important to notice that the division commander, although less than one mile away, turned over the direction of this attack to that fiery soldier General Sitwell whose courage, together with that of Hill and Maxwell (Haggard had been wounded), is commented on in the final report of the Dardanelles commission, as follows:

None of the three brigadier generals concerned in the attack on Chocolate Hill accompanied the troops, they established their report centers about two miles distance from Chocolate Hill and remained there.

In the absence of military control and guidance on the spot, a force of inexperienced troops, unacquainted with local conditions, and consisting of a number of battalions, drawn from five different brigades, must have been lacking in cohesion and cooperation, and the evidence discloses confusion and delay which resulted from this cause.

The confusion and delay referred to delayed the attack until just before dark, or at least some 15 hours too late, and Green Hill and Chocolate Hill were not in British hands until after darkness had fallen.

From the time the attack was initiated, about 1430, until just before it arrived, the Turks contented themselves with artillery fire from non-quick firing mountain guns and with harassing attacks by small squads of riflemen. They had no machine guns and at no time during the day did

they have over 500 men in line. Just before the attack, the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 31st Turkish Infantry, holding Chocolate Hill, retired to "W" Hill without loss, leaving only a small rear guard of probably a hundred men which fought to the last. In spite of the small number engaged, the Turks caused the British to lose 210 officers and 626 men during the attack.

Major Willmer's report of the day's operations sent at 1900, just before the attack arrived, is clear and specific:

The landing of hostile forces has continued all day. Estimate their present strength as at least one and a half divisions. No energetic attacks on the enemy's part have taken place. On the contrary, the enemy is advancing timidly. His skirmishers were fired on by our artillery with good effect.

Hill 10 had to be evacuated in the face of superior force. Kiretch Tepe and Chocolate Hill still in our hands. Am expecting a powerful attack against the latter tonight.

Hostile artillery fire until now only from men of war. Our artillery has suffered no damage.

4th Cavalry Regiment arrived two miles southeast of Anafarta Sagir at 5:00 p.m. and has been brought up to "W" Hill position under all circumstances. Beg you hasten arrival of 16th Corps.

The utter lethargy of the British and lack of energy and leadership is well illustrated by their action after the capture of Chocolate and Green Hills.

First they made no effort to pursue or even to keep contact with the Turks. Next the 32nd and 34th brigades were withdrawn and returned to the beach to protect it and the two battalions of the 33rd Brigade were sent to the foot of the hill, leaving only the 31st Brigade on the hill.

Turning now to the northern flank, we find that, due to poor landing beaches and general inefficiency, the two battalions of the 30th Brigade, 10th Division, which disembarked near Gazi Baba, did not leave the beach until 1440, while the last of the units of one battalion of the 31st Brigade did not all get ashore until the morning of the 8th. The units of the 10th Division did not relieve the 2nd Manchester Battalion of the 34th Brigade until 2100. When they did, they still took up a position 800 yards from the Turkish strongpoint on Green Knoll, which was defended by three companies of the Gallipoli Gendarme Battalion and a platoon of mountain guns.

To sum up, 7 August was a complete failure for the British, resulting from only rifle fire and the shells of two batteries of mountain guns. The

Turks' field guns had been withdrawn at noon in order to avoid the danger of capture in the event of a successful British offense, which did not occur. However, the passive resistance of the Turks had cost the British a casualty list of 1,700, which was in excess of the total number of Turks present.

In order to complete the gloomy picture, it is necessary to add that the Navy fell down as badly as the Army. However, this was in a measure due to the failure of the Army to take sufficiently energetic action to relieve the beach from artillery and rifle fire. Also, the very slow debarking, particularly in the case of the 10th Division, prevented the Navy from securing lighters and Beetle Boats with which to continue the landing.

Further, the plan was too meticulous and too much in detail so that when it became necessary to change it, it was impossible to do so. As a result of these circumstances, only 150 mules reached shore out of the 960 that were supposed to be landed. The water scheduled to arrive at dawn did not become available at the beach until late afternoon. Finally, the whole responsibility for the tremendous failure seems to me to rest squarely on the shoulders of Gen. [Sir Ian] Hamilton.

In spite of the fact that he received no information from Stopford until noon of the 7th, and then only covering the situation at 0730 and ending with the statement, "You see we have been able to advance little beyond the edge of the beach." He did not intervene and replied to Stopford's message with one almost as weak, "Have only received one telegram from you. Glad to hear enemy opposition weakening and know you will take advantage of this to push on rapidly. Prisoners state landing a surprise so take every advantage before you are forced off." This telegram was not sent until 1620.

### **Summary of Turkish Movements, 7 August**

At 0730, three battalions of the 16th Corps from Bulair, ordered to move on the night of the 6th, were marching but owing to the distance were not apt to arrive at Suvla Bay for at least thirty hours. This means that at this hour (0530 7 August), Willmer's three battalions of Turks and twelve guns were resisting twenty-two battalions of British on shore or about to land.

At 0700 on 7 August, von Sanders ordered the 7th and 12th divisions to march to Suvla and ordered the 8th Division from Helles and the 11th from Asia to start for the same place. However, due to the distance it would be at least thirty-six hours before any of these reinforcing units would arrive. In addition to these larger units, von Sanders also ordered three squadrons

of cavalry and a detachment of machine guns from the fleet to report to Major Willmer.

Meanwhile, Major Willmer was very much reassured by the British action and, during the day, reported as follows, "Early in the afternoon the British advancing eastward from the cut moved bolt upright as if on parade and made no use of the available cover. On reaching the northeast corner of the lake they suffered a number of casualties and their advance came to an end." This was about 1430. At midnight 7 to 8 August, the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 31st Turkish Infantry, reported to Major Willmer that he had withdrawn successfully from Chocolate Hill and was holding "W" Hill.

By comparison, it is of interest to note that the capture of Chocolate Hill, which occurred around 1930, was not reported to the 11th Division until midnight, and the fact that Green Hill was taken was not definitely known until 0800 on the 8th. Finally, twenty-four of the thirty-six hours necessary for Turkish reinforcement to arrive had been frittered away.

The general positions of the Turks and the jumbled arrangement of the British IXth Corps as of 0100 on 8 August, are striking examples of the fact that in war it is not numbers but leadership which counts, for here we have three battalions and four batteries checking one and a half divisions and a majority of the Corps troops.

## **8 August**

The failure of the Suvla Bay operations can be briefly and adequately summed up in the following quotation from the British official history, Volume 2, page 268, "Lack of leadership on the 7th of August had jeopardized the whole plan. And now, on the 8th, it brought the operations to ruin." However, the fantastic inefficiency of all higher ranks, especially Generals Stopford, Hammersley, and Sitwell, merits examination as a lesson on how not to act.

At dawn on the 8th, General Stopford and his staff were still on the cruiser *Jonquil* and had not visited the shore.

General Hammersley, commanding all the troops ashore with the exception of three battalions, 10th Division, was at last rested from his exhaustion and set out to visit his brigades for the first time. He found Generals Sitwell and Hill opposed to an advance. This was enough to quench any fire that the night's rest had started in Hammersley, so he contented himself with issuing an order to Sitwell at 0610. Sitwell, who was still charged with the handling of the troops, was to occupy the village of Su-

lajik with parts of the 32nd and 34th brigades as a means of forming a connecting link between Chocolate Hill and Kiretch Tepe Ridge.

The chief of staff of the 11th Division, impressed with the idea that something should be done and was not being done, “suggested” to the junior officers that they had better hurry up and take “W” Hill.

General Mahon on the left reported that all was quiet there but that the enemy position “was stronger than at first expected and could not be taken without the help of artillery.” Actually his three battalions were opposed to three companies with two mountain guns.

At 0930, General Stopford on the *Jonquil*, hearing what Hammersley had done and having received Mahon’s report, congratulated the troops on their brave operations and ordered the construction of trenches to defend the beaches.

General Hamilton at Imbros finally made up his mind to act and sent a staff officer to Suvla. (Note: The destroyer detailed to carry him had engine trouble and did not get Col. [Cecil] Aspinal to Suvla until 1130.)

In passing it should be noted that General Sitwell, even by 0930, had not complied with the order issued at 1810.

Sometime before 1100, GHQ at Imbros received an air report that there were no Turks in the Suvla Plains and so, at 1100, sent General Stopford this inspiring message, “Hope this indicates you will be able to gain a footing early on Tekke Tepe Ridge, importance of which you will realize.”

This message aroused General Stopford into sending the following fiery order, dated 1130 8 August:

Message to both division commanders. It is of the greatest importance to forestall the enemy on the high ground north of Anafarta Sagir (south end of Tekke Tepe Ridge) and on the spur thence to “W” Hill. If you find the ground lightly held by the enemy push on. But in view of want of adequate artillery support, I do not want you to attack an entrenched position held in strength.

General Stopford was continually impressed with the enemy’s non-existent entrenchment and with the need of artillery—too much France.

Following the issuance of this order, he sent GHQ the following message, “Heavy fighting yesterday and unavoidable delay in landing artillery makes me consider it inadvisable to call on troops to attack a strongly entrenched position without adequate support.” This last message decided

General Hamilton to go to Suvla Bay in person, but owing to the lack of any means of transportation, he did not arrive until 1800 8 August.

In the meantime, General Sitwell, in order to keep his record clean in the way of doing the wrong thing at the right time, had stopped a battery of mountain guns destined for General Mahon and had held them to defend his own beach.

When Colonel Aspinall reached General Stopford at 1500 8 August, and implored Stopford to do something, that General replied, "That he fully realized the importance of losing no time, but that it was impossible to move until the men had rested and until more guns were ashore. He intended to order a fresh attack the next day."

The following quotation from a letter written at Suvla Bay on the 9th Describing the visit of Colonel Aspinall and Col. [Maurice] Hankey is of interest:

The staffs of the 10th Division and IXth Corps are settling themselves in dugouts. The pioneers who should have been making roads for the advance of the artillery and supply wagons, soon to land, are engaged on a great entrenchment from the head of the bay northward to the hills to protect headquarters. It looks as though this accursed trench warfare in France has sunk so deep into our military system that all idea of the offensive has been killed.

"You seem to be making yourselves snug," I said to a staff officer. He answered "We expect to be here a long time." [Letter to Secretary of War by Colonel Hankey.]

However, the visit of the two GHQ staff officers finally induced General Stopford to go ashore for the first time and he inspected the headquarters of the 11th Division at 1600 8 August to urge an immediate attack, but his ardor was soon cooled and he acquiesced to an order, then being prepared there, directing an attack at 0800 the next day, 9 August. Then, exhausted by this visit, he returned to his ship to rest. There he found a message from General Hamilton which caused him to issue an order, dated 1730, directing a general advance in the morning with "W" Hill and Ejelmer Bay as objectives. The order wholly omitted any mention of attacking the Tekke Tepe Ridge.

General Hamilton reached the *Jonquil*, with Stopford on board, at 1830 8 August, and asked that an immediate attack be made that night. Stopford agreed to Hamilton's going ashore to try to get it started, but he asked to be excused from going ashore himself because of his hurt knee. Jackson

and Grant both fought in campaigns and battles with broken bones, while in the Sharpsburg campaign, General Lee could use only one of his arms.

When General Hamilton got ashore, General Hammersley had, as usual, many good reasons for delay, so Hamilton finally compromised with him on sending one battalion to the top of the Tekke Tepe Ridge that night.

This acquiescence in so supine a policy is at strange variance with the sentiments expressed in 1906 by Lt. Col. Sir Ian Hamilton who, in writing of the failure of the Japanese to exploit their initial success at the battle of the Yalu, wrote:

[T]he somewhat unconvincing explanation that the Guards and the Second Division were so very tired and hungry and needed rest and refreshment. If this is to be taken literally, as meaning that these troops were so exhausted that they could not march a mile or two further to keep at close grips with the enemy, then the statement is nothing less than a libel on the sturdy Japanese infantry; but if it means that the minds and energies of the Generals and Staff were fairly used up, then, I believe, we have here the secret not only of this, but of many other, strangely inconclusive endings to a very decisive initial success.

And, again on page 119 of the same volume he writes:

There are not many commanders who have resolution enough at the end of a terribly anxious night and morning to reject a series of plausible arguments for leaving well alone. I have heard Lord Kitchener remark under similar circumstances, "Your reasons for not doing what you were told to do are the best I have ever heard; now go and do it."

It is a sad commentary on human frailty that in his own hour of trial General Hamilton forgot the ideas he had once possessed.

The 32nd Brigade, ordered to send out this detachment, bungled things so badly that it was 0330 before the start was made. This was exactly two hours too late for, at that time, the leading units of the 12th Turkish Division were already reaching the top of Tekke Tepe Ridge, which was two hours' march from the position of the 32nd Brigade.

In speaking of the operations of 8 August, General von Sanders says, "There can be no doubt that in view of the great British superiority, complete success would have been possible for them. We all had a feeling that the British leaders had delayed too long on the shore instead of advancing from the landing place at any cost."

The determination and effectiveness of General von Sanders and Major Willmer on the 8th are in striking contrast to those of the British generals. The chief of staff of the Helles Sector urged General von Sanders during this period to withdraw all troops from Helles to Asia to avoid their being cut off by the British. General von Sanders had this man relieved and directed that not a foot of ground be given up.

In the account of the Anzac operations in the same period, I have already mentioned the fact that he relieved the commander of the 16th Corps for failure to attack on the night of the 8th, replacing him with Mustafa Kemal Pasha. Kemal Pasha, undismayed by the disparity of forces between his own and the enemy troops, attacked on the morning of the 9th with three regiments of the 12th Division and Willmer's detachment. This was a total of 6,000 men against the whole British force which then consisted of about 27 battalions.

At 0600 on the 8th, Major Willmer reported:

Chocolate Hill was attacked by superior hostile forces and had to be evacuated last night. "W" Hill position is occupied by the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry, and the Brusa Gendarmes. Machine gun detachment from fleet has arrived and been put into position. Kiretch Tepe is firmly in our hands. Losses of Brusa Gendarmes yesterday about 30 percent. Very little activity in front.

There is no point in a further examination of the Suvla operations insofar as they refer to this study. Midnight, 8 August, put a period to the last hope of success. The British, in face of a much inferior force, not only failed to advance, but actually lost ground. The following comments taken from Turkish account of the Anzac-Suvla Bay operations are of interest:

The British plan for the Suvla landing, and the operations leading up to it, were well suited to the requirements of the situation. It was sound to base this plan on a preliminary attack on the units in the Kanli Sirt (Lone Pine) section with a view to engaging and pinning down the defense and forcing it to expend its reserves. This operation was calculated not only to facilitate the landing at Suvla, but also to cover the turning movement round the right flank of the Turkish force opposite Anzac.

Had this sound plan been executed with resolution and energy, it would have effected very far-reaching results. From the Suvla sector, which was for the most part undefended, and only watched by a very weak detachment, it would have been possible to capture Anafarta Sagir and Bigali. This objective once attained, the



mastery of the Straits would have been definitely won, and the land communication of the greater part of the Fifth Army would have been cut.

The reasons why the attack failed may be summarized thus: "The offensive was not synchronized or coordinated. The force which landed at Suvla did not attack vigorously and swiftly the weak force opposed to it."



## Chapter 6

### **Tough Jobs: The Death and Rebirth of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, November–December 1950**

Col. (Retired) Kevin C. M. Benson

On 11 September 2001, our Army was once again called to war; indeed our Army remains at war now in Iraq and Afghanistan. As our units return from combat and begin the preparation for a return to a war zone, we should reflect on what we are doing with our time and how we can better prepare our units and ourselves for war. Officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) will occasionally gripe about tough jobs they hold in battalions or higher headquarters. These “tough” jobs range from the battalion maintenance officer to the S-4 or support platoon leader, the S-2 senior noncommissioned officer to the master gunner. I looked into the history of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry for examples of truly “tough jobs” performed by truly “tough” soldiers.

The purpose of this chapter is to make all of us think how we will ensure the final hundred yards of combat are linked to attaining operational and strategic objectives. The default condition for those on active duty now will be conflict and combat. What soldiers and soldier/leaders do to prepare and how they conduct themselves must always take into account the fact of war. Thinking professionals must remember the recent and past history of their units and ponder what might be demanded of them when they are again committed to battle. They will face victories and defeats in the future and must learn from both.

In his book *This Kind of War*, T. R. Fehrenbach reminds us of battles we could face against a determined enemy. He wrote that on a bleak 1950 day, “On 1 November, the Chinese sprang a carefully prepared trap against the 3rd Battalion 8th Cavalry Regiment. The battalion was surrounded, a roadblock thrown up in its rear. Chinese, fighting hand to hand, swarmed over the battalion’s command post.”<sup>1</sup> The intelligence on the movement of the Chinese was spotty at best leading to US and United Nations (UN) forces being surprised at the battalion level.

#### **Unsan, North Korea, 1 November 1950**

There were reports of large enemy forces moving south over the hills north of Unsan. The enemy set fire to the forests for smoke to cover the move and obscure US and UN observation. Still, the 1st Cavalry Division

artillery found some columns and attacked them with fire. The enemy kept coming through the hail of artillery fire. An artillery spotter plane pilot rendered this report, "This is the strangest sight I have ever seen. There are two large columns of enemy infantry moving southeast over the trails in the vicinity of Myongdag-dong and Yongchung-dong. Our shells are landing right in their columns and they keep coming."<sup>2</sup>

The enemy columns were seven and five air miles respectively south and west of Unsan. This was well south of the current location of the 1st Cavalry Division battalions. The division commander, Maj. Gen. Hobart "Hap" Gay requested permission to adjust his lines in light of the reported enemy movements. At this time, no one realized these columns were part of a much larger Chinese Communist force.

Gay ordered the 8th Cavalry Regiment to provide a rear guard for the division as it maneuvered south of Unsan. The tactical situation worsened throughout the remainder of 1 November. The Chinese cut the main road to the south of Unsan. The crescendo of attacks grew until artillery-supported infantry from the north, west, and south attacked the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 8th Cavalry Regiment. The 8th Cavalry, preparing to withdraw, was fighting in difficult terrain and had no mobility advantage over the enemy infantry. The fighting was desperate.

By 2300 on 1 November, 1st and 2nd Battalions were pushed back from their initial positions. The battalions expended huge amounts of ammunition. The Chinese swamped the Republic of Korea (ROK) II Corps to the east. Major General Gay issued the order to withdraw the 8th Cavalry. Col. Raymond D. Palmer, regimental commander, assigned the rear guard mission to the 3rd Battalion. From 2300 to 0130 on 2 November, the 1st and 2nd Battalions fought south to get across the Kuryong River. It was a hellish fight. Confusion reigned as units became intermingled and the Chinese attacked at close quarters. Soldiers in the regimental trains engaged in hand-to-hand combat in order to withdraw south of the river. Finally across the river, the remnants of the 1st and 2nd battalions, 8th Cavalry tried to hold the crossing for the 3rd Battalion.<sup>3</sup>

At around 0130 on 2 November, the commander of the 1st Battalion, Maj. John Millikin, found the commander of the 3rd Battalion, Maj. Robert J. Ormond, at a fork in the road leading south of Unsan. Millikin inquired if Ormond had any recent enemy information. Ormond replied that he had none but his last orders were to hold the fork in the road until all of the 1st and 2nd battalions had passed south the Nammyon River. Ormond would hold and left Millikin to reform the scattered elements of the 1st

Battalion. During the remainder of the night and into the morning, troopers of the 1st and 2nd battalions who had not made it through the Chinese ambushes would find their way to the 3rd Battalion positions.

Ormond returned to the plowed field in which he had established the headquarters of the 3rd Battalion. None of the companies were yet in contact with the enemy. The road was receiving scattered enemy fire, but it was without effect. The battalion expected to withdraw in good order after the rest of the regiment had passed south. The companies had no idea of the ordeal suffered by the rest of the regiment, or that the road south was blocked. Major Ormond returned to his headquarters and conferred with the executive officer, Maj. Veale F. Moriarty. Ormond knew that the way south was blocked, based on his travel along the road. The 3rd Battalion would cover the rearward movement of the regiment, but it would not be able to use the road south. The battalion started to form up for a withdrawal. It was not in defensive positions. Pvt. 1st Class (later Maj.) Joe Matukonis recalled, “No one said anything about us being vulnerable or assuming a defensive posture. Nothing was happening. It was very quiet. We broke camp and lined up the vehicles just off the road on the west side just north of the CP [command post].”<sup>4</sup>

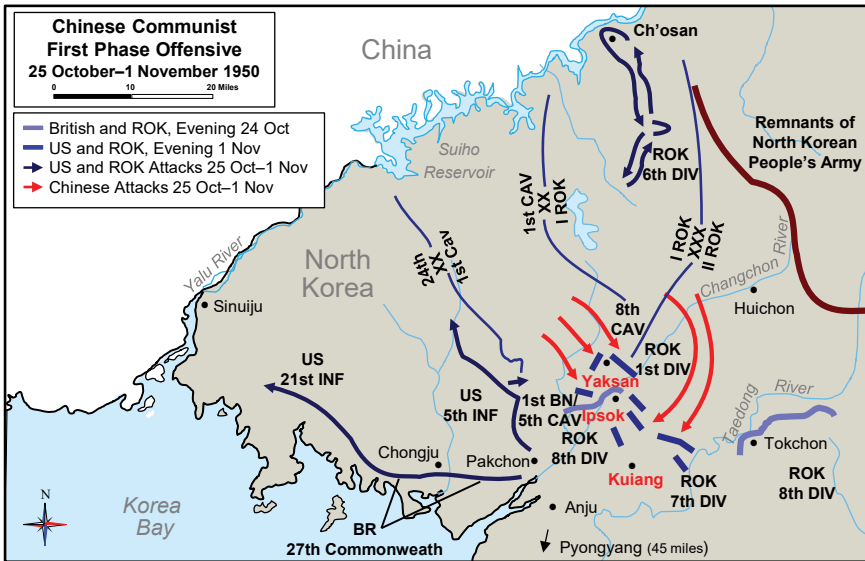


Figure 6.1. Map of Chinese Communist First Phase Offensive, 25 October to 1 November 1950. Created by Army University Press.

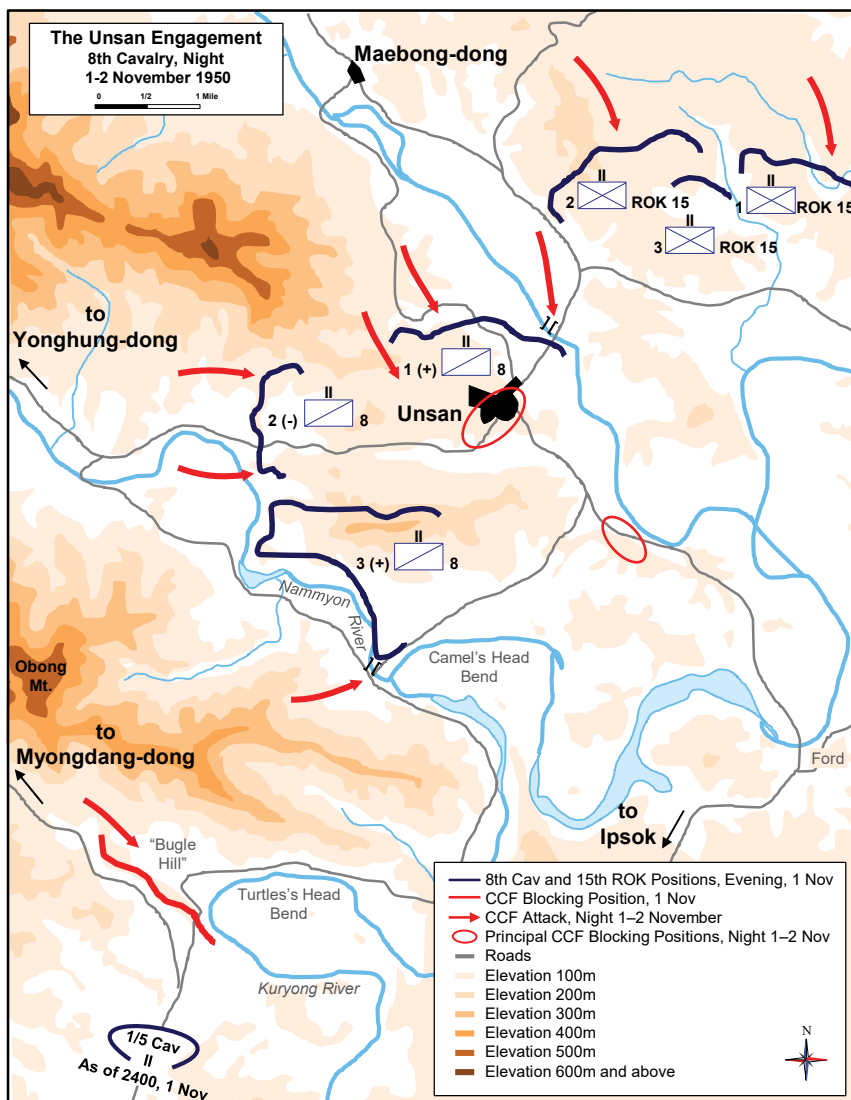


Figure 6.2. Map of the Unsan Engagement showing the dispositions of the 8th Cavalry Regiment on the night of 1 to 2 November 1950. Created by Army University Press.

### 0300, 2 November

The headquarters and the battalion were in position just to the north of the Nammyon River near where it flowed into the nose of Camel's Head

Bend on the Kuryong River. The battalion was three straight-line miles to the southwest of Unsan. Again, Private 1st Class Matukonis recalled:

I guess what really was amazing to me was that up until the CP was hit by Chinese infiltrators there was [sic] little or no sounds of battle except in the distance. That night, November 2nd, around eleven PM we were told to saddle up we were pulling out. They were looking for a ford across the river. . . . Sometime before midnight, Lt. Col. Ormand [sic] and Capt. McAbee came over to the radio truck to talk to the regimental commander [Colonel Palmer]. The last transmission from SCRAPPY SIX [Palmer's call sign] was, "I have just cleared the road block; there is an assembly area ten miles southeast of your position; make out the best you can."<sup>5</sup>

A company-sized element approached the headquarters from the south, the direction toward the rest of the regiment. The troopers of M company, 3/8 Cavalry let them pass as they thought the men were South Korean soldiers, ROKs. They were wrong. As the company approached the battalion headquarters, whistles and bugles blew and the Chinese opened fire. Confusion reigned as the headquarters and elements of the battalion returned fire. First Lt. W.C. Hill said, "I thought I was dreaming when I heard a bugle . . . and the beat of horses' hooves in the distance. Then, as though they came out of a burst of smoke, shadowy figures started shooting and bayoneting everybody they could find."<sup>6</sup> The ordeal at the Camel's Head Bend had begun.

The fighting centered around two points on the ground: the command bunker and a section of tanks. Some elements of the battalion, having received orders to withdraw, fought across the Kuryong and moved to ROK lines to the south. Matukonis wrote:

Needless to say, there was a lot of confusion and firing from all directions. I for one hit the ground and moved across the road to the river bank with several others. The tanks were firing point blank and it was hard to discern friend from foe. We engaged when we saw and at some point a lieutenant from the second battalion organized us and we withdrew across the river and eventually headed to the assembly area.<sup>7</sup>

Other groups of men moved to the centers of resistance and continued to fight. The battalion surgeon, Capt. Clarence Anderson, and the battalion chaplain, Father Emil Kapaun, moved about during the fight dragging wounded men to the command bunker. The battalion commander, Major

Ormond, was severely wounded but refused treatment in order to continue directing the fight. The combat was hand-to-hand around the tanks and command bunker. Chinese mortar fire rained down on the area. Staff Sgt. Elmer Miller's tank section formed the core of the battalion's resistance until daylight.

### **0600, 2 November**

When daylight came, Allied aircraft came up in support of the battalion. Col. Harold K. Johnson, regimental commander of the 5th Cavalry, conducted a counterattack to relieve the pressure on 3/8 Cavalry and rescue the battalion. Johnson had a special interest in relieving the 3rd Battalion. Johnson commanded the battalion when it arrived in Korea before being promoted to command the 5th Cavalry.<sup>8</sup> The attack failed at a cost of 500 casualties. Inside the shrinking 3/8 Cavalry perimeter, there were six officers and 200 men capable of fighting. There were 170 wounded men inside the perimeter. Major Ormond was badly wounded, and the rest of the staff was dead or missing. The remaining officers and NCOs organized the defense. They dug trenches, covered the wounded, and distributed ammunition. The names of many of these men are lost to history, and we cannot recount their deeds of valor. Other troopers from the regiment came down from the surrounding hills and added to the strength of the perimeter.



Figure 6.3. A Chinese soldier displays a knocked-out US 1st Cavalry Division tank during the early months of the Chinese intervention. Courtesy of histomil.com.



At 1500 on 2 November—unknown to the battalion and while they were organizing their defense—the corps commander, Major General Milburn, and Major General Gay, the division commander, agreed that since the 5th Cavalry relief attack had failed the division would withdraw. Given the weight of the Chinese attack along the entire corps front, neither Milburn nor Gay felt they could focus efforts on the relief of the 3rd Battalion. Radio communications were spotty at best and the battalion leadership, such as it was, did not know of the division and corps commanders' decision. The need to preserve the cohesion of the division outweighed the loss of one battalion. At dusk on 2 November 1950, the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry had no further hope of relief. The remaining troopers of the battalion were on their own.

### **Night, 2–3 November**

The Chinese attacked the shrinking perimeter six times during the night. The attacks were made in battalion strength, and all were repulsed. Surviving troopers gathered weapons from the dead, American and Chinese, to continue the fight. During the night the command bunker was overrun and the battalion chaplain, Father Kapaun, was captured along with 15 wounded men. The more severely wounded were left in the bunker to die.<sup>9</sup> At this point, the battalion fought for survival. Daylight brought close air support. Helicopters attempted to deliver supplies and recover wounded but were driven off by Chinese ground fire. The focus of the corps- and division-level tactical fight was on maintaining contact with the Chinese and ROK units in order to conduct an orderly withdrawal under heavy pressure rather than extricating the remnants of 3/8 Cavalry.

### **Night, 3–4 November**

The night of 3 and 4 November was a repetition of the preceding night: continuous mortar and artillery attack followed by ground assault. By the morning of 4 November, there were fewer than 200 men remaining who were able to fight. There were 250 wounded men who could not be moved. The surviving officers, Capt. George McDonnell and Capt. William McLain of 2/8 Cavalry and 1st Lt. Paul Bromser of L Company, 3/8 Cavalry, decided to lead the remaining able troopers of the battalion in an attempt to break out of the perimeter and rejoin the cavalry division. Captain Anderson, battalion surgeon, volunteered to remain with the wounded. The wounded men did not gripe; they merely told the men breaking out to come back to get them. The breakout began as a Chinese artillery strike of white phosphorous started. The troopers breaking out fought through Chinese lines in ever-smaller groups until the afternoon of 6 November.

On that date, and within range of supporting American artillery fire, the Chinese surrounded the last organized group of men from 3/8 Cavalry. Only very small groups and individuals were able to escape. Of the more than 700 men of the battalion, about ten officers and fewer than 200 men were able to rejoin the regiment.

Consider the last, perhaps final, hundred yards for the remaining leadership of the battalion. After 1500 on 2 November 1950, there was no chance of relief. The battalion's senior leaders were wounded; thus command fell to surviving junior officers and noncommissioned officers. Some leaders elected to remain with the wounded and suffered the indignities of becoming prisoners of war. Other leaders led those able to move and fight in attempts to return to American lines. The mission became taking care of their soldiers, difficult enough tasks. The linkage of the final hundred yards to operational and strategic objectives was performed by the division and corps commanders and their staffs. The division and corps sacrificed a battalion to preserve the rest of the 1st Cavalry Division. The difficult tasks did not end with the destruction of the battalion. On 3 November, the 8th Cavalry Regiment reported to division and corps that it had but 45 percent of its authorized strength.<sup>10</sup>

## **21 November 1950**

Maj. R. J. "Speed" Jennings, then serving as the S3 of 2/8 Cavalry, was ordered to take command of the 3rd Battalion.<sup>11</sup> Jennings recalled that what was left of the 3rd Battalion was sleeping in an open field some fifty miles north of Pyongyang. The men had no heavy clothing or crew-served weapons. The battalion had no vehicles. The division staff considered the battalion an ineffective fighting force and was considering dropping it from the rolls of the division. Jennings wrote, "To take command of the 3rd Battalion was one hell of a job."<sup>12</sup> Jennings did not want the job but was told by regimental and division staff officers that he would be fully supported in his efforts to rebuild the battalion.

The refitting and reconstitution of a battalion is a division- and corps-level tactical action. Linking the next hundred yards facing the battalion to a higher purpose again fell on the division and corps staff. The physical effort to send replacements, new equipment, weapons, and vehicles is a major staff effort. Reconstitution of the physical organization relies on functioning staffs to identify and deliver the materiel and personnel. The reconstitution of the fighting spirit depends upon the leadership at the battalion level. This effort, too, relates to linking the final hundred yards to the ability to attain operational and strategic objectives. Major

Jennings's superb reconstitution of the spirit of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry ensured this linkage.

To say that Major Jennings faced an extremely difficult task is an understatement. Replacements were coming in from all over the division and corps. There was no unit identity, and morale was low. Jennings had to reform a battalion, restore its faith in its own ability to fight, and return it to combat as quickly as possible. Jennings wrote, "I had a serious talk with the officers and NCOs and outlined my plans for the reorganization and future role for the battalion in the division. I thought that a whiskey toast to the past and hopes for the future was most appropriate. Thus, I ordered WO [Warrant Officer] Thomas Goss to procure a case of whiskey."<sup>13</sup> Jennings gave Goss a check for \$50 and provided him with a jeep borrowed from the 2nd Battalion. Jennings ordered Goss to return in 48 hours. Jennings said:

WO Goss was a resourceful person. He went to the nearest Marine Air Strip and arranged for a flight to Osaka, Japan, where he acquired two cases and two bottles of whiskey, returned on schedule with the borrowed jeep. I had my meeting with the officers and NCOs and divided the whiskey equally between the two groups.<sup>14</sup>

To further cement the battalion's leaders and to identify them, Jennings made a ceremony of awarding green felt tabs to be worn under the battalion crest. Doing so made the battalion's leaders stand out and was a point of honor. Facing a range of difficult tasks under extremely difficult conditions, Jennings welded a disparate group of men into a fighting force in two superb acts. The 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry became known as the "Stud Duck" battalion in the regiment and the division.

Jennings and 3/8 Cavalry received and assimilated more than 500 replacements between 24 November and 1 December 1950. His battalion borrowed equipment, salvaged equipment from the battlefield, and returned to the battle lines on 2 December 1950. On 12 December 1950, the 3rd Battalion was the last American unit to leave Pyongyang and covered the withdrawal of the 1st Cavalry Division south of the 38th Parallel. Jennings wrote that less than 40 days later, the 3rd Battalion spearheaded the division's attack to the north. Jennings said that the orders were "delivered to me personally by Col. Harold K. Johnson; along with the attack orders I also received orders promoting me . . . to the rank of LTC [lieutenant colonel]."<sup>15</sup> Jennings continued to command 3/8 Cavalry until the battalion rotated back to Japan on 10 May 1951.

It would not do to overdramatize this action. While it would be pleasing to think that the 3/8 Cavalry's fight at Camel's Head Bend gave the Chinese Communists pause to consider their foe, it did not. The Chinese reported, "The enemy looked like rookies who had never fought a war."<sup>16</sup> What the US Army calls the actions at Camel's Head Bend does not even rate a footnote in Chinese literature. The Chinese leaders believed they had cut off and destroyed the 1st Cavalry Division and told their men, "It was the first imperialist force destroyed by the Chinese People's Volunteers in the defense of Korean soil."<sup>17</sup> To the Chinese, Camel's Head Bend was a mopping-up action. That view of the facts does not though diminish the deeds of those men. The purpose of history in this case is to point out that in the face of steep odds, tough men continued to do their duty, to the death, even if no one would know. No medals, no mention in dispatches, just a lonely grave on a cold hillside.<sup>18</sup>

A veteran of the action made one very important point in support of those nameless men who took on tough jobs. Lt. Col. (Retired) Ken Ring wrote:

In any discussion of the 3rd Battalion, one must bear in mind, was never fought as a battalion. For starters, the CCF [Chinese Communist Forces] went after the Command Group and were successful. Were a few officers left—without leadership, but mostly the sergeants handled that one. One must give them great credit. They did a fantastic job under the most horrible circumstances. Few armies in this world will do that. Most would just sit down, come and get me! Our Army has a long tradition of such exceptional performance and Unsan was no exception. The proof of all, although the Chinese had unlimited forces at their disposal, over several days, [they] were not able to overrun elements of the 3rd Battalion. Matter of fact, when those troops decided to leave, [they] simply fought their way out and hit the road. Unfortunately, they walked right into the back of the Chinese Army setting up to fight the battle of the Chongchon River line. Little question, had delayed their departure because of concern for their fellow man—the wounded and dead.<sup>19</sup>

Our Army faces multiple challenges in the years ahead. We continue to develop new concepts for twenty-first century operations while we are engaged in physical and cyber battle with thinking, asymmetric, and near-peer enemies. Fighting in the glare of continuous coverage and ubiquitous social media, professional soldiers must face the obligation of preparing

for and waging war. We must be able to see a greater battlefield, the true interrelationship of the tactical to the operational and strategic. Wars are won on the operational and strategic level, but the last hundred yards of action must be linked to the operational and strategic. We cannot squander tactical success as well as our republic's blood and treasure.

Correspondent C. J. Chivers wrote about soldiers at war in Afghanistan—especially one, Robert Soto, a former sergeant. Chivers wrote of Soto and his experience facing the last hundred yards of combat in Afghanistan:

Some days he accepted it. Others he could not square what he heard with what he and his fellow veterans had lived. The dead were not replaceable, and they had been lost in a place the Army did not need them to be. Sometimes when he was awake in the restless hours between midnight and dawn, his memories of lost friends orbiting his mind, Soto entertained the questions. What befell those who sent them? Did generals lose sleep, too? “They just failed as leaders,” he said. “They should know: They failed, as leaders. They let us down.”<sup>20</sup>

The burden and privilege of command and staff work is to ensure that our soldiers who face the last hundred yards know their actions are truly linked to attaining policy objectives which result in outcomes favorable to our republic. More simply put, our soldiers must know that what they are asked to do has a greater meaning and is worth the effort. After the Chinese intervention in Korea, many more tough missions were required of our Army. Leaders then knew how vital it was to ensure the last hundred yards were explained and linked to greater objectives. Major Jennings did this in rebuilding 3/8 Cavalry. Leaders in the twenty-first century can do no less.

The history of our Army contains the high and low points of past battles. We must bear in mind our history. Our history will both inform and inspire. We need only turn to our history to see examples of leadership and valor, which ennoble even defeat as strong soldier/leaders had to turn defeat into victory. The purpose of this chapter was to describe what are really tough jobs and the conditions under which tough men and women might have to face them in the future.

We do not know what will be required of us in the future. Adversaries may disrupt movements to ports of embarkation and use the cyber domain to intimidate our families even before units arrive in the theater of operations. The expanding conduct of war and the use of force will stretch our units and our intellects. This will not be the first time in our history our

Army has faced the prospect of multi-domain operations. Serving officers at the turn of the last century faced an expanding role for American forces, competing with shrinking budgets. None of them could see that seventeen years after the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century there would be a world at war. Those serving now have no skill at foresight either. We know but one thing: the demands of honor and duty require us to remain ready to fight.

## Notes

1. T. R Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War*, 2nd ed. (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 1998), 196.
2. Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1961), 690.
3. Appleman, 691–7.
4. Matukonis letter to the author, 6 September 2001.
5. Joe Christopher and Maj. (Retired) Joe Matukonis email to the author, 6 September 2001. SCRAPPY was the 1st Cavalry Division radio call sign of the 8th Cavalry Regiment; the battalions were RED, WHITE, and BLUE for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd battalions respectively.
6. Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 701–2.
7. Christopher and Matukonis email to the author.
8. Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 704. Col. Harold K. Johnson was a survivor of the Bataan Death March. He commanded the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry in the opening stages of the war. He went on to become the Army chief of staff.
9. Father Emil Kapaun was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, later upgraded to the Congressional Medal of Honor, for his valor in this fight and for actions during his confinement as a prisoner of war (POW). The Chinese killed him while he was in a POW camp. They said he was a “disruptive element” because he kept the other prisoners spirits up. In 1993, the Roman Catholic Church named him a “Servant of God” and started the process of recognizing him as a potential saint of the church.
10. Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 703–8.
11. From a personal letter from Lt. Col. (Retired) R.J. Jennings to the author, and from the archives of the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 8th Cavalry. At the time, Jennings lived in Tulsa, OK. He was 82 years old and planned to attend the 2001 1st Cavalry Division reunion. During World War II, Jennings and his 8th Cavalry troop were awarded a Presidential Unit Citation. During the opening phases of the Korean War, Jennings was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry as the S3 of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for reorganizing the 3rd Battalion and leading it in combat until rotation back to Japan. He is an American hero.
12. Jennings letter to the author.
13. Jennings letter to the author.
14. Jennings letter to the author.
15. Jennings letter to the author.
16. Russell Spurr, *Enter the Dragon, China's Undeclared War against the US in Korea, 1950–51* (New York: Newmarket Press, 1988), 144.
17. Spurr, 151.
18. Some troopers are “coming home” as the dog tag and remains of Charles H. McDaniel, a medic assigned to 3-8 Cavalry was returned by the North Koreans on 27 July 2018. Robert Burns, “Dog tag returned from North Korea belonged to Army medic,” *Military Times* (8 August 2018), accessed 8

August 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/08/08/dog-tag-returned-from-north-korea-belonged-to-army-medic/>.

19. Personal email from Lt. Col. (Retired) Ken Ring to the author, 7 September 2001. Ring commanded a firing battery in the 78th Field Artillery, which fired in support of the 1st Cavalry Division. His battery traveled the same road west of the Kuryong River that became a gauntlet for the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 8th Cavalry.

20. C. J. Chivers, "War Without End," *New York Times*, 8 August 2018, accessed 8 August 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/08/magazine/war-afghanistan-iraq-soldiers.html>.



## Chapter 7

### Defeat from Victory: Korea 1950

Lt. Col. (Retired) Robert J. Rielly

As Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief Far East Command (FEC) and Commander of United Nations (UN) Forces Korea, strode arm-in-arm with Korean President Syngman Rhee into the National Assembly chamber of the Republic of Korea in Seoul, he could not help but feel vindicated. Just a few short months earlier, North Korean forces had nearly thrown the United Nations forces off the Korean peninsula. Faced with an American Dunkirk, MacArthur had pulled off what some were calling one of the greatest feats in military history—landing forces at the port of Inchon close to Seoul and behind North Korean lines, turning the tide of the war. The North Korean forces were now retreating north, chased by Lt. Gen. Walton Walker's Eighth Army which had broken out of the Pusan perimeter. MacArthur had prepared for this moment his entire life and had silenced all his critics.

When the Korean War began on 25 June 1950, Douglas MacArthur was seventy years old and since the end of World War II had been sinking into obscurity; the North Korean invasion rescued him from a backwater position of marginal authority.<sup>1</sup> MacArthur's staff was intensely loyal to him. Called "The Bataan Gang" at the start of the Korean War, a disproportionate number of his top men had been with him since the late 1930s. It was the most exclusionary of groups.<sup>2</sup>

On 18 February 1949, Maj. Gen. Ned Almond was selected as MacArthur's chief of staff, because he was "one of MacArthur's most fervent disciples and never shrank from the most difficult assignments."<sup>3</sup> MacArthur was trusted by the Truman administration because of his past reputation; after all, he won the Army's Pacific campaigns with limited troops and resources. In Korea, they gave him a new opportunity to conduct a climactic battle before a world audience that could ensure him a premier place in the annals of war.<sup>4</sup>

#### **The Inchon Decision**

In June 1950, it was hard to imagine a US victory in Korea. Outnumbered and outfought, the small number of US and UN forces had been steadily pushed down the length of Korea and ultimately found themselves holding a shrinking perimeter around the port of Pusan. When the North

Koreans invaded, the Truman administration thought they were a bunch of bandits who would be easy to defeat but feared damage to its credibility. Truman decided to wage a limited conflict in Korea.<sup>5</sup>

Conditions in Korea during the first few months of the war did not deter MacArthur. In late June 1950, he already envisioned the amphibious envelopment that would win the war and establish his legacy. Inchon not only offered a quick result, but also a fast exit from Korea and the ability to start preparing forces in Europe.<sup>6</sup> Members of the Joint Chiefs had reservations concerning the suitability of Inchon, the availability of forces and resources, and the distance from Pusan. Lt. Gen. Walton Walker, Eighth Army commander, whose forces would have to break out of the Pusan perimeter to link up with the Inchon landing force, shared those concerns. Furthermore, the situation in Pusan was getting desperate. Commanders were sacrificing units to stabilize the perimeter and buy time.<sup>7</sup>

### **MacArthur Chooses Almond**

As the planning for Inchon progressed, it became clear that the commander for X Corps—the unit created to conduct the assault—would need to be involved quickly. In his role as chief of staff, Almond had been doing most of the planning but had no experience in amphibious operations. MacArthur picked Almond to command the corps while simultaneously keeping him as chief of staff—without consulting the Pentagon.<sup>8</sup> MacArthur also determined that X Corps would report directly to him and not fall under Eighth Army. This arrangement of X Corps outside of Eighth Army control violated the principle of war of unity of command.<sup>9</sup>

X Corps would initially consist of two divisions: the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division. The principle assault unit for Inchon was the 1st Marine Division, and its commander was Maj. Gen. Oliver Prince (O.P.) Smith. Smith was highly professional, wary of hubris, almost deliberately non-charismatic, and, most important of all, respectful of his adversaries. He had learned some hard lessons as assistant division commander during the September 1944 Battle of Peleliu, one of the worst disasters of the Pacific War; it took a full month of yard-by-yard and cave-by-cave fighting to capture the island.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike MacArthur, Gen. Lawton Collins, Army Chief of Staff, and Adm. Forrest Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations, felt no need to hide their apprehension about taking an awful gamble with the landing at Inchon.<sup>11</sup> However, they were reluctant to overrule the theater commander who was placed in that position to be the expert on the spot.<sup>12</sup> Both officers

went to Tokyo in late August to try and talk MacArthur out of Inchon but were unsuccessful. The Joint Chiefs gave conditional approval to MacArthur's plan on 29 August.

The landing at Inchon and the breakout from Pusan succeeded beyond almost everyone's expectations. "If there was one serious flaw in [MacArthur's] plan, it was the totality of his success, which gave him, if anything, more leverage over Washington and the Chiefs. Because he had stood up for it against everyone else, on all other issues afterward it was hard to stand up to him. He had been right at Inchon and those who doubted him had been wrong."<sup>13</sup> However, there were some problems following the landing. MacArthur ordered Almond to capture Seoul instead of sealing off the escape of the North Korean Army's fleeing remnants, now being pursued by Walker's Eighth Army. "Walker would have bypassed the city partly from his memory of bogging down in Metz, an urban fortress that cost his WWII command more than 2,500 casualties in late 1944."<sup>14</sup> Almond and MacArthur didn't agree with Walker, and 50,000 North Koreans escaped partly because of personal agendas.<sup>15</sup>

The relationship between the Marines and Almond continued to deteriorate during the fighting for Seoul. Almond ordered Smith to splinter his division and assault the flanks, but Smith refused. Smith's refusal shocked Almond, who thought it was insubordinate.<sup>16</sup> Smith believed the North Koreans would defend Seoul, street by street and "it would be more prudent to conduct the American attack out of one solid, closely coordinated formation."<sup>17</sup> Smith was not going to fragment his division and risk casualties to speed up the capture of a city.

Almond decided to bring in the 32nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) from the 7th Infantry Division to execute a flanking attack on Seoul. The Marines were infuriated because of the increased risk and the fact that the capture of Seoul was no longer a Marine responsibility.<sup>18</sup> Seoul was finally captured in late September.

## **The Chinese Intervene**

No sooner had the debate over Inchon ended than a discussion began over how far north to go and the specter of Chinese intervention. There were those in the Truman administration and the Pentagon who agreed with MacArthur and Almond that there was shame in stopping at the 38th Parallel, a loss of prestige—especially considering how the war started.

Others were concerned about possible escalation of the war. On 27 September, the Joint Chiefs informed MacArthur that his tactical objective

was to destroy the North Korean Army, and absolutely no forces were to cross Manchurian or Soviet borders. MacArthur acknowledged the Eighth Army would cross the 38th Parallel and seize Pyongyang while X Corps would conduct an amphibious landing on the coast at Wonsan and help Walker take the capital.<sup>19</sup>

South Korean forces crossed the parallel on 30 September.<sup>20</sup> On 3 October, Chou En-Lai, China's foreign minister, stated in a tough public announcement that the Chinese people "absolutely will not tolerate foreign aggression [in Korea] nor will they supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by imperialists."<sup>21</sup> In private, the Chinese leader told the Indian ambassador that "if UN forces other than ROKs [Republic of Korea forces] crossed the 38th Parallel, China would send troops into North Korea to oppose them."<sup>22</sup> MacArthur sent US forces across on 9 October. MacArthur's staff and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) all advised the president that Chinese intervention was unlikely.<sup>23</sup> On 15 October, MacArthur met President Truman on Wake Island and assured him that Chinese intervention would have been decisive earlier in the war but not now.<sup>24</sup> After the meeting on Wake Island, everyone thought resistance was all but over.

On 17 October, MacArthur moved "the northern boundary for US operations to the Songjin-Sonchon line, approximately forty miles south of the Yalu River. This was north of the limit the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] cited back on 27 September. MacArthur specified only South Korean troops were to cross the new boundary."<sup>25</sup>

On 19 October, US forces captured Pyongyang and established positions along the Ch'ongch'on River, further fueling the idea that the war would be over shortly and the North Korean Army was finished. The Chinese threats up to that time had not been taken seriously by the Pentagon, the State Department, or the White House.<sup>26</sup>

As early as 6 October, China decided to enter the war. It did so not to spread communism but to protect itself from a powerful enemy moving toward its borders.<sup>27</sup> Chinese leaders feared a failure to intervene would mean that the new China would be no different from the old, a "powerless giant when facing what was in their eyes the armies of western oppression."<sup>28</sup> At the same time the United States was capturing Pyongyang, Chinese Fourth Field Army troops consisting of 120,000 men began crossing the Yalu at night on foot, successfully avoiding detection.<sup>29</sup> The Third Field Army—about 120,000 men—began to move to Manchuria. The Chinese commitment would consist of thirty divisions, about 300,000 men.<sup>30</sup>

Many US leaders based their assumptions about the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) on previous experience fighting against the Japanese in the Pacific. They failed to grasp the differences between the Chinese and Japanese armies. None of the commands prepared their troops for how the Chinese would fight. The CCF understood their own strengths and weaknesses. They did not use frontal assaults, moving at night on foot and off roads. The Chinese soldiers slipped along the enemy's flanks looking for soft spots while taking up positions behind the UN forces in order to cut off retreat. They were not encumbered by heavy weapons or supplies.<sup>31</sup>

When UN forces were fifty miles from the Manchurian border, China decided to take action. Their original plan had been to concentrate on defense and wait until UN forces were overextended and then attack, isolating their formations and destroying them piecemeal. However, having US forces fifty miles from their border was too close; the Chinese would have to act whether they were ready or not. As UN forces continued to drive to the Yalu, China began to concentrate three armies to face the Eighth Army.

While the Chinese began to concentrate, X Corps finally began to land at Wonsan; Wonsan had already been captured by Walker's ROK I Corps, which had fought its way east after crossing the 38th Parallel. After X Corps landed, "Walker thought he would get [control of] X Corps but MacArthur informed him that X Corps will take over all operations in eastern Korea and operational control of ROK I Corps. In addition, Walker [had] to provide logistical support for all UN forces in Korea."<sup>32</sup>

After landing at Wonsan, X Corps was ordered to attack west and assist Eighth Army in the capture of Pyongyang. Once Pyongyang was captured, the orders were changed to attack north in zone parallel to Eighth Army, with the Taebaek mountain range as the boundary between the units. The Taebaek Mountains, which rose to heights of 7,000 to 8,000 feet and had very few roads, were a significant obstacle—preventing the two commands from providing mutual support. Almond established his headquarters ashore on 20 October. For operations in eastern Korea, he would have the 1st Marine Division, the 7th Infantry Division, and the ROK I Corps. On 26 October, Almond issued orders for his plan of operation. The ROK I Corps was to split into regimental-sized units and move up the coast, advancing as rapidly as possible to the border. The 1st Marine Division was to split into three regimental combat teams (1st, 5th, and 7th Marine regiments), each with separate missions, then advance on the Corps' left flank toward the border. The 7th Infantry Division (7th ID) would also break into columns and advance in zone to the border. The 7th

Marine Regiment on the extreme left flank of X Corps was to relieve the ROK forces in sector and advance to the Chosin Reservoir.

By the end of October, UN forces were facing logistical problems caused by long supply lines and a shortage of transport. However, commanders in Korea generally agreed that the war was all but ended. Plans were already being made to redeploy at least one division to Europe.<sup>33</sup> The Eighth Army operation above the Ch'ongch'on River was essentially a continuation of the pursuit that had started with the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter; the US I Corps was on the left, the ROK II Corps on the right. When the attack began, gaps of twenty to thirty miles were opening up between units as they raced north.<sup>34</sup>

On 24 October, MacArthur ordered Walker and Almond to drive north with all possible speed. The Joint Chiefs had previously restricted the use of non-ROK forces operating in North Korea. MacArthur no longer limited the use of US forces. MacArthur still did not take the threat of Chinese intervention seriously even though intelligence forces in North Korea were reporting Chinese as early as 15 October.<sup>35</sup> The Joint Chiefs approved the drive to the Yalu as the way to end the war quickly and unify Korea. Both the Joint Chiefs and Truman wanted the war over quickly so they could prepare forces in Europe, their strategic priority. The CIA concluded that China would not intervene without the Soviets.<sup>36</sup>

### **The First Chinese Attack**

When Walker's forces crossed the Ch'ongch'on River on 24 October, the bulk of the CCF was still moving south. However, two divisions were in position to attack the ROK II Corps on the right flank. The Chinese began their attack on the isolated columns at mid-day, destroying an entire regiment by nightfall.<sup>37</sup>

On 26 October, General MacArthur celebrated the arrival of a platoon from the 7th Regiment, ROK 6th Division at the Yalu; meanwhile, the remainder of the 6th ROK Division ceased to exist as an effective fighting force and the remainder of the ROK II Corps was close to collapse.<sup>38</sup>

By 1 November, the Eighth Army was forced to stop its advance. However, X Corps was still pressuring units to move forward. In the east, Almond told the Marines to continue moving forward. On 2 November, they encountered and attacked Chinese forces, beginning a week-long battle around Sudong and ultimately inflicting heavy losses on the CCF. On 30 October, Almond flew to Chosin to see sixteen Chinese prisoners taken by the ROK I Corps. He confided to his subordinates that the prisoners

were “not intelligent” and ridiculed their appearance, calling them a bunch of “Chinese laundrymen.”<sup>39</sup> Almond was briefed that these troops were Chinese regulars and their division had crossed the Yalu in October. The prisoners stated that they were members of the “CCF 124th Division and that a sister division was close by.”<sup>40</sup> Almond sent a message to MacArthur informing him that the corps had captured Chinese army troops.<sup>41</sup>

On 1 November, the CCF had driven back the ROK II Corps, crippling it disastrously, and the right flank of Eighth Army was open.<sup>42</sup> The ROK II Corps collapse caused Eighth Army to rush elements of the 1st Cavalry Division to the Unsan area to protect the open flank. When briefed that they might face Chinese forces, they reacted with disbelief and indifference.<sup>43</sup> In the meantime, the remaining Eighth Army elements were having success in their pursuit; they were only a few miles from the border when Lieutenant General Walker ordered them to withdraw back behind the Ch’ongch’on River. This order disturbed MacArthur’s headquarters, which telephoned Eighth Army about the withdrawal.

By nightfall on 1 November, the CCF had surrounded the 8th Cavalry Regiment (lead regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division) on three sides. The Eighth Army situation was getting desperate; units had to get behind the Ch’ongch’on to establish a coherent line of defense. On 3 November, the 1st Cavalry Division commanding general, Maj. Gen. Hobart Gay—under orders from his corps commander to pull his division back—made what he later called the hardest decision of his career. Knowing the situation was hopeless and that Chinese forces liked to ambush relief columns, he ended all relief operations and left behind the men of the 8th Cavalry Regiment.<sup>44</sup> Once all its forces were behind the Ch’ongch’on River, the Eighth Army was able to stop the Chinese and inflict heavy losses.

The Chinese unexpectedly withdrew on 5 November because they had outrun their supplies and did not want to press a bad situation. They had inflicted 15,000 casualties on the UN forces, prevented MacArthur from unifying Korea by Thanksgiving, and won time for North Korean troops to reform, reposition, and gain battle experience.<sup>45</sup> Although they had been decisive in their engagements with ROK forces, the Chinese had only destroyed one non-ROK regiment (the 8th Cavalry Regiment).<sup>46</sup> Their sudden withdrawal sparked a renewed debate in Korea, the Pentagon, and the Truman administration over whether the Chinese intervention was serious. Some thought the Chinese had withdrawn because they were hit hard and had sustained heavy losses while others believed they had broken contact to give the UN time to reconsider its actions.<sup>47</sup>

From the 24 October UN offensive until the CCF withdrew on 5 November, UN forces had captured 96 prisoners from six different Chinese armies. The initial estimate at Eighth Army headquarters based upon prisoner reports was that Chinese troops were reinforcing North Korean units in defense of border approaches only; there were “no indications of open intervention on the part of the Chinese Communist Forces in Korea.”<sup>48</sup>

### **The United Nations Resumes the Offensive**

The lack of enemy activity in front of X Corps during the second and third weeks of November prompted the corps intelligence officer to state officially on 18 November that “the enemy’s recent delaying operations are apparently concluded and he is once again withdrawing north. The speed of his movements has caused a loss of contact at most points.” General Almond himself did not think that the Chinese had intervened in the Korean War in force.<sup>49</sup> With the CCF withdrawal by mid-November, confidence was restored. The command saw logistical problems and ROK forces’ performance as the causes for the Chinese success. Both the FEC and the Eighth Army G2 estimated the number of Chinese forces in North Korea at 34,000. The UN had 250,000 troops.<sup>50</sup>

MacArthur used the break to reconstitute his forces and isolate the battlefield with air power. He was still confident he could continue the offensive. MacArthur ordered the Eighth Army and X Corps to press on independently toward the Yalu.<sup>51</sup> The offensive date was set for 15 November but was postponed until the 24th when Walker said he could not get the logistics support he needed. On the night of 9–10 November, the first snow fell and the temperature dropped to eight degrees below zero with a twenty- to thirty-knot Siberian wind.<sup>52</sup> At this time of the year, there were sixteen hours of darkness each day.

While Eighth Army was striving to overcome the mid-November logistical difficulties that delayed its resumption of the attack, X Corps in northeast Korea continued its headlong rush to the border against scattered and ineffective opposition except in the 1st Marine Division sector below the Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir.<sup>53</sup>

MacArthur believed that a lateral advance by X Corps slightly to the northwest beyond the Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir could create a choke point and cut the primary enemy interior supply network south of Kanggye. This, in turn, would effectively prevent the enemy from organizing a strong defensive redoubt against Eighth Army columns moving up Route



7.<sup>54</sup> On 10 November, the FEC operations officer sent a personal note to Almond emphasizing the importance of rendering all possible assistance to Eighth Army.<sup>55</sup>

On 15 November, Almond was ordered to re-orient his attack from the Yalu to supporting Eighth Army. Almond made the decision to support Eighth Army with the Marines while directing the 7th Infantry Division to continue its movement to the Yalu.<sup>56</sup> However, no direct communication was possible between Eighth Army and X Corps because they were separated by the Taebaek mountain range.

On 15 November, Col. Homer Litzenberg's 7th Marine Regiment occupied Hagaru-ri at the southern end of the Chosin. While Almond was stressing the need for speed, Smith was telling his staff, "We're not going anywhere until I get this division together and the airfield built." He still had his third regiment (1st Marine Regiment) guarding the main supply route (MSR) up to the Chosin.<sup>57</sup> Smith took the uncommon step of outlining his misgivings to the Marine Corps commandant, discussing his doubts about stringing out a division across 120 miles and supplying units during a winter campaign in the mountains.<sup>58</sup> The Marine division and regimental commanders, much to the X Corps commander's dissatisfaction, deliberately slowed their advance.<sup>59</sup> Between 10 and 26 November, the 7th Marine Regiment averaged one mile per day.<sup>60</sup> While the ROK I Corps and the US 7th Infantry Division advanced toward the northeast border of Korea against scattered and ineffective North Korean opposition, the 1st Marine Division began moving up its assigned axis of advance toward the Chosin Reservoir. Its rate of advance was not as rapid as theirs, nor would it go as far.<sup>61</sup> General Smith ensured he kept supply dumps and adequate protection along his MSR. Two days after the first Marine units entered Hagaru-ri, General Smith and General Harris (1st Marine Air Wing commander) selected a site for an airstrip to bring in supplies and evacuate wounded. The temperature with the wind chill had dropped to minus 60°F.

On 17 November, Almond gave his staff guidance modifying the plan to support Eighth Army. He directed the 1st Marine Division to turn west at Hagaru-ri, move to Yudam-ni, then advance on Kanggye. In addition, Almond wanted the 7th Infantry Division to provide a regimental-sized force "to go north on the east side of the reservoir to Changjin and free the 5th Marine Regiment on that side of the reservoir so that it could join the main force of the 1st Marine Division on the west side of the reservoir at Yudam-ni."<sup>62</sup> The warning order was issued on 25 November.

Smith said, "What I was trying to do all along was stall until we could bring up the 5th Marine Regiment and then the 1st Marine Regiment. I was unable to accomplish that until the 26th. By that date I was able to put one of Puller's battalions at Hagaru-ri, another at Koto-ri, and a third at Funchilin Pass. They were to guard our main supply route."<sup>63</sup>

On 20 November, the 17th RCT of the 7th Infantry Division reached the Yalu; they were the first US forces to do so. Almond flew up to get his picture taken with the division's leadership. With UN forces on the Yalu, many thought it was the end of the war.<sup>64</sup>

When the X Corps warning order was issued on 25 November, the 1st Marine Division was already in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir. However, the remainder of the 7th Infantry Division was still involved in the race to the Yalu more than 100 miles away and one of its regiments, the 32nd, was still landing in the Wonsan area. To coincide with Eighth Army's attack, which was to begin on 24 November, the X Corps attack had to start on 27 November. On 26 November, the 7th Marine Regiment arrived at Yudam-ni. The 5th Marine Regiment on the east side of the Chosin under Lt. Col. Raymond Murray stopped movement and dug in awaiting their relief by a 7th Infantry Division regiment.

The corps order called for this regiment to be on the east side of the reservoir by noon on 26 November; this order was easy to issue but almost impossible to execute given the distant and scattered deployment of the 7th Infantry Division units. The division had to use troops nearest the reservoir; for Maj. Gen. David Barr, the 7th ID commanding general, this meant his effort to assemble a regimental combat team quickly was entirely ad hoc.<sup>65</sup> The chosen unit was the 31st RCT commanded by Col. Allan MacLean. MacLean had only commanded the 31st Regiment for two months, taking command after the previous commander was relieved during the fighting for Seoul. Short one infantry battalion, MacLean was given the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry, commanded by Lt. Col. Don Faith because it happened to be closest to the reservoir. Faith's battalion was the first unit to arrive there.<sup>66</sup> The rest of the 31st RCT had to travel 140 miles to reach the area.

Commanding 1-32nd Infantry, Lt. Col. Don Faith was considered one of the ablest battalion commanders in the 7th Infantry Division. He was the son of a retired brigadier general and in World War II, Matt Ridgway had handpicked him from Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning to be his aide-de-camp.<sup>67</sup> Faith served as Ridgway's aide for three years, ad-

vancing to lieutenant colonel.<sup>68</sup> He commanded his battalion for more than a year. “On the battlefield, Faith was a clone of Ridgway: intense, fearless, relentlessly aggressive, and unforgiving of error or caution.”<sup>69</sup>

While X Corps continued to move to get in position to support the offensive, the Eighth Army offensive began 24 November; MacArthur believed it was the offensive to end the war and have the troops home by Christmas.<sup>70</sup> Although the Joint Chiefs had some apprehension, they approved MacArthur’s offensive because it had a reasonable chance of success. MacArthur argued that halting the advance would destroy morale, be a defeat for the free world, and bankrupt America’s leadership and position in Asia. The Joint Chiefs hesitated and then wavered rather than fight with MacArthur again and deal with the historic general’s claims and charges that they would deny his victory.<sup>71</sup>



Figure 7.1. The 23 November 1950 Battlefront. Created by Army University Press.

Still wary of the Chinese, Walker was forced to choose between what he considered the irrational orders of his superior and the safety of his men. He changed his mission from all-out offensive to reconnaissance in force.<sup>72</sup> Walker believed no more than two Chinese divisions were in front of him on 24 November; in fact, the Chinese had 180,000 men in Korea by the end of October. General Walker's order reflected an intention to proceed with a closely coordinated attack in order to have the army under control at all times. He expected opposition but believed he could reach the border.

## **The Chinese Attack**

The Chinese attacked the Eighth Army at sundown on the 25th, destroying the ROK II Corps and uncovering the center of the Eighth Army. The Chinese then struck the US 2nd Infantry Division, which lost more than 4,000 men and most of its artillery. Before the day was over, MacArthur's grand offensive had been shut down before the Marine attack westward from Yudam-ni had been launched.<sup>73</sup>

On 25 November, Lt. Col. Don Faith and a small advance party met Lt. Col. Raymond Murray, the 5th Marines commander, on the road just outside Hagaru-ri. Murray assigned Faith's battalion an assembly area just south of Hill 1221. Faith's battalion closed into the assembly area by mid-afternoon and set up defensive positions. Faith met with Murray that evening and Murray told Faith his lead battalion had observed no significant enemy activity in the area.<sup>74</sup>

The night of 25–26 November passed quietly on the east side of the reservoir. The next morning Faith was joined by Brig. Gen. Henry Hodes, the 7th ID assistant division commander. Hodes told Faith that Colonel MacLean was on his way with the rest of the RCT and the situation with the Eighth Army was unclear. Faith stated that he could begin the attack the next day if he could get some Marine tanks. After disapproving that request, Hodes left the position and headed south to the 7th ID Tactical Command Post (TAC). During the day, Faith and his officers made a reconnaissance of the Marine positions and received their intelligence. Murray told Faith he would be leaving the next day to join his division on the west side of the reservoir. Colonel MacLean reached Faith's assembly area at mid-day. He told Faith that 3-31st Infantry Battalion and the 57th Field Artillery (FA) Battalion would join them on the 27th. Faith asked MacLean for permission to occupy the Marine position after they vacated. MacLean approved the request.<sup>75</sup> After viewing the forward Marine positions with Faith, he directed that 3-31st and 57th FA take positions south of the Pungnyurigang inlet—about two miles from the Marine forward

position. When MacLean returned to Faith's assembly area, he received a report of Chinese soldiers in a village east of the inlet where 3-31st and 57th FA were planning to move. MacLean ordered his Intelligence and Reconnaissance (I&R) Platoon to investigate.

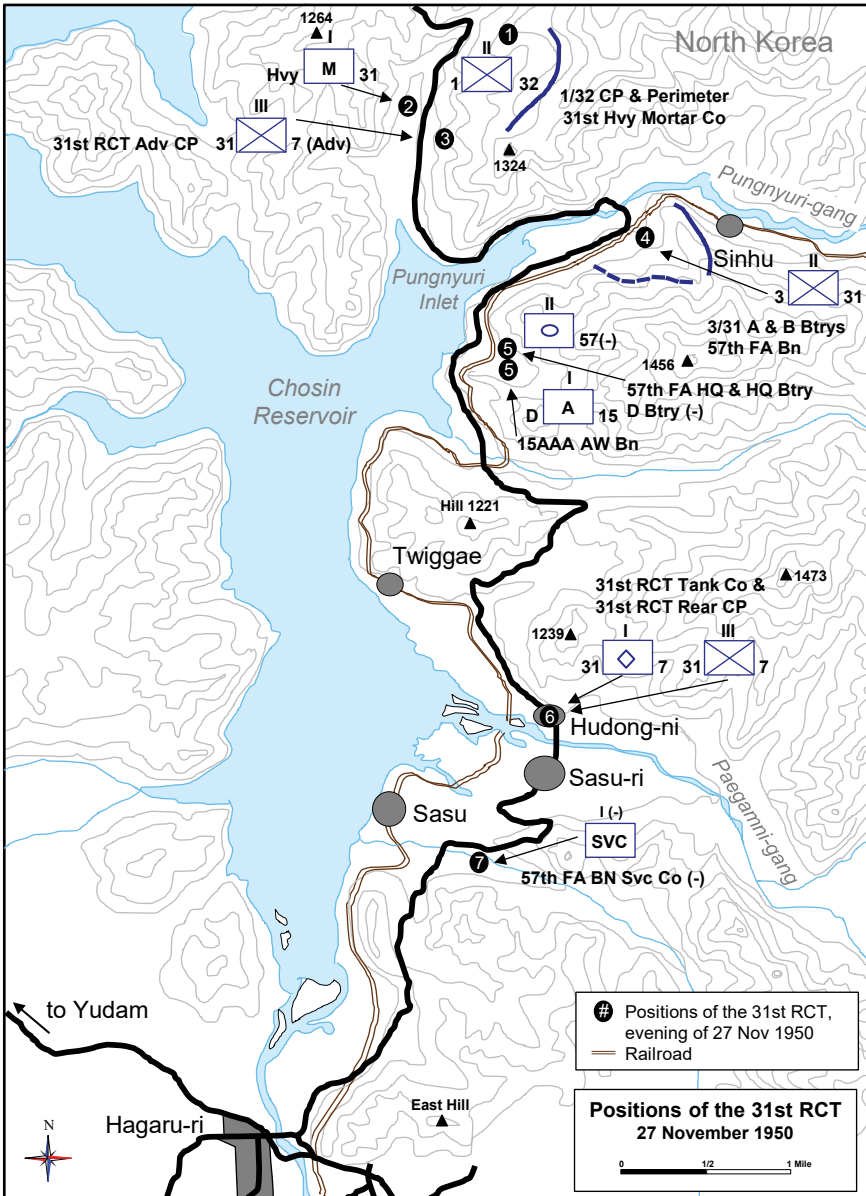


Figure 7.2. The seven positions of the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the evening of 27 November 1950. Created by Army University Press.

## 27 November

On the morning of the 27th, the last battalion of the 5th Marine Regiment moved out of their forward positions and Faith's battalion occupied them. Faith and his men expected to be there only one night. The 3-31st and 57th FA reached their assigned area near the Pungnyurigang Inlet. By early evening, MacLean's attached tank company made it to Hudong-ni, where the 7th ID TAC was located, and stopped for maintenance. The company commander went forward to find MacLean but never made contact with him. He did find Faith, who told him the plan was to attack the next morning. Faith advised him "not to try to bring his tanks up during the night but to wait until the next morning."<sup>76</sup> In the evening of 27 November, 31st RCT elements were strewn along from Hagaru-ri road northward on the reservoir's east side covering a distance of ten miles in seven different locations.<sup>77</sup> Colonel MacLean was located with the forward command post near Faith's perimeter.

On 27 November, the X Corps attack began on schedule when the Marines began their attack from Yudam-ni on the west side of the reservoir. The Marines were supposed to link up with elements of the Eighth Army at a linkup point forty miles away. By this time, however, the Eighth Army offensive had been stopped and elements were already in retreat. The two Marine regiments immediately ran into heavy resistance, realizing they were battling superior forces; in sixteen vicious hours, they gained only 1,500 yards but suffered heavy casualties.<sup>78</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Murray finally ordered his lead battalion to withdraw. Despite battling all day, the Marines made little progress and went into a defense for the night.

During the day on 27 November, the CCF troops at the Chosin Reservoir had prepared to launch a night offensive; their plan was to hit the widely dispersed X Corps simultaneously, cut them off, and destroy them piecemeal. In addition, three CCF divisions would assault the Marines at Yudam-ni and one division would attack MacLean's RCT.<sup>79</sup>

During the night of 27 November, the 31st RCT prepared for the next day's attack. Just before midnight, the Chinese initiated attacks in force in an attempt to penetrate the perimeters of 1-32nd and 3-31st/57th FA. The attacks lasted all night, with the Chinese forces finally seizing key high ground in Faith's perimeter. The Chinese attacks were more successful at the inlet position. They penetrated the defending infantry companies and almost overran the artillery batteries. The 3-31st Infantry Battalion command post was overrun. The surviving units were disorganized and

fell back to the remaining artillery position. Once the Chinese pulled back at daylight, the remaining men in the units returned to their positions. The 31st Medical Company, which tried to move up to the inlet perimeter during the night, was destroyed.

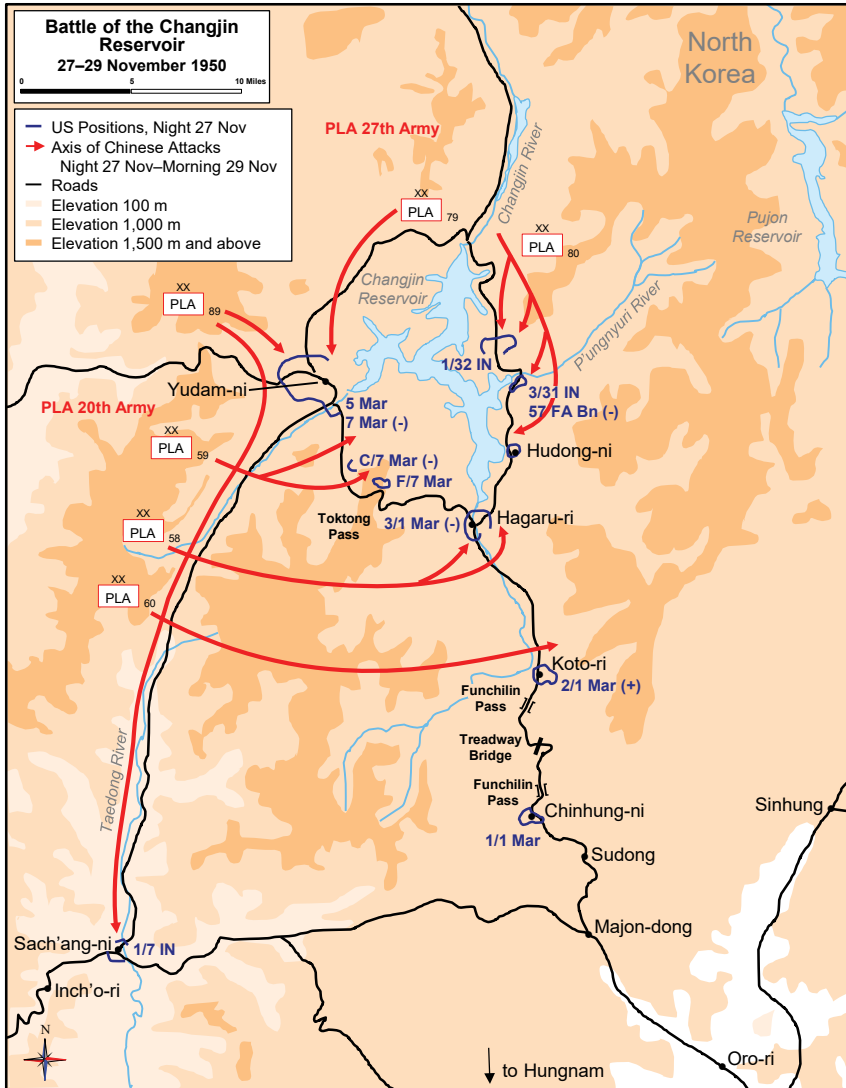


Figure 7.3. Battle of the Changjin Reservoir, 27–29 November. Created by Army University Press.

The CCF divisions caused chaos as they hit the Marines frontally west of the Chosin Reservoir at Yudam-ni, overran outposts, and swarmed into the Marine positions. Quickly recovering from the shock, the Marines fought all night and reestablished their perimeter.<sup>80</sup> However, the CCF cut the road between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri.

## **28 November**

At daybreak on the 28th, the Chinese fell back after failing to achieve their objectives. On the east side of Chosin at both the forward position and the inlet perimeter, they withdrew at daylight and occupied the high ground surrounding both perimeters, keeping US forces under observation and sniper fire. They also put roadblocks behind the perimeters to cut off retreat. In addition, Chinese forces controlled the MSR below Hagaru-ri, cutting the road to Koto-ri. During the day, MacLean's tank company attacked toward Hill 1221 and was repulsed with the loss of four tanks. Brigadier General Hodes realized the Chinese were there in strength; following the attack, he left in a tank for Hagaru-ri to attempt to get help in attacking Hill 1221.<sup>81</sup> Upon arrival, he met with Major General Smith, who had just arrived at Hagaru-ri. Smith informed Hodes that the situation at Hagaru-ri was critical and nothing should be spared to help the 31st RCT. Faith tried to regain the key high ground all day but could not. Throughout the day the forces at both the inlet perimeter and the forward position observed Chinese forces moving south. Despite the attack, MacLean was optimistic. He believed that when his third infantry battalion and the tank company arrived, he would regain control and continue the attack. Neither Faith nor MacLean had any communications with the rest of the RCT, including the battalions at the inlet perimeter.

After the Marine attack was stopped on 28 November, Lieutenant Colonel Murray and Colonel Litzenberg met and made several decisions. The two officers determined that the 5th Marine Regiment would not resume its westward march; they decided to combine staffs—consolidating and reorganizing. They had to figure out how to strengthen the perimeter by reducing it.<sup>82</sup> On the afternoon of the 28th, the 1st Marine Division started to grasp the gravity of the situation.<sup>83</sup> “The Chinese had broken the division into three groups, isolating them from one another. The first group was at Yudam-ni, the second at Hagaru-ri, the third at Koto-ri and they had successfully blocked the road connecting them.”<sup>84</sup>

Determined to get his attack moving, Almond visited the Marines at Hagaru-ri and the 31st RCT forward position. After reading the reports, Almond was convinced the marines and soldiers had lost their nerve. He



believed they had exaggerated the number of Chinese troops and could not fathom how so many Chinese had suddenly appeared without being detected by air reconnaissance.<sup>85</sup> Murray and Litzenberg had already recommended to Smith that the offensive be cancelled and the marines go on the defensive.<sup>86</sup> Smith concurred. When Almond arrived at Hagaru-ri, Smith strongly recommended that the drive to the Yalu be cancelled and the division go on the defensive.<sup>87</sup> Almond detested such conservatism and believed the Marines were dragging their feet again, as they had done on their drive to Seoul.<sup>88</sup> Almond reluctantly let Smith have his way.

Almond next flew to the 31st RCT forward position, where he conferred with MacLean and Faith. Faith explained to Almond that he'd lost perimeter high ground to the Chinese.<sup>89</sup> Almond was unimpressed and explained that the Chinese who had attacked them were "nothing more than the remnants of Chinese divisions fleeing north."<sup>90</sup> He felt the two officers were as shaky as Smith and his Marines. Almond told the two officers, "We're still attacking and we are going all the way to the Yalu. Don't let a bunch of Chinese laundrymen stop you."<sup>91</sup> He also told them to retake the lost high ground and prepare to attack north once MacLean's third battalion arrived.<sup>92</sup> MacLean raised no objection.<sup>93</sup>

When Almond arrived back at his headquarters, he received word that another 7th Infantry Division unit had reached the Yalu. He also learned that Walker's Eighth Army was retreating. "Like others at X Corps, Almond figured this was one more instance of Walker's loss of nerve."<sup>94</sup> Almond was still convinced the Chinese assaults were not serious.

"MacArthur did not share Almond's disregard concerning the Chinese attacks."<sup>95</sup> He cabled the Pentagon: "We face an entirely new war. This command has done everything possible within its capabilities but is now faced with conditions beyond its control and strength."<sup>96</sup> MacArthur estimated the number of Chinese troops at 200,000. Back in Washington, the president convened a hasty meeting of the National Security Council. "No decisions were made, but all agreed that war with the Soviets must be avoided."<sup>97</sup> They also concluded that they could not defeat the Chinese in Korea; after disastrous November elections, there was no doubt that America was divided and the country wanted the war to end.

MacArthur met with Walker and Almond in Japan on the evening of the 28th. He authorized Walker to fall back as far as necessary to establish a defensive line. Almond told MacArthur he believed he could continue the attack to the Yalu. MacArthur disagreed and told him to move his corps all the way back to the coast.

The situation in X Corps was just as perilous as that of the Eighth Army. Because the corps was widely dispersed through difficult terrain, the Chinese offensive against the separated corps units was more localized and the full extent of the enemy offensive was not clear to Almond due to poor communications. Almond did not fully appreciate the dire situation of MacLean's regiment.<sup>98</sup> Almond thought he could help the Eighth Army by continuing the attack and cutting the enemy's rear line of communication.

## **29 November**

During the night of 28 November and the early morning of the 29th, Chinese forces once again attacked 1-32nd's forward position. During the night, MacLean and Faith decided to withdraw back to the inlet perimeter. They had no communications with 7th Infantry Division Headquarters and made the decision on their own. During the fighting, 1st Platoon, A Company, was cut off by Chinese forces. A Company unsuccessfully counterattacked twice to reach them. As the withdrawal time approached, the battalion executive officer and the A Company commander decided protection of the rear guard was more important and that they would leave the platoon behind, which they did.

During the withdrawal, Chinese forces did not pressure the battalion. Faith's battalion reached the inlet perimeter, where they witnessed a scene described as total devastation. The 31st RCT at the inlet perimeter received intense enemy attacks from the east and west during the night. The perimeter held but by all accounts was shaky. The anti-aircraft guns attached to the FA battalion played the dominant role in defense and saved the perimeter until 1-32nd's arrival.

As 1-32nd approached the inlet perimeter, Colonel MacLean mistakenly moved toward Chinese forces, thinking they were his missing third battalion. He was wounded, captured, and disappeared. Faith entered the perimeter and met with the commanders of the 3-31st Infantry Battalion and the 57th FA Battalion, both severely wounded. Faith assumed command of all troops and worked out a plan to reorganize and defend the inlet perimeter. During the day, Faith unsuccessfully tried to seize some high ground to improve the defensibility of his perimeter. "In the end he had to settle for a very restrictive unsatisfactory perimeter, all of it dominated by high ground."<sup>99</sup> During the day, they received an air drop of supplies but not the right type or amount. The task force had no communications with the rear command post or the tank company. For the second day in a row, the tank company tried to reach the inlet perimeter but was stopped by

strong Chinese defenses at Hill 1221. Though Faith was unaware of this action, it led to aircraft reports of a relief force. “Logic and prudence dictated a withdrawal of the consolidated force to Hudong or Hagaru-ri. Yet Faith could not order a withdrawal without orders from higher authority. An unauthorized withdrawal might be seen as a cowardly act.”<sup>100</sup>

On the west side of Chosin, the 5th and 7th Marine Regiments “were still tied down near Yudam-ni in desperate need of supplies and reinforcements.”<sup>101</sup> They incurred heavy casualties during the CCF’s nighttime attacks but held the perimeter. Also the previous evening, Chinese troops had attacked the perimeter at Hagaru-ri, which was defended by one Marine infantry battalion. Major General Smith, still at Hagaru-ri, was concerned that the MSR south of his position had been cut by Chinese forces and the Hagaru-ri perimeter might not be able to hold against Chinese attacks. He directed a task force to fight north from Koto-ri to Hagaru-ri, “thus opening the supply route to his two beleaguered regiments and reinforcing the garrison at Hagaru-ri.”<sup>102</sup> Smith ordered Col. Chesty Puller, 1st Marine Regiment commander at Koto-ri, to send all possible reinforcements to Hagaru-ri—even though Puller would have been hard-pressed to provide a single man.<sup>103</sup>

### **30 November**

During the night of 29–30 November, there were a few enemy attacks against the inlet perimeter but nothing serious; the perimeter remained intact. The 31st RCT, now called Task Force Faith, received daytime airdrops of supplies but were still short of ammunition. Unbeknownst to the task force, they had been attached to the 1st Marine Division. Faith still believed a relief force would be coming from Hagaru-ri. The task force continued to use close air support against the Chinese forces surrounding the perimeter. For many of the soldiers and leaders, this was their third day of being awake and in combat. Major General Barr borrowed Major General Smith’s helicopter, flew into the perimeter, and spoke with Faith. Faith provided an update about MacLean and the number of wounded. The task force still had no communications with anyone outside their perimeter. Although many of the details of the Barr-Faith meeting have not survived, one can surmise that Barr advised Faith that his task force was now under the command of the Marines and that there weren’t enough forces at Hagaru-ri to help Faith.<sup>104</sup>

“Under ordinary circumstances, [withdrawal] would have been no great challenge for Task Force Faith. Faith had withdrawn four miles to the

[inlet perimeter] without great difficulty. The 31st CP [Command Post] at Hudong and [MacLean's tank company] were merely four more miles to the south. But the problem was the wounded. By then Faith was burdened with about 500 of them. He would have to take them out in the trucks. This would make the withdrawal very dangerous."<sup>105</sup>

When Barr returned from visiting Task Force Faith, he told Smith that Faith's biggest problem was the wounded; the task force currently had 500 casualties who needed evacuation. At midafternoon, Almond met with the two division commanders at Hagaru-ri. He was a very different man. Obviously shaken by the situation at the Chosin and the number of Chinese troops south of Hagaru-ri, Almond stated the "very survival of the corps was at stake."<sup>106</sup> Almond told them the corps would withdraw from the Chosin area. He issued plans to consolidate X Corps at Hagaru-ri then move back to the coast. Almond ordered Smith and Barr to develop a plan for the extraction of Task Force Faith and for the Marines to send an RCT to the east side of the Chosin to assist in the withdrawal.

After Almond departed, Smith, Barr, and Hodes determined that—contrary to the corps commander's instructions—Task Force Faith would have to fight its way back to Hagaru-ri on its own. The commanders needed to consolidate their units instead of further isolating them. In addition, although speed was essential, they did not want to make any rash decisions that would jeopardize their already hard-pressed forces. They questioned the plan to have the Marines move rapidly from Yudam-ni to Hagaru-ri then attack toward the inlet perimeter under intense Chinese pressure the entire time. This would risk the Marine regiments and possibly result in their isolation and destruction. Furthermore, the garrison at Hagaru-ri was short of troops and every man was needed for its defense. If Hagaru-ri fell, the forces on both sides of the Chosin would be trapped. Smith allocated Task Force Faith priority on air support. Smith also said that if the Marine regiments made it back to Hagaru-ri and Task Force Faith was still isolated, he would send one of the regiments to extricate them.<sup>107</sup> To avoid any semblance of a conflict in command, Major General Barr brought Hodes back to 7th ID headquarters.<sup>108</sup> Smith issued orders to the 5th and 7th Marine regiments to prepare to disengage and withdraw to Hagaru-ri on 1 December. In addition in one of the most controversial decisions of the battle, the 31st RCT's tank company was ordered to withdraw to Hagaru-ri. Who gave the order has never been established but one of the general officers had to approve the decision.<sup>109</sup> Still out of communications, Task Force Faith was not informed of the decision.

The Eighth Army experienced another bad day on 30 November as the withdrawing units had to run a gauntlet of Chinese fire delivered from the heights which dominated the roads. In Washington there was active discussion about using atomic weapons on the Korean battlefield. The discussion caused an uproar among other UN members fighting in Korea.<sup>110</sup>

## **1 December**

The Chinese attacks on the Task Force Faith perimeter during the night of 30 November and early morning of 1 December were more intense than any of nighttime attacks the units had previously encountered. There was serious doubt whether the perimeter could be held. The Chinese finally penetrated the perimeter and seized high ground in the northeast corner. Repeated counterattacks during the night failed to regain the high ground. Caring for the wounded was becoming increasingly difficult. The soldiers and leaders were exhausted; they had been under attack for eighty hours in sub-zero weather with little sleep. With little resupply, the dead were used as a source of clothing, weapons, and ammunition. There was very little artillery, mortar, and anti-aircraft ammunition. The weather had gotten worse each day they had been at the Chosin, which meant less air support. A pilot told the task force that there would be good weather about noon. The pilot also confirmed that there was no relief force currently on the road. Faith's executive officer and S3 recommended to him that they attempt a breakout. Faith issued the order at 1000 on 1 December, emphasizing that they should expect no help except close air support in their breakout attempt.

“In retrospect some would question why Faith chose that difficult land route rather than go out onto the frozen reservoir to . . . Hagaru-ri. The answer was that he and his staff did not believe the ice was thick enough to support the weight of the trucks in which the wounded were to be transported. The ice provides no natural cover. If it gave way—or if the CCF broke it up—the task force could be trapped in the open.”<sup>111</sup>

As the task force began to move, the Chinese put intense pressure on the perimeter. While the column moved down the road, they ran a gauntlet of heavy fire. The lead company outpaced the slow-moving, overloaded trucks carrying the wounded. The wounded were continuously hit by enemy small arms fire. The movement quickly became a series of problem-solving events as the column encountered destroyed bridges and roadblocks.

During the evening of 30 November–1 December, the CCF attacked Hagaru-ri. Without the addition of MacLean's tank company, it was doubtful the perimeter would have held.

The Marine attack to Hagaru-ri was slow and deliberate. Murray and Litzenberg used their battalions to defend against Chinese attacks on all sides of the column. The regimental commanders kept forcing the leading battalion to move faster against the resistance.

## **Aftermath**

It took the lead Marine units sixty-nine hours to cover the fourteen miles to Hagaru-ri from Yudam-ni. They arrived on 4 December with 1,500 casualties. After consolidation and casualty evacuation, on 6 December the Marines began their attack to the coast to rejoin X Corps and begin the evacuation of eastern Korea. Task Force Faith had been completely destroyed on 1 December around Hill 1221, near the location occupied just a day earlier by MacLean's tank company. Members of the task force who abandoned the convoy and crossed the frozen reservoir on foot made it to Hagaru-ri. Lt. Col. Don Faith was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. Walker initially consolidated at Pyongyang then gave orders to withdraw to the Imjin River. The Chinese occupied the city on 6 December. President Truman cabled MacArthur that the primary concern was preservation of his force rather than territory. While coordinating the defense behind the Imjin River, Lt. Gen. Walton Walker was killed in a jeep accident. MacArthur immediately called Lawton Collins. They both agreed that Walker's successor should be Lt. Gen. Matt Ridgway.

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## Chapter 8

### The Battle of Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse: The Assault of Kampfgruppe Meyer/Wunsche, 8–9 June 1944

Capt. (Canadian Army) Arthur W. Gullachsen

Within the historiography of the Normandy Campaign, the battle of Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse, France, 8–9 June 1944, is viewed as one of the most outstanding small-unit actions of the Canadian Army. The nighttime defensive battle of the 1st Battalion, the Regina Rifle Regiment (1 RRR) against a battlegroup of the 12. SS-Panzerdivision (Armored Division) *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth) of the *Waffen SS*, the military arm of the Nazi party, is a very well-known event in Canadian military history. Regrettably, apart from a limited number of German and French secondary sources, the encounter has been recounted multiple times almost exclusively from a Canadian viewpoint. The ability to gain a fuller picture of the nighttime encounter recently became more attainable with the widespread dissemination of the wartime unit war diary for SS-Panzerregiment 12 (SS Pz Rgt 12) in Normandy.<sup>1</sup>

Following the successful 6 June 1944 D-Day assault of Canadian forces on Juno Beach and their initial move inland, the 12. SS-Panzerdivision rapidly moved forces to the battle zone and utilized them piecemeal. The Germans felt an urgent need to wrest the initiative from the Allied invasion force in the eastern sector of the bridgehead and capture vital jumping off points for a larger multi-panzer division counteroffensive. They would ultimately fail in this objective.

This chapter argues that the failure of an armored battlegroup of the 12. SS-Panzerdivision to take the village of Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse was not exclusively due to poor planning, lack of coordination, and not enough infantry support. Though Canadian secondary sources on the battle state that these factors were present in abundance, the main reason for failure was the German attempt to exercise mutated armored tactics that were successfully used by the *Waffen SS* on the Eastern Front.<sup>2</sup> These rough tactics, though successful 1941–43, actually violated established German armored doctrine. The Russian enemy so familiar to the Germans fought in an entirely different manner than Canadians and had significantly fewer resources available in an average battlespace.<sup>3</sup> Often groups of German tanks with limited infantry present could achieve battlefield objectives using shock and surprise on the vast steppes of the Ukraine, where Russian

anti-tank and artillery forces were often absent. These conditions were not present in Normandy, to the dismay of the Eastern Front veterans of the *Waffen SS*. The failure of the *Waffen SS* commanders to recognize the need for greater preparation and, by default, larger and more powerful resources doomed their enterprise to failure.

The Germans possessed significant strengths during their attack on the night of 8–9 June 1944, but accompanying weaknesses ultimately assured their failure during the resulting close-quarter fighting. Attacking with an overabundance of armor on hand, including a battery of six *Wespe* (Wasp) 105-mm self-propelled howitzers to accompany two understrength companies of Panther tanks, the infantry component that was needed to construct a well-balanced battlegroup was not present at critical times.<sup>4</sup> Further weaknesses in the assault forces' infantry contingent included weak leadership, no coordination with the armor, poor start line positions, and a lack of numbers. Also, totally missing from the German plan was an effective preliminary artillery barrage to diminish the defensive capabilities of the Canadians. These factors were ruthlessly exploited by a powerful Canadian combined arms force that expertly dealt with the attacking German infantry that sought to follow in the tracks of the Panthers. Though Anglo-Canadian forces were often as unexperienced in battle as some German officers were experienced, the high level of training—gained through multiple years in the United Kingdom and North America—allowed these forces to perform at a high level.<sup>5</sup>

After assaulting Juno Beach on 6 June 1944, D-Day, 1 RRR under Lt. Col. Foster Matheson had made steady progress inland, moving from the landing beaches at Courselles sur-Mer through Reviere to a position near Le Frense-Camilly by nightfall 6 June 1944.<sup>6</sup> The following day the regiment pushed farther south in order to take up its assigned location in its parent 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade's defensive line, designated "Oak," a line roughly parallel to Caen-Bayeux railway running slightly northwest.<sup>7</sup> The designated defensive position for 1 RRR, centered on the village of Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse, was first reached by the vanguard of the battalion at 0730, supported by a troop of Sherman tanks from the 1st Hussars (6th Canadian Armored Regiment).<sup>8</sup> See figure 8.1 for geographic locations. The individual infantry line companies were not mechanized and marched into the area on foot, one by one. A complete anti-tank battery of the 3rd Canadian Anti-Tank Regiment of the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA) soon joined them, as well as a Vickers medium machine gun company of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa Machine Gun Regiment.<sup>9</sup> Matheson began immediately making plans on how to deploy his

battalion's companies in discussion with his brigade commander, Brig. Gen. Harry Foster of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade. His initial dispositions would see his companies take up positions in the area Rots, Le Villeneuve, Bretteville, and Norrey-en-Bessin—dominating the local road network, villages, and prominent geographic features.<sup>10</sup> This was in line with the Anglo-Canadian infantry doctrine circa 1944, which demanded “defended localities” if a continuously manned defensive line was not possible or feasible.<sup>11</sup>

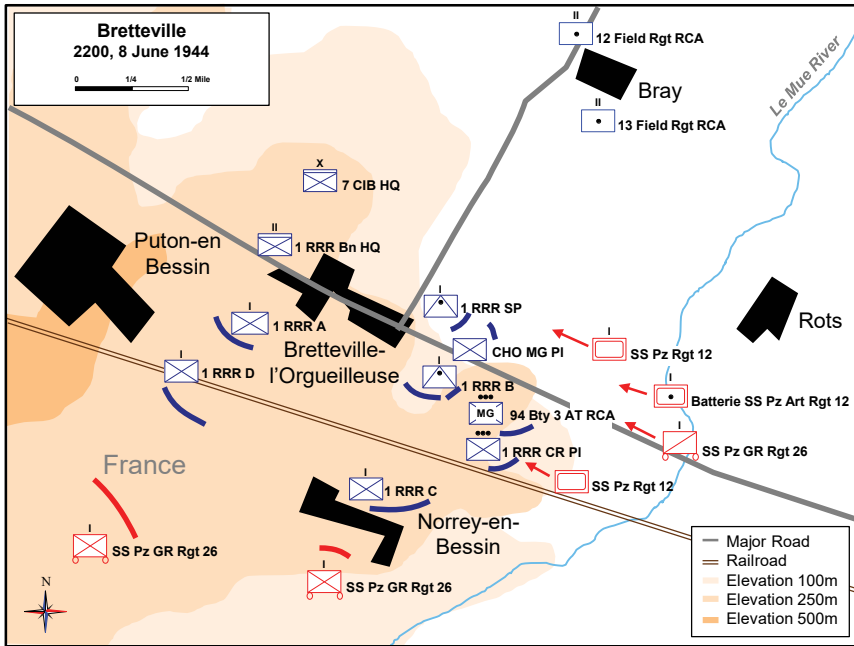


Figure 8.1. Map of 1000 meeting engagement between German and Canadian forces east of Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse, 8 June 1944. Created by Army University Press.

Roughly half of the 12. SS Panzerdivision was involved in heavy combat on 7 June 1944 against the forces of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade northwest of Caen. On the night of 7–8 June and on 8 June itself, the remainder of the division arrived piecemeal. This included all three panzer grenadier (armored infantry) *battalione* of SS-Panzerregiment 26 (SS Pz Gr Rgt 26): the 1st battalion of the tank regiment, I./SS-Panzerregiment 12 (I./SS Pz Rgt 12); the remaining battalions of the artillery regiment, SS-Panzerartillerieregiment 12 (SS Pz Art Rgt 12); and

the combat engineer battalion, SS-Panzerpionierbataillon 12 (SS Pz Pi Abt 12), as well as smaller divisional units.<sup>12</sup>

I./SS Pz Rgt 12, in transit to the front with sixty-six Panther tanks on strength and led by *Sturmbannfuhrer* (Maj.) Arnold Jurgensen, was alerted to conduct future operations northwest of Caen during the night of 7–8 June 1944. The *kompanies* (companies) were directed to depart Maizert, France, at 0930 on 8 June once fuel arrived, and the 1., 2., and 4. *Kompanies* had arrived in the vicinity of Caen by roughly 1600.<sup>13</sup>

On the night of 7–8 June 1944, the first elements of the SS-Pz Gr Rgt 26 also began to arrive south of the Brouay-Putot-Norrey-Bretteville L'Orgueilleuse area. They had been beaten in their race to these positions by the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Though not the focus of this analysis, hasty attempts by the SS Pz Gr Rgt 26 battalions to seize Norrey and Putot were beaten back by determined Canadian defensive actions. Near Norrey, a hasty attack by 1st Battalion, SS Pz Gr Rgt 26 (I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26) led by *Sturmbannfuhrer* Bernard Krause, was defeated in the early morning of 8 June 1944.<sup>14</sup> Charlie Company of 1 RRR, under Maj. Stuart Tubb, utilized artillery support in conjunction with machine gun and mortar fire to defeat this piecemeal assault, conducted at 0300 without artillery preparation.<sup>15</sup> Real or imagined time pressures spurred the Germans to attack with little in the way of supporting armor or artillery, utilizing their infantry forces piecemeal as they arrived.

Following this failed surprise night attack, the deployment of I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26 was scattered, with 1. *Kompanie* slightly east of St. Manvieu, 3. *Kompanie* just north of the same village and 2. *Kompanie* in Les Saullets near Le Mesnil-Patry. The battalion hardly appeared to be a concentrated force, its commander at this stage being hard-pressed to merely hold the frontage he had been assigned, never mind move his panzer grenadier battalion forward in a concentrated manner. It should be noted that as of midday 8 June 1944, the activities and dispositions of I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26 were the last thing on the mind of the regimental commander, *Obersturmbannfuhrer* (Lt. Col.) Wilhelm Monke. The aforementioned battle in Putot, raging all day on 8 June and involving II. and parts of III./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26, had seen the Germans capture and then subsequently be forced out of the village. What drive there was from regimental higher command for Krause's battalion to capture Norrey-en-Bessin or any 1 RRR positions is debatable. Certainly nothing was coordinated with his counterpart to the east, *Standartenfuhrer* (Col.) Kurt "Panzer" Meyer, the commander of the neighboring SS-Panzergrenadierregiment 25 (SS Pz Gr Rgt 25), on the afternoon of 8 June 1944.<sup>16</sup>

On 8 June *Standartenfuhrer* Meyer, fresh from a somewhat successful 7 June counterattack on the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade near Caen, conferred with *Brigadefuhrer* (Brig. Gen.) Fritz Witt, the 12. SS-Panzerdivision divisional commander, on the topic of his next objective. Witt directed Meyer to assist SS Pz Gr Rgt 26, then heavily engaged in battle in Putot to the west, in clearing the localities of Norrey-en-Bessin and Bretteville.<sup>17</sup> Meyer decided that he would seize Bretteville in a night attack, cutting off Norrey which could then be tackled by I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26. Despite not reaching the beaches the previous day, Meyer was confident that victory could be achieved, regardless of factors such as Allied air dominance. As previously noted, *Standartenfuhrer* Monke was heavily engaged in battle in Putot to the west, and could not attend this meeting.<sup>18</sup> In a brief encounter earlier that afternoon, Witt met with *Generalfeldmarschall* Erwin Rommel, *Heersgruppe B* (Army Group B). As Canadian military historian Terry Copp recounts, Witt “reported that one panzer battalion was waiting for dusk to attack Bretteville and Norrey-en Bessin. The intent was to secure a start line for a multi-divisional thrust to the coast”. Rommel approved this plan and then quickly departed for his headquarters.<sup>19</sup>

A significant distance existed between the frontline positions of SS Pz Gr Rgt 25 and the SS Pz Gr Rgt 26. The right wing of the newly arrived forces of the SS Pz Gr Rgt 26, I. / SS Pz Gr Rgt 26, was centered on St. Manvieu, 6.5 kilometers from other German forces.<sup>20</sup> In the eastern SS Pz Rgt 25 zone, a makeshift western flank of weak divisional support companies was strung out in a line roughly Franqueville to Gruchy north-south.<sup>21</sup> This gap was a dangerous weak point, and the overall German front line distance needed to be shortened. Also, the Bretteville-Norrey Canadian position was a dangerous salient that needed to be dealt with. By taking Bretteville, Meyer would eliminate the gap in his division’s front, shorten it at the same time and also secure the start line for further attacks.<sup>22</sup>

Continuing to plan with the regimental commander of SS Pz Rgt 12, *Obersturmbannfuhrer* Max Wunsche, Meyer then set about assembling his task force. He was extremely short of infantry reserves. All that could be spared was the 15. *Aufklarungs* (reconnaissance) *Kompanie*. This was a lightly armed force equipped with VW *Schwimmwagens* (amphibious jeeps), motorcycles, staff cars and a few light trucks. It was led by *Hauptsturmfuhrer* (Capt.) Von Buttner.<sup>23</sup> Numbering near 100 men, it had nowhere near the capability of a fully equipped panzer grenadier battalion, three of which would be the standard force required (3:1 ratio) for the task of successfully attacking an enemy battalion-sized strong point. Attached to this small infantry force was an overabundance of armor in the way of

roughly twenty-five operational Panther tanks of the 1. and 4. *Kompanies*, led by *Hauptsturmführers* Berlin and Pfeiffer and accompanied by *Sturmbannführer* Jurgensen, the *abteilung* (detachment) commander.<sup>24</sup>

There was nothing new about conducting a night attack involving tanks for Wunsche or Meyer, who had practiced night attacks multiple times on the Russian front in the winter of 1942–43. Although German armored doctrine relates: “Offensive operation in fog or dusk could be necessary if it serves to destroy an already shaken enemy and cause them to disintegrate completely,” the enemy in this case was not shaken, nor were they about to disintegrate.<sup>25</sup>

Much has been made of the number of tanks involved in the German battlegroup, with many sources differing on the number. As previously noted, the *abteilung* only had sixty-six Panthers on hand at the time of the invasion versus its authorized level of seventy-nine tanks, and not all *kompanies* were up to strength.<sup>26</sup> A 1 June 1944 readiness report from the division states of fifty Panthers on hand at that point, forty-eight were combat ready, a readiness rate of ninety-six percent.<sup>27</sup> While considering this figure it must be reflected that the tanks were brand new, combat operations had not begun and long route marches had not occurred. Also present was the six-vehicle-strong 2. *Batterie* (Battery)/SS Pz Art Rgt 12 with its *Wespe* self-propelled howitzers. This force was led by acting *batterie Chef* (commander) *Untersturmführer* (2nd Lt.) Erwin Hoke. Additional armored fighting vehicles included at least one Czech 38(t) 20-mm *flakpanzer* (anti-aircraft tank) of the Panther *abteilung flak* (anti-aircraft) *zug* (platoon).

While Meyer should have taken care to further coordinate his operations by holding an orders group with the nearby infantry commanders of I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26 *kompanies* or contacted a liaison officer, no evidence exists that he did. The involvement of these panzer grenadier units bordering his objective would potentially be vital to his success or failure. Also, no evidence can be found regarding any sophisticated German indirect artillery fire plan or organized artillery support of the operation.<sup>28</sup>

*Sturmbannführer* Wunsche, meeting with the Panther *kompanie* commanders on the afternoon of 8 June, briefed them on the upcoming attack on Bretteville and clearing the Le Bourg–Rots area due east of the village.<sup>29</sup> He made it clear to them they would be the vanguard of the attack. The allocation of roughly twenty-five operational Panthers and the *Wespe* *batterie* to take a small village was a huge allocation of armored resources for the task at hand, especially by German 1944 standards. This may have been in part to mitigate the weakness in the accompanying infantry forces



and the poor performance to that point of I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26, the one SS panzer grenadier battalion in the area which had been badly repulsed at Norrey the previous night.

The final armored objective decided by Wunsche and Meyer was to secure the high ground northwest of Bretteville, Point 68, after supporting the grenadiers in clearing the village area of enemy resistance. The H-hour (designated hour) of the attack was decided for 2130, partially to negate the Allied air threat and partially to achieve surprise at last light with the violent swarming of armored vehicles onto the objective as per German armored doctrine.<sup>30</sup> Several German tank commanders and panzer grenadier *zug* commanders conducted a recce of the Canadian dispositions near the river Mue in the afternoon of 8 June 1944. These movements were observed by the Canadians, who noted the positions and amount of armor moving in the area. Short but violent artillery bombardments, called “Stonks,” were called in on the Germans on several occasions that afternoon. These were directed by the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA) forward observation officer (FOO) assigned to Baker Company, 1 RRR, Lt. T. J. O’Brennan.<sup>31</sup>

The area of Bretteville and Norrey defended by the 1 RRR was made up of flat, open beet and wheat fields and was broken up by dense tree lines. Almost all the buildings were constructed of stone masonry, making each one a potential bunker. Around the villages were 2.5-meter-tall walls that posed significant barriers to armored movement or infantry assault. South of Bretteville was the Caen-Bayeux railway line, which ran slightly northwest.<sup>32</sup> On his arrival in the area, Lieutenant Colonel Matheson sited his headquarters in the center of Bretteville. Able Company of Capt. Ron Shawcross was positioned in the village itself and encircled the battalion headquarters located near the village church.<sup>33</sup> Baker Company with its new commander, Maj. Eric Syme, was initially positioned in the neighboring village of Rots to the east but by the evening was pulled back to the open fields broken by tree lines 200 meters east of Bretteville, with its front positioned east.<sup>34</sup> Charlie Company under Major Tubb was installed in Norrey-en-Bessin in an all-around defense. Dog Company under its new commander, Capt. Gordon Brown, was initially placed in La Villeneuve, southeast of Rots, but was withdrawn at the same time as Baker Company. Its new defensive position was southwest of Bretteville at Cardonville Ferme (Cardonville Farm). The farm complex was a series of walled-in buildings with an orchard and a flax production facility just north of the rail line.<sup>35</sup>

Interspaced within the 1 RRR positions were the 6-pounder anti-tank guns of 1 RRR Support Company’s Anti-Tank Platoon, and one complete

battery (94 Battery with two troops) of the 3rd Canadian Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA, also with 6-pounder anti-tank guns. In accordance with Anglo-Canadian doctrine, each gun's field of fire interlocked with other nearby anti-tank guns to provide maximum firepower on any enemy attacking armor.<sup>36</sup> The total strength for the 1 RRR company positions was fourteen 6-pounders, an impressive amount of firepower. These were supplied with discarding sabot ammunition, which was more than adequate for penetrating nearly all German panzers apart from the frontal armor of the heavier Panthers and Tiger Is.<sup>37</sup> While not Panther tanks, the 6-pounder anti-tank gun was a formidable weapon which could fire rounds at 2,000 feet per second and had an accurate flat trajectory. It also had a total of 90-degree traverse and could fire up to twelve rounds per minute. It was very mobile, easily manhandled into position, and could be towed by a jeep or the tracked Universal Carrier. Further support was given by at least two platoons of A Company, the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa Machine Gun Regiment, with their Vickers medium machine guns. At least one medium machine gun was assigned to each company position.



Figure 8.2. A 1st Battalion, Regina Rifle Regiment rifleman in Bretteville l'Orgueilleuses, June 1944. Courtesy of Libraries and Archives Canada.

Support in the way of indirect field artillery was supplied by the 12th and 13th Field Regiments, RCA, who were on call to carry out pre-planned defensive fire missions.<sup>38</sup> Each regiment had a full complement of twenty-four 105-mm self-propelled “Priest” howitzers. Each 1 RRR company position had an RCA FOO assigned to it. Due to the reported heavy presence of panzers to the immediate south and east, both field regiments were moved to one kilometer north of Bray on the afternoon of 8 June 1944, and were back to being fully operational by the evening.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of the increased German activity during the afternoon of 8 June, Lieutenant Colonel Matheson very much expected an armored assault to be launched imminently and placed his battalion on high alert.<sup>40</sup> Of interest and ignored in previous accounts of this battle is the proximity of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade headquarters during the battle. No more than 100 meters from the headquarters of Matheson was the headquarters of Brig. Harry Foster, located in the hamlet of Haut de Bretteville, attached to the northern part of the village.<sup>41</sup>

As planned at 2130, the Meyer/Wunsche battlegroup began to advance.<sup>42</sup> No indirect artillery barrage to support their attack was fired, in direct violation of established wartime German combined arms armored doctrine, which states: “In spite of all their firepower, tanks are dependent on the support of extensive indirect fire.”<sup>43</sup> Doctrine was followed, however, with regard to basic *zug* (platoon) tactics, with the Panther advance to contact being conducted in staggered formation on the Caen-Bayeux highway, Route Nationale 13 (RN13), an improved paved two-lane road.<sup>44</sup> Leaving Franqueville and driving west, the Panthers entered the hamlet of Le Bourg, attached to Rots to the north, and encountered no resistance.<sup>45</sup> The lead 4. *Kompanie* reached this hamlet at approximately 2140, with the grenadiers of the 15. *AufklarungsKompanie* of SS Pz Gr Rgt 25 riding on the rear engine decks. The reconnaissance panzer grenadier’s Volkswagen *Schwimmwagens* and motorcycles had been largely left in the rear, though some were present. *Hauptsturmführer* Pfeiffer then ordered 4. *Kompanie* into column formation and with himself in the lead crossed the village bridge over the river Mue; his *Kompanie* was followed by the tanks of 1. *Kompanie* under *Hauptsturmführer* Berlin. On exiting the village of La Villeneuve west of the Mue, wedge formation was resumed with 4. *Kompanie* on the north of the R13 and 1. *Kompanie* to the south, the tanks roaring through the open fields at thirty-five kilometers per hour. *Hauptsturmführer* Von Butter, the commander of 15. *Kompanie*, rode on the engine deck of one of the lead 4. *Kompanie* tanks with his command staff. Meyer

was himself riding in a motorcycle sidecar combination near Wunsche's *Befehlspanther* (command tank) on the main highway.

Anticipating an attack from this direction, the 1 RRR Carrier Platoon with its tracked Universal Carriers of Support Company and two Cameron Highlanders Vickers machine gun crews had been dispatched by Colonel Matheson to form a reinforced combat outpost to the east of Bretteville. Placing themselves 200 meters to the east of Maj. Eric Syme's Baker Company facing east near a rise along the RN13 highway, they had good fields of fire in a reverse slope position. It seems Matheson wished to detect and possibly disrupt any attack with these forces in a manner similar to what occurred near Norrey on the night of 7–8 June. His plan was to utilize this reinforced combat outpost position to do so, in accordance with Anglo-Canadian infantry defensive doctrine.<sup>46</sup> But the attack on Norrey the night previous did not include Panther tanks, and to what extent this grouping could be supported by the Baker Company positions is unclear.<sup>47</sup> The Germans were rapidly approaching this improvised skirmish line at 2145, by which time the Canadians had not yet completed digging in. The 6-pounder anti-tank guns of "K" troop, 105 Battery of the 3rd Canadian Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA—temporarily attached to 94 Battery to form a composite battery—were sited both south and north of the highway in support of the Carrier Platoon skirmish line and within the main positions of Baker Company.<sup>48</sup> The Canadians, on high alert, were ready for the Germans.

At this point, first contact was made. The lead Panthers, coming over the rise in the cornfields east of Bretteville along the RN13 highway, stopped to observe on this crest. These Panthers, one of them commanded by *Hauptsturmführer* Pfeiffer, received a violent volley of Canadian heavy machine gun and anti-tank fire.<sup>49</sup> Thus began the first phase of the battle of Bretteville that lasted from 2145 to 2330 and consisted of a high-intensity firefight between the Panther *kompanies* and the Canadian defenders as the Germans advanced on the village from the east and maneuvered to the south as shown in figure 8.1. This firefight was to destroy the majority of the outlying combat outpost of the 1 RRR Carrier Platoon and Cameron Highlander machine gun crews as well as engage the majority of Baker Company positions to the east of Bretteville. During the process, more than one Panther tank was destroyed or disabled and heavy casualties were inflicted on the accompanying *Waffen SS* panzergrenadiers by the ferocity of Canadian defensive fire.

On receiving the first Canadian volley of anti-tank rounds and medium machine gun fire, *Hauptsturmführer* Pfeiffer ordered the rest of 4. *Kompanie* forward and ordered the village buildings be set on fire to expose

Canadian positions in the fading light. Taking casualties in their positions on the rear hulls of the tanks, the grenadiers dismounted and began to follow the tanks on foot. Panther “404,” the *kompanie* commander’s vehicle, destroyed a lone Canadian Sherman tank located at the entrance to the village after a short firefight. It is unknown to what Canadian armored regiment this tank belonged, but it was not an artillery observation vehicle.<sup>50</sup> It has been incorrectly reported that at this point Pfeiffer’s tank was hit and set ablaze shortly afterward by a Canadian anti-tank gun.<sup>51</sup> There is no evidence this occurred. Another Panther, “427” of *Unterscharfuhrer* (Cpl.) Klaus Hartmann was certainly destroyed and did burn out. Canadian artillery from both the 12th and 13th Field regiments, RCA also joined the battle with defensive fire tasks, hammering the Germans.<sup>52</sup> The 1. *Kompanie* Panthers, moving west to the south of 4. *Kompanie*, also came into contact with the anti-tank guns and machine guns and joined in the intense firefight. Roughly twenty-five Panthers engaged the RCA anti-tank gunners, who were outnumbered by at least three-to-one odds. The Panther’s machine gun and cannon fire raked positions of the outlying Carrier Platoon position and then drove right over it, destroying six Universal Carriers in the process.<sup>53</sup> Any survivors ran back to the Baker Company positions, the advancing Panthers hot on their heels.

During this first portion of the firefight, the tankers also claimed to have destroyed or disabled four anti-tank gun positions near Bretteville with high-explosive rounds, utilizing fire and movement in the semi-darkness. The Panther crews were fighting in accordance with their armored doctrine, which stated, “When it comes to taking position and opening fire, targets are to be destroyed in rapid succession, followed by a prompt change in position.”<sup>54</sup> All the 6-pounders of K Troop, 105 Battery of the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA were thus silenced, vastly reducing the defensive power of the Canadians.<sup>55</sup>

To rectify this inequality, the remaining RCA gunners of G Troop, 94 Battery began to manhandle their 6-pounders to face east to engage the Panthers.<sup>56</sup> Positioned to defend the remainder of the village, the crews frantically maneuvered their guns to orient them to the south and east and took up the fight.<sup>57</sup> The Panther crews, now bunching up in front of the village in the semi-darkness, were following their doctrine that stated: “Limited intervals are needed in darkness so that visual contact can be maintained.”<sup>58</sup> But by maintaining this close formation in the limited visibility of the burning village, they did not adequately disperse in the face of enemy fire. It was difficult for tactical spacing distances to be judged by the tank commanders in the low light of the late evening, and the crew’s

focus was on engaging the anti-tank guns. During this point in the battle, the six *Wespe* 105-mm self-propelled howitzers also entered the fray. They appear to have taken up positions on the rise or behind it, and engaged the Baker Company positions with some success. At this point during the firefight, many Panthers were being hit with anti-tank shells, some multiple times. It appears Wunsche then ordered the *Wespes* back to the village of Rots after they had fired several salvos, fearing they would be lost to the anti-tank fire.<sup>59</sup> It is estimated they re-crossed the Mue River before midnight, having only lost a Volkswagen *Kubelwagen* and suffering a small number of casualties. It can be concluded that their direct contribution to the battle was minimal.

As a result of the entrance to the village looming up in front of them with its one street, the mass of 4. *Kompanie* Panthers was now bunched up in front of the objective. This made things easier for the Canadian RCA anti-tank gunners targeting the Panthers and the 1 RRR machine gunners who engaged German infantry near the tanks. The attached panzer grenadiers of the 15. *Kompanie* during this period took heavy casualties as they attempted to dismount and fight their way on foot through the positions of Baker Company, which the Panthers had now reached. Largely unseen by the Panther tank crews, the Baker Company riflemen waited for the Panthers to drive by before engaging the following panzer grenadiers, as per the direction of the 1 RRR commander, Lieutenant Colonel Matheson. The 15. *Kompanie* commander, *Hauptsturmführer* Von Buttner, was killed during the initial part of the firefight; he and his command team were literally shot off the rear deck of a Panther. Also shot was the driver of the motorcycle combination which *Standartenführer* Meyer was riding. The motorcycle itself was destroyed, the fuel tank explosion briefly starting Meyer's uniform on fire. After recovering, Meyer at this point was still able to move on foot and communicate with the panzer grenadier commanders, but he had no access to a wireless net to control or influence the armored group except by running up to Wunsche's Panther command tank.<sup>60</sup> His ability to lead and influence the battle at this point was diminished.

At this point in the battle, just before midnight, whatever advances the grenadiers of 15. *Kompanie* had made toward Bretteville had stalled in the middle of the Baker Company positions. The Germans found themselves pinned down in the ditches on each side of the highway, this being the only cover apart from treelines bordering fields. They were suppressed by defensive small arms fire from the Canadian infantry positions that were difficult to locate and silence in the semidarkness. While the Panthers

could churn through the Canadian positions, crews were unable to identify and engage individual fighting trenches in the darkness.

Despite having lost wireless communication with the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters shortly after the German attack began, 1 RRR battalion headquarters stood firm and continued to direct the fight. The remaining soldiers of Maj. Eric Syme's Baker Company continued to fire from their surviving positions. The darkness was their friend, as the Panther crew commanders had limited visibility by the light of the burning buildings. The RCA anti-tank gunners also continued to fire, refusing to be suppressed by the Panther cannon and machine gun fire. RCA Sgt. Herman Dumas of "G" Troop, 94 Battery moved a 6-pounder from one position to another, firing it singlehandedly from his position along a Bretteville hedgerow and reported hitting at least four Panthers.<sup>61</sup> RCA Bombardier Cyril D. Askin also got a damaged 6-pounder working again and reportedly hit at least three Panthers.<sup>62</sup> Vital to the efforts of the RCA 6-pounder crews were the actions of 1 RRR rifleman Frank Wolfe, who fired two-inch mortar magnesium illumination flares all night, blinding the Panther crews and exposing the tank positions for the anti-tank guns.<sup>63</sup> While German doctrine indicated "signal flares, parachute flares, or haystacks set on fire by gunfire will assist the tanks in locating the objective," a similar effort was being directed against them by Canadian two-inch mortar crews. Firing magnesium flares all night, they were determined to blind the tank crews.<sup>64</sup> Each two-inch illumination round had a parachute attached, which lengthened the illumination effect.<sup>65</sup>

After watching his armored group bombard the village with all weapons for at least 90 minutes, Wunsche ordered a thrust into the village shortly before 2330 when he perceived Canadian defensive fire to be weakening. This began the second phase of the battle, which lasted from 2330 to 0045 and consisted of determined German armored and infantry thrusts into the village of Bretteville from the west and south. These assaults were successfully repulsed by the Canadian defenders, who managed to continue to inflict high armored and infantry losses on the Germans.

On reaching the eastern entrance to the village, the I. *Zug* of 4. *Kompanie*, led by Panther "418" of *Unterscharfuhrer* Muhlhausen, began to push up the main street followed by another Panther. The II. *Zug* pushed left of the village with the III. *Zug* remained in depth. As the two Panthers began their attempt to push down the main street, Meyer reorganized the 15. *Kompanie* infantry forces to continue the assault. He assigned command of the *kompanie*, now vastly reduced from its original 100 men, to *Untersturmfuhrer* Reinhold Fuss, commander of 15. *Kompanie*'s I. *Zug*.

Meyer's new order for the surviving panzer grenadiers was as follows: I. *Zug* was to assault right along the east-west road and II. *Zug*, under *Untersturmführer* (2nd Lt.) Alfred Fehling, was to assault left. The objective for both *zugs* was the church at the far end of the village. III. *Zug* under *Hauptsturmführer* (Technical Sgt.) Wilhelm Boigk was to be in depth.<sup>66</sup>

Shortly after Panther "418" approached the 1 RRR battalion headquarters and the positions of Able Company, it was hit at short range by a round from a Canadian projector, infantry, anti-tank (PIAT) hand-held anti-tank weapon. It was then hit several more times by PIAT fire and finally drove over a necklace of Type 75 anti-tank grenades. This final explosion rendered it immobile, its track broken.<sup>67</sup> The Panther crew was then shot as they attempted to dismount, and the burning hulk then blocked traffic. Seeing this, the following second Panther began firing on the houses near the first Panther, accidentally hitting it and setting it on fire.<sup>68</sup> Wunsche was thus forced to abandon his attempt to drive right through the village and ordered the remaining Panthers of 4. *Kompanie* to pull back and regroup to the east of Bretteville.

About the same time that Panther "418" was destroyed, the re-formed panzergrenadiers of 15. *Kompanie* launched their planned attack. The I. *Zug* managed to fight its way to the center of town after a large small arms battle, but with only six men remained of the original force of thirty. The II. *Zug* was stopped in its advance on the left flank by Bren light machine gun fire and pinned down after it ran into the positions of Able Company, 1 RRR near the left side of the eastern village entrance.<sup>69</sup> During both these advances, Able Company, 1 RRR put up fierce resistance with all available weapons. Despite reaching the center of the town and entering the church, a reduced I. *Zug* party led by *Untersturmführer* Fuss could not control the area; only a few members of this group would evade eventual death or capture. On reaching the church, all they could do was hold on and await another push by the Panthers into the village. This armored support never arrived.

On observing the 4. *Kompanie* Panthers pull-back to regroup, Canadian morale and resistance surged. It is unclear why this occurred, but possibly the Canadian soldiers sensed the Germans were withdrawing and saw an opportunity to aggressively open fire. The regrouped 4. *Kompanie* responded to the increased Canadian fire by firing high-explosive (HE) rounds and machine gun fire into the entrance to the burning village and onto suspected Canadian positions, causing further fires. This second sporadic bombardment by the Panthers lasted an estimated forty-five minutes; it must not have been too intense as Panthers only carried seventy-nine



rounds, half of which were HE. 1. *Kompanie* under *Hauptsturmführer* Berlin was still engaging targets on the southern portion of the village at this point, having previously advanced on the south side of the RN13.

Following the failed drive through the village at roughly 0045, 4. *Kompanie* was then ordered to bypass the village to the south and capture the high ground northwest of Bretteville along the RN13 west of the village. After 4. *Kompanie* passed by the south, 1. *Kompanie* was directed to continue to try to crush resistance from the southwest and try to press into the village from this direction. 4. *Kompanie* travelled at high speed in wedge formation with turrets at forty-five degrees. It was led by III. *Zug*, with the II. *Zug* echeloned right and the I. *Zug* echeloned left. As the mass of tanks bypassed south of the village, they were silhouetted by fires raging in the village and again received heavy anti-tank gun fire. Despite receiving many hits, the 4. *Kompanie* Panthers cleared the western entrance to the village and again straddled the RN13. They then drove east onto the high ground to the north of the village of Putot, west of Bretteville. It is stated within the I./SS-Panzerregiment 12 war diary that after reaching point 68 to the north of Putot, the Panthers “came to a halt and occupied what they describe as a high feature” on which no enemy activity was detected.<sup>70</sup> 4. *Kompanie* then assumed an all-around defensive position.

At 0045, just as 4. Panther *Kompanie* was pushing south and bypassing the village to reach the Point 68 high ground, the 1. *Kompanie* was ordered to push south then north to fight their way into the village from the southwest. To get into position, some Panther *zugs* travelled as far south as Norrey in their route, and were observed by the Charlie Company 1 RRR defenders but not engaged in the dark. The I. *Zug* of 1. *Kompanie* however pushed too close to the southern portion of Bretteville and was illuminated, receiving heavy anti-tank fire which hit all three tanks in this *zug* simultaneously. Panther “116” burned out in this exchange, “115” was severely damaged, and “117” managed to survive despite many hits. The still-mobile-but-damaged “115” Panther picked up the crew of “116” and withdrew back with the third Panther to the east of Bretteville, where it met up with the *kompanie* commander SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Berlin.<sup>71</sup>

Shortly after this, a II. *Zug* Panther of 1. *Kompanie* commanded by *Untersturmführer* Paul Teichert managed to push right into the village from the south, but almost immediately was immobilized by PIAT and anti-tank gunfire. In an effort to save him, a force of three III. *Zug* Panthers pushed into Bretteville from the west to pick up the dismounted crew. Fighting furiously, the Panther crews subdued the Canadian positions enough to rescue the crew and retrieve Teichert’s Panther, which was towed away.<sup>72</sup>

Following this, a tank of III. *Zug* was badly damaged by anti-tank fire, its cupola being shot off.<sup>73</sup>

Following a period of fighting in the village up to roughly 0200, the remaining Panthers of 1. *Kompanie* withdrew from the village surroundings. It is unclear whether Wunsche or Berlin ordered the 1. *Kompanie* to disengage and pull back to the southwest; they may have pulled back due to their losses in the village itself. Possibly Wunsche mistakenly felt that the village had been sufficiently suppressed at this time to allow remaining grenadiers of 15. *Kompanie* that were in the area to go in and “mop up.” Regardless, the remains of 1. *Kompanie*, less the I. *Zug* which had withdrawn, regrouped near the orchard of the Cardonville Ferme complex shortly after 0200.

Following these actions, a third phase of the battle took place between 0200 and 0630. With the Panther *kompanies* holding new positions near Cardonville Ferme orchard and Point 68, several sporadic clashes occurred. These involved renewed German piecemeal infantry assaults into Bretteville and a surprise encounter for the German tank crews near Cardonville Ferme. This was followed by a determined German infantry assault on the farm compound itself later on as dawn broke, curiously without armored support. None of these actions were decisive or resulted in favourable results for the German forces; the Canadian defenders continued to hold on and resist all attempts to evict them from their positions. Daylight would see the Germans withdraw for good from the battlefield at approximately 0630.

Beginning at roughly 0200 and sometime after the failed 15. *Kompanie* two *zug* assault into Bretteville, several bizarre incidents occurred in the village. First, a German dispatch rider on a motorcycle, ignorant of German and Canadian positions and the results of the first battles in the village, was shot as he attempted to drive past the battalion headquarters near the church. Shortly afterward, a German *Kubelwagen* staff car drove up with a driver who dismounted and began to curiously look around. A PIAT bomb was fired at the vehicle and he was killed. Third, two light trucks full of German panzer grenadiers arrived in the center of the village at roughly 0300. This may have been the previously held-in-reserve III. *Zug* of 15. *Kompanie*. The first truck was destroyed by Canadian Able Company infantry with PIAT bombs. The second truck reversed out of the village at full speed.<sup>74</sup> Lastly at roughly 0315, a German 38(t) anti-aircraft 20-mm *flakpanzer* was destroyed in front of the burning hulk of Panther “418,” also by PIAT bombs fired from the second story of a building.

These reckless attempts speak to a possible mistaken German belief that only small pockets of Canadian resistance were remaining in the village.

As previously noted, at approximately 0100, six 1. *Kompanie* Panthers—their number minus those withdrawn or destroyed earlier—assembled in an all-around defense near the orchard of Cardonville Ferme, their engines idling. Thinking the farm compound free of Canadian troops, they were totally unaware of Dog Company 1 RRR led by Captain Brown, who was charged with defending it. The 1 RRR riflemen maintained utter silence not to alert the Germans. Gunners of the attached 1 RRR Anti-Tank Platoon section 6-pounders also kept silent, uneasy at the prospect of alerting the Panther crews and starting a firefight that they could not potentially win.

The uneasy coexistence of the infantry and Panthers was broken shortly after 0230 when a 1 RRR Dog Company rifleman shot down members of a dismounted Panther crew.<sup>75</sup> The Panthers then drove off and poured concentrated fire into the farm buildings, suppressing the 1 RRR riflemen and anti-tank gunners. At this point had any German panzer grenadier forces arrived, it is highly likely Cardonville Ferme would have fallen. None arrived as the Panthers raged, forcing Captain Brown and Company Sgt. Maj. Jimmy Jackson to hunker down in the main farmhouse. Without supporting infantry, the tanks could not evict Dog Company, even though they did inflict significant casualties on the Canadians. By staying calm and remaining in their positions, Dog Company withstood a deluge of high-explosive and machine gun fire.

By 0400, an effective stalemate had occurred in Bretteville, Cardonville Ferme, and the general vicinity. Any further German infantry assault into the village of Bretteville was impossible, and the 1 RRR and RCA soldiers inside the village could not destroy the Panthers due to the darkness and their distance from Canadian positions. Established German armored doctrine was very clear: “The tanks have to function as the fire bases while the infantry takes the vanguard role in the assault.”<sup>76</sup> Wunsche led the Panther group in a manner entirely opposite to this maxim, attempting to replace the missing infantry with tanks to try to force the assault to succeed. Also, neither German heavy artillery nor supporting mortar fire was present, and the Panzers were forced to attempt to fulfill this role as well. Supporting the 1 RRR throughout the battle in Bretteville was the artillery of the RCA units of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. As previously mentioned, these forces consisting of the 12th and 13th Field regiments, RCA, were based near the village of Bray two kilometers to the north. Nearly all of their support in the six hours of battle so far had been given to Able and Baker Companies in Bretteville. Despite all of Matheson’s efforts, he was

nearly totally out of contact with Dog and Charlie companies, 1 RRR.<sup>77</sup> The telephone lines had been cut by Panther tank tracks.

Quoting Canadian military historian Mark Zuehlke: “Having committed too few infantrymen, Meyer was unable to support the Panthers properly.”<sup>78</sup> Seeing the ineffectiveness of the Panthers, *Obersturmbannfuhrer* Wunsche—possibly directed by Meyer—attempted one last time to retrieve the situation by driving to the vicinity of Norrey at 0350 to attempt to make contact with 3. *Kompanie* of I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26, in the hope of rallying these infantry forces for a continued assault. No panzer grenadiers could be found.<sup>79</sup> As his command tank was receiving heavy Canadian fire, Wunsche quickly drove back to Bretteville. Despite making an utmost effort for the better part of six hours, Meyer and Wunsche then met and at 0430 made the call to pull all forces back to the vicinity of the village of Rots, their start point.

On hearing the radio command to withdraw, both Pfeiffer and Berlin moved their *kompanies* back to Rots.<sup>80</sup> While coming back from Point 68, the 4. Panther *Kompanie* again received heavy anti-tank fire near the edge of Bretteville. Panther “415” had its turret penetrated by 6-pounder anti-tank fire, wounding its commander, *Untersturmfuhrer* Johannes Hillig. To add insult to injury, Wunsche was hit by fragments from a Canadian artillery round as he dismounted from his command Panther on his return to Rots.<sup>81</sup> On arrival in Rots, the weakened Panther *kompanies* reorganized themselves and took up securing tasks facing west.

In an inexplicable conclusion to the third and final phase of the battle—sometime after the withdrawal of Meyer and Wunsche—2. *Kompanie*, I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26 finally made an attempt to attack Cardonville Ferme, illustrating the complete lack of any coordination with Meyer or the Panthers.<sup>82</sup> Captain Brown, who commanded Dog Company of the 1 RRR, easily handled this attack by utilizing all machine guns at his disposal and requesting artillery support.<sup>83</sup> To decisively beat back the attack, Lieutenant Colonel Matheson—now finally in touch with Brown via radio—called in 105-mm artillery fire from the 13th Field Regiment, RCA, which drove the attackers back to their start lines.<sup>84</sup> Why the Germans waited until first light and the Panthers’ withdrawal before making their move is beyond comprehension. It illustrates a complete lack of any planning between Meyer, Wunsche, Monke, and I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26 commander *Sturmabfuhrer* Bernard Krause. Dog Company, now reduced to roughly fifty men due to extensive casualties in the course of the earlier Panther bombardment and the morning battle, had prevailed again.<sup>85</sup>

Final German losses in the Meyer-Wunsche battlegroup were ninety-one total casualties and thirty-one dead, the majority being in the 15. *Aufklarungs Kompanie*, SS Pz Gr Rgt 25. The I./SS Pz Rgt 12 suffered three Panthers completely destroyed: 427, 418, and 116. Panthers 115, 128, and others were badly damaged, some having to be towed away from the battlefield.<sup>86</sup> One 20-mm *flakpanzer* built on the tracked Czech 38(t) chassis was also destroyed, as well as at least one motorcycle, one staff car, one jeep, and one truck. In the hapless I./SS Pz Gr Rgt 26, total panzer grenadier casualties were sixty-one, with twelve panzer grenadiers killed.

Canadian losses in the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA's 94 (Composite) Battery included seventeen missing, five killed, and five wounded—almost all from K Troop, which was overrun along with the 1 RRR Carrier Platoon. At least eight Universal Carriers were destroyed and one was captured by the Germans. Accounts differ regarding how many anti-tank guns were lost, but a reasonable estimate would be a half-dozen. "A" Company of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa suffered eleven killed and ten wounded or missing. The 1st Battalion Regina Rifle Regiment suffered forty-two killed in the 8–9 June period and suffered an unknown number of wounded.<sup>87</sup> French military historian Georges Bernages listed its total casualties as approximately 150 men for the 8–9 June nighttime battle.<sup>88</sup> In addition, an unknown number of Canadian jeeps and trucks were destroyed.



Figure 8.3. From left: *Sturmbannführer* Arnold Jurgensen, *Obersturmbannführer* Max Wunsche, *Sturmbannführer* Bernard Krause, *Standartenführer* Kurt Meyer photographed on the morning of 9 June 1944 in Rots following the failed attack on Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse. Courtesy of SS-PK Wilfried Woscidlo.

Throughout the time the 1 RRR held out at Cardonville Ferme, Norrey, and Bretteville, no relief force of Allied armor arrived to support the unit in the thick of the six-hour battle against vastly superior armored forces. No information has been found to establish if this option was ever considered by the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade staff. The Anglo-Canadian armored practice of “harboring” in the hours of darkness forced the RCA units, Cameron machine gun crews, and infantry forces of the 1 RRR to fight it out the best they could without tank support. In response to 1 RRR headquarters inquiries regarding armor reinforcement, the terse response from 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters was that “tank support would arrive at dawn.”<sup>89</sup> To the average soldier in the midst of a firefight with multiple Panther tanks, and considering that said firefight lasted six hours, these words were cold comfort. That the Canadian brigade headquarters, with multiple Panthers nearby within 100 meters, did not force the issue speaks to a steadfast reluctance to rapidly commit Canadian armored reserves. The concept of night employment of armor appears to have been very much anathema to senior Canadian commanders but, given the circumstances, its employment could hardly have made matters worse for the 1 RRR defenders.<sup>90</sup>

In conclusion, the failure of the German armored battlegroup to succeed in driving the Canadians out of Bretteville was the result of the Germans’ failure to properly exercise their established tactical doctrine and their failure to allocate the infantry and artillery resources needed for the mission. Though stronger German infantry forces were present to the south near Norrey and Cardonville Ferme, little if any coordination was made with them. Success was totally dependent on the assault of weak 15. *Kompanie*. This failure in planning was compounded by a complete lack of heavy artillery fire support, despite German armored doctrine stating: “In spite of all their firepower, tanks are dependent on the support of extensive indirect fire.”<sup>91</sup> The lack of a decisive impact made by the large group of Panthers illustrates the limitations of direct fire support. The Canadian commander of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, Brig. Harry Foster, remarked that no attempt was made to exploit the flanks of the 1 RRR battlegroup.<sup>92</sup> Rather than avoid the strong point of Bretteville altogether, a wiser option would have been to bypass it. Meyer’s attempt to use shock and brute force was met by an equally determined foe who exploited the German weaknesses present to the maximum.

## Notes

1. Vojensky Historicky Arhiv, Praha, Kriegstagebuch No. 1 I./SS-Panzerregiment 12, 1944.

2. Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 72–73.

3. Kurt Meyer, *Grenadiers* (Mechanicsburg, PA : Stackpole Books, 2005), 166. On 10 February 1943, Meyer conducted a surprise attack on the village of Merefa, Ukraine, with no artillery or air support preparation. In this attack, the column of Meyer's *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* Panzer Grenadier Division battle-group simply drove into the village at high speed, surprising the Russians, who then tried to escape into a nearby wood.

4. Stephan Cazenave, *Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend sur le Front de Normandie: SS-Panzer Regiment 12 Normandie 1944* (Bayeux, France: Maranes Editions, 2014), 181.

5. John English, *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2009), 51. Units of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division had the better part of two and half years to prepare for the campaign in Normandy.

6. Mark Milner, *Stopping the Panzers: The Untold Story of D-Day* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 113.

7. Milner, 206.

8. David Greentree, *Osprey Combat Series/Normandy 1944: Hitlerjugend Soldier versus Canadian Soldier* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2018), 44. The official designation of the 1st Hussars was the 6th Canadian Armored Regiment.

9. Milner, *Stopping the Panzers*, 260–61.

10. Milner, 217–8.

11. “Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion: 1944 26/G.S. 1070 Publication,” War Office, Ottawa, Controller, His Majesties Stationary, 1944, 39, accessed 8 January 2019, <http://wartimecanada.ca/categories/training-manuals?tid=All&page=1>.

12. Hubert Meyer, *History of the 12. SS Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend* (Winnipeg: J. J. Fedorowicz Publishing, 1994), 47–48.

13. Vojensky Historicky Arhiv, Praha. The battalions within a regiment are given Roman numerals in the German unit titles. The Panther crews were not exhausted, and the drive of the last sixteen kilometers was not enough to cause massive technical or engine failure in the tanks. The 2. Panther *Kompanie* did not depart due to a lack of fuel. The 3. *Kompanie* went into the combat sector north of Caen and conducted securing tasks near the village of Gruchy.

14. Meyer, *History of the 12. SS Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend*, 50. The advanced artillery observer attached to the battalion could not communicate with the divisional artillery due to lack of radio contact. Casualties in the failed attack were five killed and twenty wounded.

15. Mark Zuehlke, *Holding Juno: The Canadian Army's heroic defence of the D-Day Beachhead* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 197. The lack of

artillery preparation and attempts at surprise attacks would continue as a favorite, if unsuccessful, tactic of the Waffen SS.

16. Meyer, *History of the 12. SS Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend*, 49–54.

17. Meyer, *Grenadiers*, 227.

18. Meyer, 228.

19. Copp, *Fields of Fire*, 72.

20. Michael Reynolds, *Steel Inferno: The 1st SS Panzer Corps in Normandy* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1997), 95.

21. Meyer, *History of the 12. SS Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend*, 54.

This screening force was made up of the 14. (Flak), 16. (Pioneer) and 15. (*Aufklarungs*) *kompanies* of SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 25 and the division *Begleitkompanie* (Headquarters Escort Company).

22. Milner, *Stopping the Panzers*, 259. As Canadian military historian Marc Milner notes: “The Canadian Scottish Infantry Regiment and two squadrons of the 1st Hussars tank regiment had recently taken part in the 8 June counterattack on Putot. The artillery regiments behind the front were entirely unprotected.” 10 Centaur Tanks of the British 2nd Royal Marines Assault Squadron were tasked to bolster the Canadian Field Artillery Regiment positions. Meyer could have been unaware of this gap in the Canadian positions, or simply too focused on Bretteville. Regardless, he let this opportunity pass. The entirely unprotected left flank of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles remnants, recently defeated in Putot, could have been exploited in an attack on the axis Rots-Le Hamel-Bray straight northwest, bypassing Bretteville for the moment. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles were in no shape to resist, and the *Hitlerjugend* Panthers could have destroyed or attacked Canadian RCA field artillery and anti-tank units and reached dangerously close to the invasion beaches. D Company of the 1 RRR battlegroup had recently abandoned its positions east of Bretteville near Rots, and the way was clear. Meyer, *History of the 12. SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend*, 54. With Meyer and Witt focused entirely on Bretteville, no mention was made in the 12. SS-Panzerdivision divisional history of this possible opportunity.

23. Zuehlke,  *Holding Juno*, 195.

24. Cazenave, *Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend sur le Front de Normandie*, 181. Jurgensen was present. It is unclear if he was in his own command Panther, 155.

25. Wolfgang Schneider. *Panzer Tactics: German Small-unit Armour Tactics in World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books. 2005), 13.

26. Vojensky Historicky Arhiv, Praha, Kriegstagebuch Appendix No.3; Cazenave, *Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend sur le Front de Normandie*, 181–90. As an example, 4. *Kompanie* only had three *Zugs* (platoons) of a maximum of four Panthers each, maybe less, and one to two *Kompanie* staff Panthers for a total of eleven to fifteen Panthers versus the authorized strength of seventeen. Second World War tank units rarely if ever had 100 percent of their vehicles operational at any one time, and some would have fallen out following the route march to the invasion front.

27. Niklas Zetterling, *Normandy 1944* (Winnipeg: J. J. Fedorowicz, 2000), 351.



28. Meyer, *History of the 12. SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend*, 196. While the *Wespe* self-propelled guns were effective artillery assets, their value in the direct fire role in low light conditions would have been small; they had limited ammunition, carrying only 40 rounds per vehicle. A short but sustained bombardment would be all they could muster.

29. Vojensky Historicky Arhiv, Praha, 8 June 1944 entry.

30. Schneider, *Panzer Tactics*, 54.

31. Schneider, 262.

32. Schneider, 50.

33. Greentree, *Hitlerjugend Soldier versus Canadian Soldier*, 44.

34. Gordon Brown, Letter of Major Gordon Brown (Retired) dated 23 April 1994. 1 RRR Baker Company officer commanding has often been listed as Lt. John Treleavan. Though he was the senior platoon commander who led the company to Rots on 7 June, he relinquished command of the company to Maj. Eric Syme on 8 June 1944.

35. Greentree, *Hitlerjugend Soldier versus Canadian Soldier*, 44; Stewart A. Mein, “Up the Johns:” *The Story of the Regina Rifles* (North Battleford: Senate of the Royal Regina Rifles, 1992), 113. It should be noted at this time two of the line companies in 1 RRR were commanded by acting officers commanding as most of the majors had become casualties in the previous two days.

36. “Infantry Training Part VI,” War Office, 11. Depth of all anti-tank assets in the infantry battalion defensive position was to be achieved in conjunction with deployed RCA anti-tank assets.

37. Reynolds, *Steel Inferno*, 98.

38. G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada: The History of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery Volume II: 1919–1967* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 282.

39. Nicholson, 283.

40. Milner, *Stopping the Panzers*, 262.

41. Georges Bernage and Frederick Jeanne, *Three Days in Hell: 7–9 June 1944* (Bayeux, France: Editions Hemidal, 2017), 113. The knowledge that he could have destroyed this headquarters and seized Bretteville simultaneously would have ensured Meyer would requisition appropriate infantry forces to properly clear the objective. This proximity did have its advantages for the Canadians. Matheson would not have to travel far to communicate any urgency regarding his situation.

42. Howard Margolian, *Conduct Unbecoming* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 104.

43. Schneider, *Panzer Tactics*, 247.

44. Schneider, 142, 247. It is stressed in German armored doctrine to make use of indirect fire and attach forward artillery observers.

45. C.P. Stacey, *The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III: The Victory Campaign* (Ottawa: The Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1960), 136.

46. “Infantry Training Part I,” War Office, 43–44. Combat outposts could be supported by other assets, such as anti-tank guns and medium machine guns, to increase their strength.

47. Ben Kite, *Stout Hearts: the British and Canadians in Normandy 1944* (Solihull, England: Helion and Company, 2014), 39. The Carrier Platoon of the 1 RRR contained thirteen vehicles, and it is unclear if all of them drove off east of Bretteville.

48. Milner, *Stopping the Panzers*, 266.

49. Copp, *Fields of Fire*, 72.

50. Vojensky Historicky Arhiv, Praha, 8 June 1944 entry. Also, a total of six carriers are recorded as being destroyed in the war diary of SS Panzer Regiment 12 for this date.

51. Milner, *Stopping the Panzers*, 268; Vojensky Historicky Arhiv, Praha, 8 June 1944 entry. Panzer 427 was commanded by SS-Unterscharfuhrer Hartmann.

52. Milner, 268.

53. Eric Luxton, ed., *1st Battalion the Regina Rifle Regiment: 1939–1946* (Regina: Regimental Association, 1946), 40; Margolian, *Conduct Unbecoming*, 107; Zuehlke,  *Holding Juno*, 202. A total of eight members of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa and 1 RRR were found shot at close range, indicating a possible battlefield execution by members of the 15. *Kompanie*, SS-Panzer Grenadierregiment 25. A total of six carriers were recorded as being destroyed in the war diary of SS Panzer Regiment 12.

54. Schneider, *Panzer Tactics*, 92.

55. Zuehlke,  *Holding Juno*, 202.

56. Zuehlke, 199

57. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada*, 282.

58. Schneider, *Panzer Tactics*, 13.

59. Bernage and Jeanne, *Three Days in Hell*, 128–29.

60. Meyer, *Grenadiers*, 228.

61. Zuehlke,  *Holding Juno*, 199.

62. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada*, 282. Bombardier Askin was killed in July 1944 but was mentioned in dispatches.

63. Milner, *Stopping the Panzers*, 272.

64. Schneider, *Panzer Tactics*, 16.

65. Jean Bouchery, *From D-Day to V-E Day: The Canadian Soldier* (Paris: Histoire and Collections, 2003), 124.

66. Bernage and Jeanne, *Three Days in Hell*, 110, 118–19.

67. Zuehlke,  *Holding Juno*, 203. 1 RRR Able Company Rifleman Joe Lapointe, part of a PIAT crew, was instrumental in its destruction.

68. Luxton, *1st Battalion the Regina Rifle Regiment*, 40.

69. Reynolds, *Steel Inferno*, 99.

70. Vojensky Historicky Arhiv, Praha, War Diary Appendix No.3.

71. Meyer, *The History of 12. SS-Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend*, 55.

72. Greentree, *Hitlerjugend Soldier versus Canadian Soldier*, 56.

73. Meyer, *The History of the 12. SS-Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend*, 56.
74. Luxton, *1st Battalion the Regina Rifle Regiment*, 40.
75. Luxton, 41.
76. Schneider, *Panzer Tactics*, 248.
77. Reynolds, *Steel Inferno*, 98.
78. Zuehlke,  *Holding Juno*, 207.
79. Reynolds, *Steel Inferno*, 99.
80. Meyer, *Grenadiers*, 230.
81. Zuehlke,  *Holding Juno*, 207.
82. Mein, "Up the Johns," 115.
83. Zuehlke,  *Holding Juno*, 207–8.
84. Zuehlke, 210. The 13th Field Regiment, RCA was led by Col. F. P. T. Clifford and equipped with twenty-four 105-mm Priest self-propelled artillery pieces.
85. Zuehlke, 206.
86. Cazenave, *Panzerdivision Hilterjugend sur le Front de Normandie*, 190. Multiple Panthers were taken to the village of Venoix, the location of the Panther *abteilung Werkstattkompanie* (repair company) for repairs.
87. Regina Rifles fatal casualties by date, 8–9 June 1944, accessed 6 November 2018, [http://www.reginarifles.ca/bn\\_cas\\_list\\_d.htm](http://www.reginarifles.ca/bn_cas_list_d.htm).
88. Bernage and Jeanne, *Three Days in Hell*, 127. An unknown number of Canadian prisoners were killed by their captors in the early part of the battle, most coming from the outlying skirmish line positions east of Bretteville that were overrun. In keeping with 12. SS-Panzerdivision practice during the June 1944 Normandy battles, many prisoners were shot arbitrarily or deliberately. This detail has not been worked into the narrative as this was the first time most of the companies of 1 RRR had encountered the Waffen SS and were unaware of their practices; thus it would not have made them fight harder or be less willing to surrender.
89. Bernage and Jeanne, 99; 1st Battalion, the Regina Rifle Regiment War Diary June 1944, RG 24 C-3, vol. 15198, Libraries and Archives Canada, 9 June 1944 entry. Tank support is recorded in the June 1944 war diary of 1 RRR as arriving at 0515 on 9 June.
90. "The Armoured Division in Battle," *21st Army Group*, Holland, December 1944, WO 219/5326, File 461 (vol. 2) SGS National Archives, Kew. Doctrinal notes by Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery. Nowhere in this pamphlet does it expressly forbid or warn against use of tanks in night actions.
91. Schneider, *Panzer Tactics*, 247.
92. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, 137.



## Chapter 9

### Battle of Bataan, 1942: Security Force Assistance in the Close Combat Fight

Maj. Mark J. Balboni

*We're the battling bastards of Bataan.  
No mama, no papa, no Uncle Sam,  
No aunts, no uncles, no cousins, no nieces,  
No pills, no planes, no artillery pieces  
And nobody gives a damn.<sup>1</sup>*

—Frank Hewlett

Before the first bombs dropped on Pearl Harbor, the fate of American and Filipino forces in the Philippines had been sealed as initial battles of the war had been lost in the competition continuum before the war. Despite tactical proficiency and repeated displays of amazing courage, strategic decisions and operational planning failures had already determined the course of the battle before the first Japanese soldier landed. While the soldiers held up their end of the bargain, decisions made by strategic leaders had predetermined the outcome based off of strategic requirements. The cost of those decisions resulted in the fall of Bataan and the largest mass surrender in the history of the US Army.

Between the world wars, the Joint Army and Navy Board (precursor to the Joint Chiefs of Staff) was the planning mechanism for how the joint force would fight the next war.<sup>2</sup> The board devised a series of color-coded war plans in preparation for how the United States would fight potential conflicts across the globe without allies, no matter how unlikely the conflict. For example, War Plan Black focused on Germany, War Plan Red against the British Empire, and War Plan Orange against Japan.<sup>3</sup>

War Plan Orange was initially developed in anticipation of a Japanese blockade of US territories in the Western Pacific, to include the Philippines. The US Navy then fought its way across the Pacific—relieving the surrounded garrisons, destroying the Japanese fleet, and eventually blockading Japan into surrendering. The last revision of War Plan Orange, called War Plan Orange-3 (WPO-3) was done April 1941 and called for the United States to defend only Central Luzon then hold Manila Bay until reinforcements arrived. There was no contingency built into the plan for defending the Philippines if reinforcements did not arrive.

The strategic calculus for the United States changed throughout the late 1930s as the international community became entangled in the conflict. The United States faced potentially a multi-front war against an enemy coalition. Adapting to the changing environment, the Joint Board developed the Rainbow series of war plans. The Rainbow 5 plan assumed the United Kingdom and France would be allies and the United States would conduct offensive operations outside of the Western Hemisphere.

The Philippine Independence Act (also known as the Tydings-McDuffie Act) provided the Philippines' with a path to statehood.<sup>4</sup> With the country set for independence in 1946, the United States lacked the institutional interest to defend the Philippines, as an independent Philippines would be responsible for its own national defense. The United States assisted in building Philippine military might through security force assistance, providing advisors and some equipment to assist the fledgling Philippine Army. Unlike the officers assigned to the Philippine Scouts, American advisors to the Philippine Army were not in the chain of command of the units and could only influence Philippine Army commanders.

The Philippines National Defense Act of 1935 (Commonwealth Act No. 1) was designed to train and equip a force capable of defending the Philippines by 1946.<sup>5</sup> Former Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur retired in 1937 so that he could serve as the military advisor to the Philippines. The United States played a key role in assisting Filipino security forces in support of US regional interests.

Upon returning to active duty in 1941, then-Major General MacArthur determined that the long-standing plan to only defend Manila Bay was a "defeatist" plan and that all of the Philippines would need to be defended.<sup>6</sup> MacArthur clearly understood the infeasibility of WPO-3 and how reinforcements were unlikely to arrive in time to save the day. MacArthur's plan became the third concurrent strategic plan for the United States: executing Rainbow 5 in conjunction with their new allies, conducting the strategic WPO-3 plan against Japan across the Pacific and the new defensive strategy in defense of the Philippines.

With a view toward independence, the Filipinos devised a defensive force structure to defend themselves without American assistance. The fledgling Philippine defense force consisted of a small active component and a huge reserve that would be trained and equipped along with associated air and naval forces. Three distinct groups of uniformed Filipinos initially provided ground forces: the Philippine Army, the Philippine Constabulary, and the Philippine Scouts. The Philippine Army and Constab-

ulary reported to the country's president, Manuel L. Quezon, while the Scouts were members of the US Army and would not join the Philippine Army until after independence.

On paper, the Philippine Army accomplished the development of the active component by combining the Philippine Scouts and the Philippine Constabulary to serve as the foundation of this component. While the development of the active ground component was the furthest along by the start of the war, issues remained. The Philippine Constabulary transitioned to the new Philippine Army in 1936 when the newly created State Police assumed the constabulary's law enforcement responsibilities; the constabulary later resumed that role in 1938.<sup>7</sup> The Philippine Scouts remained under American control and often were the preferred choice for young Filipinos as they would receive better pay and equipment than with the Philippine Army.

The 1st Regular Division of the Philippine Army, the only standing Philippine Army division, served as the cadre to train reserve forces. While not trained or equipped with the same readiness standards as the Philippine Scouts, the division benefitted from excellent leadership and training when afforded the opportunity. As mentioned previously, Philippine Army soldiers received less pay despite doing the same functions as the Philippine Scouts. The disparity created the challenge of trying to support the development of a large conventional force while specialized units received special incentives. The conventional force was destined to do the majority of the fighting, because there were not enough Scouts to be everywhere.<sup>8</sup>

The development of the reserve force was a failure for predictable reasons. Lack of qualified leadership was foreseeable, as members of the reserve forces were not paid for their drills.<sup>9</sup> The financially challenged Philippine government was unable to purchase required equipment before the beginning of the war. The United States provided some equipment just before the war, mostly ancient weapons and material long past its usefulness. The majority of the ammunition was old and resulted in numerous duds.

With a coastline just shy of twice as long as that of the United States, defending the Philippines was a monumental test. Challenged with trying to defend hundreds of possible landing zones, the Philippine Army took the lead for protecting the coastline due to the numbers of personnel required; the better trained, but far fewer, Scouts served as the reserve. To rapidly support the development of the Philippine Army, American

advisors provided experienced leadership to the Philippine Army. The US Army dispatched this large influx of senior field grade and extremely junior company grade officers to the Philippines shortly before the war; they had little time to acclimate themselves to the Philippines or to their Filipino advisees.<sup>10</sup>

The Philippine Army's 11th Infantry Regiment, 11th Division was indicative of how the army was manned, trained, and equipped in preparation for combat operations.<sup>11</sup> On paper, the 11th Infantry Regiment consisted of approximately 1,850 officers and enlisted personnel, broken down into a headquarters battalion and three infantry battalions. Mobilized on 1 September 1941, the regiment consisted mainly of Ilocanos from the lowland Ilocos region on northwestern Luzon and Cordillerans from the highlands of Luzon; the regiment was a cross-cultural mix from across Luzon.<sup>12</sup> To facilitate rapid training, the unit was provided with a contingent of US advisors consisting of ten officers and seven noncommissioned officers. Senior noncommissioned officers and commissioned officers from the US 31st Infantry Regiment and recently arrived US Army reserve officers provided the bulk of these American advisors.<sup>13</sup>

Speaking was a fundamental challenge within the regiment. Eleven different dialects were spoken in the regiment, not including the English spoken by American advisors. As Maj. J. W. Lage observed:

[I]n one machine gun company alone, we had personnel that spoke five different dialects and were unable to communicate with each other; many of the officers spoke Tagalog, and they were unable to communicate with any of those speaking the mountain or Ilocano languages. Superimposed on all of this were the Americans, who spoke none of the native tongues. It was not uncommon for the only words known to all would be "attention," "forward march," "halt," and "chow."<sup>14</sup>

Utilizing interpreters and demonstrating required actions were the preferred methods to work around the language barriers.

The regiment had received its initial training in 1937. The focus of the five-month initial training was on individual soldier skills, with some platoon and company level training. Due to the lack of training resources (funding, equipment, and training facilities), the units were never able to conduct large-scale combined arms maneuvers. As Col. Glen Townsend, the commander of the 11th Infantry Regiment, reported, "I found that although all personnel had taken the prescribed five-and-one-half month's training, they were proficient only in close order drill and saluting."<sup>15</sup> Bat-



talion and regimental staff training was non-existent, so staffs were of little value during the battle. Despite being the first regiment of the 11th Division activated, the 11th Regiment only had three months of training before the Japanese attack. The division's other regiments barely had weeks to prepare their subordinate units for combat.

More than the inability to talk and the lack of training, logistical failures and lack of enablers were the most crippling deficiencies. The majority of the weapons were well past their prime years. Each rifleman was equipped with a World War I-vintage M1917 Enfield rifle. The machine guns were even worse, as the "machine-gun company had eight .30-caliber water-cooled Browning machine guns whose serial number consisted of only four digits and each barrel had a minimum of 15,000 rounds fired through them."<sup>16</sup> No machinegun spare parts were available, so when the water-cooled .50 caliber machine guns broke, the unit was forced to utilize "two push-pull force pumps commandeered from a civilian hardware store to cool them."<sup>17</sup>

Another challenge was that the Philippine Army lacked anti-tank guns and field artillery pieces. Because the army was not able to destroy Japanese armor or engage in counter-battery against Japanese artillery strikes, many Filipino soldiers died, and the army lost precious ground to the Japanese. The US War Department attempted to rectify this anti-tank gap in November 1941 by shipping T12 Gun Motor Carriages (75-mm howitzers in an M3 half-track), but the lack of roads within the Philippines and on Bataan specifically limited the effectiveness of these systems. Additionally, US personnel were not sent with the systems, so when a provisional field artillery brigade was established with local personnel, vehicles were not distributed to the soldiers until 96 hours before the commencement of hostilities.<sup>18</sup>

Because of the lack of staff training, sustainment was either locally procured at the company level or the soldiers went without. Additionally, the Philippine Army did not have mess teams to procure and prepare food; all food was bought from local vendors when available. In peacetime, this arrangement worked because the Philippine Army was widely spread throughout the country and units could live off of the local economy.<sup>19</sup> This lack of sustainment capacity became a serious issue later when the large Philippine Army descended into Bataan defensive perimeter. The failure to develop a logistical support system became the Achilles' heel of the army and played a key role in the fall of Bataan. The decision to forward-deploy the limited food supplies beyond Bataan quickly resulted in starvation conditions once the large force retreated into Bataan.

Mobility support also was limited as only six vehicles were assigned to the entire 11th Infantry Regiment; units had to commandeer civilian assets if they needed to relocate. For communications, the regiment only had eight field telephones plus wall telephones they “acquired,” but only one mile of wire was available so the lack of field telephone capacity was not itself a huge restriction. The regiment only had a single radio to talk to the division headquarters but lacked trained personnel to operate it, so the majority of regimental communications were carried by couriers.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike the Philippine Army, the Philippine Scouts remained a force to be reckoned with. The Philippine Scouts consisted of two infantry regiments (45th and 57th), one cavalry regiment (26th), two field artillery regiments (23rd and 24th), coastal defense/anti-aircraft, and assorted enablers. Well-led, equipped, paid, and highly motivated, the Philippine Scouts recruited the best available personnel.<sup>21</sup> Philippine Scouts recruiters identified high school graduates and English speakers while leaving less-desirable personnel to the Philippine Army. The Philippine Scouts were equipped with the same weapons and equipment as US stateside units. Equipping was especially important in the fielding of artillery pieces, which were severely lacking within the Philippine Army. The Philippine Scouts were rounded out with a small headquarters and the 31st Infantry Regiment, the only infantry unit without Filipinos, to form the Philippine Division.<sup>22</sup>

The disparity between the Philippine Army and the Philippine Scouts was evident from the first encounters with the Japanese; Philippine Army soldiers failed to halt Japanese landing forces on the beaches and instead melted away back to their homes. The assault by Japanese Gen. Masaharu Homma’s 14th Army at Lingayen Gulf against elements of the Philippine Army’s 71st Division was the first of many examples of the ill-prepared Philippine Army running away at from contact with Japanese forces when not directly supported by Philippine Scouts or American armor. The Philippine Scouts’ 26th Cavalry, supported by the recently arrived Provisional Tank Group recently equipped with 108 M3 Stuart light tanks, was the primary covering force; when the defensive position in Luzon became untenable, a retreat into the Bataan defensive position was ordered.<sup>23</sup>

### **Abucay-Mauban Line**

Following the retrograde into Bataan, MacArthur adjusted the structure of his operational headquarters. Previously designated as the Northern and Southern Luzon Forces, Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright now commanded the western flank with I Corps while Gen. George M. Parker secured the

eastern with II Corps. In an effort to refuse the right flank of the II Corps, the Philippine Scouts' 57th Infantry Regiment entrenched in battle positions.<sup>24</sup> The 57th Infantry Regiment arrayed in a standard defensive position of two up and one back (in reserve) with the 3rd Battalion on its left, 1st Battalion on its right, and 2nd Battalion as the regimental reserve.<sup>25</sup>

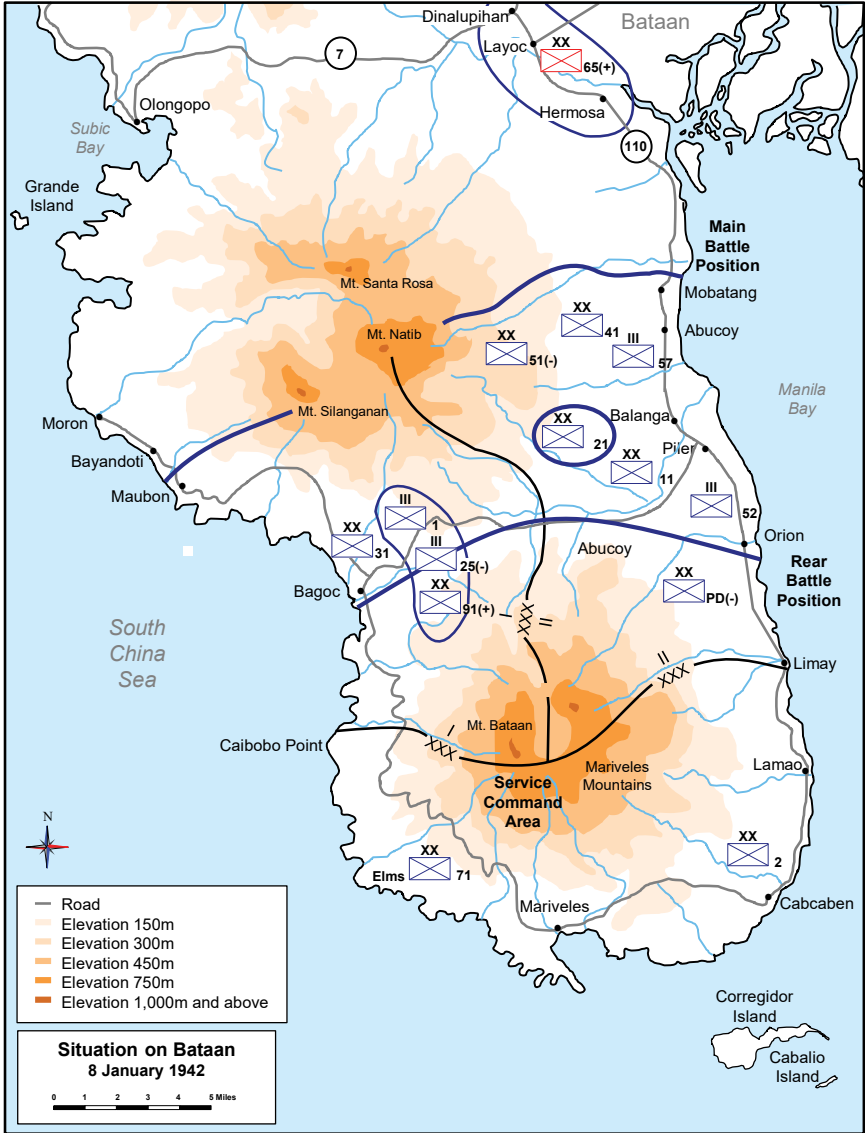


Figure 9.1. Situation on Bataan, 8 January 1942. Created by Army University Press.

Once the troops were in place, 57th Infantry Regiment leaders identified key terrain that could affect the unit's ability to defend against an expected Japanese attack: a flourishing cane field. A dry creek bed led into the vast cane field and provided excellent concealment for the Japanese avenues of approach until they were within 150 meters of 3rd Battalion's position. The 57th's regimental commander, Col. George Clarke, made the decision not to cut or burn the field.<sup>26</sup> The Japanese had control of the air, and Colonel Clarke was concerned that destroying the cane field would alert the Japanese that a large American force was in the vicinity of the cane field. With no anti-air capability resident within the US or Filipino maneuver units, the Japanese could conduct in-depth aerial reconnaissance prior to attacks. Despite the best arguments of the 3rd Battalion commander, Lt. Col. Philip Fry, Colonel Clarke refused to authorize the destruction of the cane field. It was believed that by utilizing indirect fire assets, the cane field avenue of approach could be denied to Japanese forces. As it turned out, leaving the cane fields in place limited visibility, shortened the fields of fire that the 57th could engage in, and gave the Japanese a concealed and expeditious avenue of approach.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 9.2. Philippine Scouts from the 26th Cavalry move into Pozorrubio. Courtesy of Louis Morton, *Fall of the Philippines*, 246.

Under cover of darkness, a Japanese infantry battalion moved into attack position against the 3rd Battalion. The lack of moonlight and the cane field provided excellent concealment for the infiltration, but the poor noise discipline of the Japanese force alerted the 3rd Battalion that the Japanese were nearby. Fire commands were quickly pushed from the forward observers to the Philippine Scouts' supporting artillery unit, 1st Battalion, 24th Artillery. The Japanese began their attack with small arms, light mortars, and machine guns then transitioned to a human wave frontal assault as the first rounds of Philippine 75-mm artillery landed in their positions. Capt. Ernest Brown, company commander for L Company, eloquently summarized the situation: "the cane field seemed to vomit Japanese in great numbers."<sup>28</sup>

Along with the infantrymen, the Japanese human wave was met by the Philippine Scouts' Charlie Battery, 1st Battalion, 24th Artillery. Having remained concealed, Charlie Battery direct-fired its four 75-mm howitzers into the Japanese assault force. Even with deadly fire, the Japanese continued their assault, moving toward 3rd Battalion's position. Exploiting the Filipino tracer fire to identify 3rd Battalion positions, the Japanese utilized the bodies of their dead to breach barbed wire sections of the position. Despite the casualties, the Japanese continued their assault until they began to collapse I Company, 3rd Battalion's flanks. The adjacent K Company commanded by Capt. Charles W. Haas utilized a machine gun section, combined with company reserve squads to provide suppressive fires; meanwhile the remainder of the company broke contact with the enemy and repositioned to previously constructed defensive positions that allowed the Scouts to immediately re-establish a strong defensive perimeter.<sup>29</sup>

The Japanese force became disoriented as it attacked through I Company and K Company positions throughout the night. Confusion reigned supreme as both sides lost situational awareness of the fight. While inspecting the company position with his first sergeant, Capt. Herman Gerth, the I Company commander, was shot in the hip when he came upon Japanese who had taken over foxholes within his position.<sup>30</sup> Gerth was dragged back to his command post and replaced by Lt. David W. Maynard, the company executive officer. Shortly thereafter, Maynard was killed by a Japanese machine gun during his inspection of the company's lines. Despite the removal of two company commanders within a few hours, I Company continued to fight on, refusing to break and run.<sup>31</sup>

To shore up his position, Lieutenant Colonel Fry committed his battalion reserve, L Company, to counterattack through I and K companies and destroy the remaining Japanese. However, due to a lack of coordination in synchronizing the passage of lines, L Company intermixed with K

Company as K Company was surprised to have movement to the rear of its formation. While the L Company additions reinforced positions within the battalion sector, their movement did not remove the threat from Japanese infantry attacks within the perimeter. With no additional assets available, it fell on the regimental reserve to reestablish the battalion's defensive perimeter.

As the struggle for the perimeter continued, the Philippines Scouts' outstanding leadership and training won the day through its defensive preparations. When the Philippine Scouts' 2nd Battalion, 57th Infantry first arrived at their battle position, the battalion leadership took key leaders from the subordinate companies on battlefield terrain walks before transitioning into night exercises on the actual terrain in preparation for the upcoming fight. E Company, the regimental reserve, was well-prepared to conduct a limited visibility clearance of friendly lines then destroy multiple small pockets of Japanese within friendly lines. E Company only ceased its advance when the threat of fratricide with I Company became too high.<sup>32</sup> The excellent identification of the risks in further clearing showed the sound thinking of E Company leaders in accomplishing the assigned mission while minimizing unnecessary fratricide. The Japanese attack against the regiment had been defeated and the defensive line re-established.

A different story was occurring on the western flank of the defensive line. With a thin veneer of experienced leadership, the loss of any Philippine Army leader had devastating results. While Philippine Scouts units were able to fill positional gaps due to the outstanding training received before the war, the Philippine Army had no depth to absorb casualties at the battalion commander and above levels, let alone at company and platoon. The lack of depth proved catastrophic as the violent nature of large-scale ground combat operations exposed these deficiencies.

On 12 January 1941, the Philippine Army's 51st Infantry Regiment was in its defensive sector on the far left flank of the II Philippine Corps. Lt. Col. Loren Stewart, the regimental commander, brought together his battalion commanders for a final coordination meeting before the expected Japanese attack.<sup>33</sup> Highly experienced, Lieutenant Colonel Stewart had previously served as an advisor to the Philippine Army and was exceedingly familiar with the terrain where the battle was to be fought. As Stewart addressed his battalion commanders, they were caught by surprise by intense artillery preparatory fires from the Japanese. Lieutenant Colonel Stewart and Capt. Wilbur Kruse (commander, 3rd Battalion) were killed, and Capt. William Osborne (commander, 1st Battalion) was forced to sneak through Japanese lines to return to his battalion.

During this period, 1st Battalion was responsible for securing the main defensive line at the front of the regiment. When Captain Osborne left to attend the coordination meeting, he relinquished temporary command of the battalion to his executive officer. Then the battalion came under heavy attack. Without coordinating the action with adjacent units or clearing it through the regimental headquarters, Captain Osborne's executive officer decided to retreat from the battalion's battle position. The terrain lost by the 1st Battalion created salient position that threatened the rest of the 51st Infantry Regiment's perimeter. Regaining the lost terrain of the 51st Infantry Regiment became an imperative as it threatened the entire American front. Despite the commitment of the division reserves to stabilize the line on 16 January, the remaining forces of the 51st Infantry Regiment were enveloped. This leadership failure at a decisive time in the battle facilitated the regiment's defeat and eventual destruction. The 51st Infantry Regiment's defeat exacerbated an already weak link between the I Philippine Corps and the II Philippine Corps, causing a withdrawal farther into Bataan.

The initial fight on Bataan provides a clear picture of a repetitive theme in many conflicts: properly trained and equipped soldiers perform well in combat while untrained units fall apart quickly. Leaders and advisors need to understand the capabilities of their units and set realistic expectations for what those units can accomplish. Training timelines, personnel manning, and equipment sourcing must be identified, resourced, trained with, and executed in order for new units to have any chance for battlefield success. The Philippine Army's 51st Infantry Regiment's failure to adapt to the loss of key leaders was a result of their hasty pre-war train-up, while the success of the Philippine Scouts' 57th Infantry Regiment can be directly attributed to the training that the unit received before the war.

Farther west in the I Corps Sector, the Japanese Army's 122nd Infantry Regiment attacked the town of Morong on 15 January 1942. Morong initially was defended by Lt. Daniel Ledda's Company I, 1st Regular Division, but the unit was pushed out during the Japanese attack. Morong was strategically important in that the town was the only defensive position between the I Corps line and the advancing Japanese.

Frustrated by the loss of Morong, General Wainwright drove to the headquarters of Brig. Gen. Fidel V. Segundo, commander of the Philippine Army's 1st Regular Division. General Wainwright ordered Segundo to retake Morong. Then he noticed Lt. Edwin Ramsey standing with his new troop commander, Capt. John Wheeler. Wheeler now commanded remnants of the Philippine Scouts' E and F Troops, 26th Cavalry, and Ramsey had volunteered to stay behind when the new E Troop relieved his

G Troop. General Wainwright recognized Lieutenant Ramsey from a pre-war polo match at Fort Stotsensberg; Wainwright instructed Ramsey to lead the advance guard with the remainder of Captain Wheeler's E Troop following to secure Morong; meanwhile the Philippine Army's 1st Regular Division followed and relieved Wheeler's troop.<sup>34</sup>

After capturing Morong, the Japanese Army's 122nd Infantry had begun establishing defense positions in the town. Lieutenant Ramsey's mounted platoon rode in a column of twos across the six kilometers to a final concealed position in the jungle near Morong. The platoon, moving across the town in squads of eight, came in contact with and was quickly reinforced by the rest of E Troop. The Scouts quickly defeated the Japanese, killing dozens; only one Scout was killed and eight wounded, including Wheeler and Ramsey. Three Japanese prisoners were taken and turned over to a Filipino sergeant to escort. Once out of sight, the sergeant executed all three prisoners. Unknown to the American officers, the sergeant was a local whose village had been destroyed by the Japanese. Lt. Edwin Ramsey's counterattack was the last horse-mounted cavalry charge in combat in the history of the US Army Cavalry.<sup>35</sup>

### **Orion-Bagac Line**

The Orion-Bagac Line was the next defensive line and provided a smaller defensive frontage to secure. The short line was both a geographic and physical necessity as the American and Filipino units had suffered attrition through combat and non-combat losses, mainly disease and desertion. The force transitioned from a traditional division structure to a modular force where division commanders would be responsible for a specific area and have regiments from other divisions for subordinate units instead of their own. Due to a lack of food and sleep, coupled with a high concentration of mosquitoes in the area, widespread malaria knocked more soldiers out of the fight than actual combat.

To help fill manpower shortages, a provisional Air Corps Regiment was established. Consisting of squadrons now without aircraft to support, this regiment was hastily trained, equipped, and given a sector to secure. An advantage to the recent expansion of the Army Air Corps was that some of the officers and noncommissioned officers had previous infantry experience before becoming aviators and thus were able to provide much-needed leadership. The provisional units allowed senior leaders to measure expectations for the unit and assign appropriate areas to minimize deficiencies.

Facing the smaller US battle lines, the Japanese Army attempted amphibious assaults to outflank the Americans by attacking the support area.



General Homma hoped the American perimeter would collapse with the sudden appearance of Japanese forces in the rear area. Instead, an ad-hoc combined joint force of US soldiers, airmen, sailors, and marines along with Filipino partners annihilated the Japanese landing forces in what came to be known as the “Battle of the Points.”

The Japanese amphibious assault force was led by Lt. Col. Nariyoshi Tsuchiro of the Japanese Army’s 2nd Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment. The battalion had recent amphibious experience having landed in the Mauban area of Lamon Bay at dawn on Christmas Eve 1941. The 2nd Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment quickly moved off the beaches as it assaulted through elements of the Philippine Army’s 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment and seized Mauban in support of the Japanese encirclement of Manila. The Japanese commitment of this highly effective battalion against a motley collection of Americans and Filipinos illustrates how poorly conceived operational ideas can have catastrophic results for even the best units. It also demonstrates how success in other domains can be a catalyst for successful operations.<sup>36</sup>

In a rare naval success during the battle, Motor Torpedo Boat PT-34 intercepted the Japanese 2nd Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment’s invasion fleet.<sup>37</sup> PT-34’s effective attack destroyed two barges and forced the remainder of the convoy to disperse. As a result, the Japanese landed at two dispersed locations, neither of which was the intended landing site. If the Japanese force had been able to land as a whole force, the result of the battle might have been different. The dispersed landings set in motion a series of events that allowed the inferior hodgepodge collection of Philippine and US forces to destroy the well-trained but poorly employed Japanese landing force.

During the withdrawal back to the new defensive line, elements of the Philippine Division had been broken apart, with units divided between the corps in their areas. With the new threat posed by the Japanese amphibious assaults, now-Lieutenant General MacArthur called for the Philippine Division to be returned to his control as his reserve force. Subsequently the Philippine Scouts’ 45th Infantry began pulling out of its position before the Philippine Army’s 1st Regular Division had properly relieved them, creating gaps within the defensive line. Japanese forces observed these gaps and broke through weak sections of the Philippine line. Then the Japanese troops maintained aggressive pressure; however, the isolated groups discovered they were separated from the main Japanese line as Filipino forces closed the gaps in the defensive line.

Meanwhile to support the withdrawal from the Abucay-Mauban line, the Philippine Army's 31st Infantry Division commander, Col. (later Brig. Gen.) Clifford Bluemel, organized defensive positions along Trail Two to stop the Japanese as they poured through holes in the I Corps lines during the retrograde and the establishment of the Orion-Bagac Line. Elements of the Japanese 20th Infantry Regiment (minus the 2nd Battalion) had broken through near the Tuol and Cotar rivers while the Japanese 2nd Battalion, 33rd Infantry Regiment had broken through near Trail 7. Due to the lack of transportation assets and the limited road networks in the area, it took time for Filipino and US soldiers to plug the gaps within the line. As the gaps closed, the Japanese forces established three hasty defensive positions. The Battle of the Pockets proved to be the high water mark for the defenders during the Battle of Bataan; each Japanese pocket was systematically destroyed.

With Japanese units slipping through the gaps in the defensive line—and not knowing the strength of the Japanese element—then-Major General Wainwright ordered Lt. Col. Leslie Lathrop, the Philippine Scouts' 1st Battalion, 45th Infantry commander, to clear out a Japanese sniper position. Despite being initially ordered to only send a platoon to clear the snipers, Lathrop further assessed the situation and requested permission to deploy his entire battalion.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the campaign, the Japanese Army effectively utilized snipers in both reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance roles. Japanese snipers effectively disrupted rear area command and supply operations and were even suspected of tapping American communications.

The attack by the Philippine Scouts' 1st Battalion, 45th Infantry against the Big (Tuol) Pocket was initially repulsed due to the dense undergrowth, which made maneuvering of large formations impossible. Reinforced by a platoon of M3 tanks from the US 192nd Tank Battalion, the Scouts repeatedly attacked the position until the Big Pocket was surrounded and cut off. Even with supplies running low, the Japanese refused to surrender. The dense jungle made air resupply and air support impossible for the Japanese, as air-dropped supplies often landed in Filipino hands while Japanese aerial bombs dropped within the Japanese Army 20th Infantry's perimeter.

The Philippine Army's 1st Regiment, 1st Regular Division led by then-Capt. Alfredo Santos succeeded in destroying the Little Pocket without armor or artillery support. Due to his failure to secure Morong, lack of urgency in securing the new defensive line, and failure to support the destruction of the Little Pocket, Brigadier General Segundo of the Philippine Army's 1st Regular Division was relieved and replaced by US Col. Kearie Berry. At the Big Pocket, a combination of the Philippine Scouts'

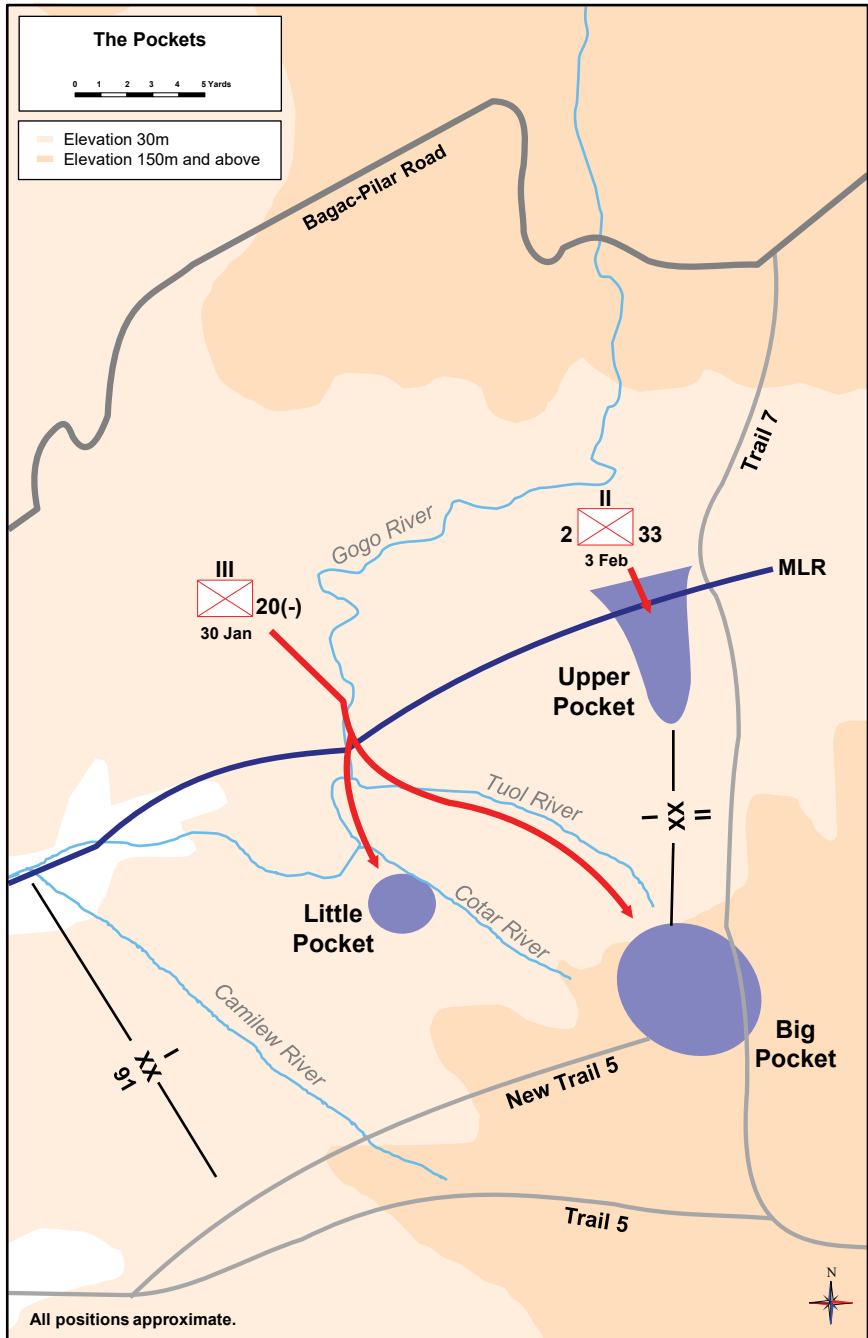


Figure 9.3. Battle of the Pockets. Created by Army University Press based on Louis Morton, *Fall of the Philippines*, 336.

45th Infantry with the Philippine Army's 92nd Infantry and 51st Combat Team successfully destroyed the pocket. When Lieutenant Colonel Lathrop's battalion finally cleared through the pocket, they discovered decaying horse carcasses that the Japanese had been using for food as well as unexploded ordnance from the World War I-era ammunition that the Philippine soldiers had fired.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these successes, the writing was on the wall for American and Filipino forces on Bataan.<sup>40</sup> On 12 March 1941, President Roosevelt ordered General MacArthur out of the Philippines. MacArthur took his family and key members of his staff to Australia, where he assumed the role of allied supreme commander, Southwest Pacific Area. Senior command of the Philippines transitioned from US Army Forces in the Far East (US-AFFE) to US Forces in the Philippines (USFIP) under the command of newly promoted Lt. Gen. Jonathan Wainwright. Maj. Gen. Edward King assumed the role of the operational commander on Bataan when Wainwright relocated to Corregidor to assume his new position.<sup>41</sup>

While the Americans and Filipinos prepared for the fall of Bataan, the Japanese forces began to consolidate their forces while additional reinforcements began pouring in. Japan had expected the Philippines to fall in a month, and the successes of the Japanese Army throughout the Pacific left the 14th Army as the only failure. While General Homma remained in command, his chief of staff was replaced and the army reinforced with additional infantry and armor units and even a complete field artillery division. Instead of conducting company and piecemeal battalion attacks, the Japanese attacked with destructive artillery fires followed by a massive infantry and armor combined arms assaults. The artillery fire proved devastating to the Americans and Filipinos, who were trapped on Bataan and had nowhere to hide.

On 3 April 1942, General Homma's 14th Imperial Army began its assault on the Orion-Bagac Line. Japanese forces quickly broke through the Filipino lines utilizing effective close air support and artillery fire to prepare for the ground assault; with a focused drive into the center of the defensive line, they captured Mount Samat and outflanked all of the II Corps. While the Japanese forces had been reinforced with fresh soldiers, the US and Filipino units had been decimated by malaria. The defenders' starvation diet had weakened the force until the soldiers had reached the breaking point. The horses of the Philippine Scouts' 26th Cavalry had previously been sacrificed; there was no hope of additional resupply as any supplies snuck in by submarine or boat could not provide nearly enough to keep the force fed. The end was near.

Despite attempts by the reserve forces from the Philippine Division to close the breaches, the Japanese quickly broke through the lines. On 9 April 1942, Major General King met with Maj. Gen. Kameichiro Nagano, commander of the Nagano detachment of the Japanese Army's 21st Infantry Division. With the majority of his force physically incapable of conducting combat operations due to starvation and illness, King surrendered all US and Filipino forces on Bataan.

The loss of Bataan was the decisive point in the battle for the Philippines. Corregidor held out for another month before Lieutenant General Wainwright surrendered all US and Filipino forces in the Philippines. Even then, an active Filipino "fifth column" continued to cause Japan problems until US forces returned to the Philippines in 1944. The surrender of US and Filipino forces at Bataan was the largest mass surrender in the history of the US Army.<sup>42</sup> Even though the Japanese succeeded in taking the islands, the delay in seizing the Philippines caused General Homma to be relieved of command after combat had ceased and forced to retire the next year.

The main cause of the defeat is simple: the Japanese military was better prepared than US and Filipino forces. The Japanese Navy required the neutralization of US air and naval threats from the Philippines while the Japanese Army wanted the island to be part of its extensive defensive perimeter protecting the home islands. The Japanese effectively utilized a multi-domain approach that projected naval gun fire support and amphibious landings from the maritime domain with air strikes and reconnaissance from the air domain in support of land operations.

The Japanese also conducted information operations, utilizing radio messaging and leaflet drops to separate the Americans and Filipinos. While unsuccessful at splitting the Filipinos from the Americans, the efforts affected morale as the soldiers sat starving in their defensive positions. Additionally, Japanese-controlled radio stations slowly demoralized the defenders by playing songs like "I'm waiting for ships that never come in" and "I'll be glad when you are dead, you rascal," or talking about the size of the army the Japanese were building before ending the program with Chopin's "Funeral March."<sup>43</sup>

Despite having years of evidence to identify the Japanese force structure and operational employment tactics, US and the Philippine leaders failed to identify and resource the force required to deter or defeat Japan. The United States wrote off the defense of the Philippines as a problem for a burgeoning Philippine government that lacked the resources required to

defeat the Japanese. The United States invested little other than the Philippine Scouts until the summer of 1941 when they began to push additional forces to the Philippines; however, the lack of capacity to receive and utilize the assets hindered utilization. The absence of secure airfields led to the destruction of a large portion of the US Army Air Forces on the second day of the war. The employment of two US National Guard armor battalions was restricted due to the lack of available road networks, maintenance support, and the scarcity of fuel. These issues needed to be resolved months and years before the conflict began. Efforts as simple as destroying a cane field, staging food storage in underground bunkers on Bataan, or shipping malaria pills in advance could have meant the difference between success and defeat.

Having spent years fighting against the Chinese, the Japanese Army was optimally prepared to defeat a light infantry force with limited enabler support. Knowing that with each passing day the US Navy grew in strength, additional Philippine Army personnel received training as Japanese resources dwindled. Meanwhile, Japanese military leaders assessed the strategic calculus of the situation and determined that their window for winning a war against the United States was rapidly closing. The Philippines were lost because Japan had the forces available at the right time to defeat the United States. Throwing bodies and equipment at the last minute was not enough to change the equation. The United States was not willing to provide required resources to serve as a deterrent to armed conflict. This lack of action encouraged the Japanese to take the islands when the opportunity presented itself.

One lesson learned in the Philippines for how to provide effective security force assistance: establish the groundwork for future American advising efforts during large-scale ground combat operations.<sup>44</sup> American forces in China eventually advised thirty-six infantry divisions, twelve armies, and four group armies with more than 3,100 advisors. Instead of focusing purely on infantry tactics, many of the advisors needed to provide advice on combat enablers such as engineering and field artillery in addition to sustainment functions such as communications, ordnance, and medical.<sup>45</sup> Supporting the employment of non-American combat units during major combat with US advisors and enablers limited the number of US combat troops required to achieve strategic end states. Many of these lessons learned atrophied over time; the same lessons were learned again over time in Korea and Vietnam as the US Army shifted emphasis away from its advisory effort toward the deployment of US combat troops to do the heavy fighting that host nation forces could have been doing.<sup>46</sup>

The loss of the Philippines was an operational failure but a strategic success for the United States. Henry L. Stimson, the US secretary of war during the battle, noted in his diary: "There are times when men must die."<sup>47</sup> By conducting an economy-of-force mission built around security force assistance to Filipino units, the United States traded the Philippines for time and space required to build up forces required for offensives against Japan, Germany, and Italy. That sacrifice allowed the United States to counterattack the Axis powers shortly after the fall of Bataan.<sup>48</sup> The focus on the strategic end state outweighed the operational defeat; the time and resources required to conquer Bataan denied the Japanese the opportunity to use committed resources in other areas. The determined sacrifice of US and Filipino forces on Bataan helped set the stage for the strategic victory that followed, but if more preparation had gone into securing the Philippines years prior, the sacrifice might not have been necessary.<sup>49</sup>

## Notes

1. Frank Hewlett, 1942, Manila Bureau Chief for United Press. Hewlett escaped the Philippines, but his wife, Virginia, remained behind in Manila. Hewlett spent the next two years following Merrill's Marauders in Burma before being part of the 1st Cavalry Division column that rescued his wife and other prisoners at the Santo Tomas Internment Camp.

2. Unlike the current Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Army and Navy Board had no legally defined mandate.

3. The Canadian counterbalance to War Plan Red was Defence Scheme No. 1. Canadian planners even conducted undercover reconnaissance inside the United States. Pierre Berton, *Marching As to War: Canada's Turbulent Years 1899–1953* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001).

4. Tydings-McDuffie Act, H.R. 8573, 73rd Cong. (1934), 456–65, <http://www.legisworks.org/congress/73/publaw-127.pdf>.

5. National Defense Act of 1935 (Commonwealth Act No.1), accessed 28 June 2019, <http://www.chanrobles.com/commonwealthacts/commonwealthact-no1.html>.

6. He was appointed as a lieutenant general on 27 July 1941 and then general on 18 December 1941.

7. A lack of trust in the State Police was noted as the reason for the return of the Constabulary.

8. Alfredo M. Santos, "The 1st Regular Division in the Battle of the Philippines," US Army Command and General Staff College School of Logistics, Fort Leavenworth, KS.

9. National Defense Act of 1935, Section 94.

10. Col. Richard C. Mallonee, *Battle for Bataan* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1980), 8–14

11. Maj. W. J. Lage, "Opns of 3d Bn, 11th Inf (PA) at Zaragoza, 28–29 Dec 41," Advanced Infantry Officers Course, 1947–48.

12. Cordillerans are also known as Igorot. Igorot is a derogatory term for mountain tribes thought to be uncultured by metropolitan Filipinos.

13. Lage, "Opns of 3d Bn," 1947.

14. Lage, 1947.

15. Lage, 1947.

16. Lage, 1947.

17. Lage, 1947.

18. Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1953), 33, 120.

19. Bakery units were established on Bataan and functioned until supplies ran out.

20. Lage, "Opns of 3d Bn," 1947.

21. The Philippine Scouts included soldiers such as Teófilo Yldefonso, the first Filipino to medal at the Olympics.



22. Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*, 21. The 4th Marine Regiment arrived from China a week prior to the Pearl Harbor attacks and supported the defense of Corregidor Island.

23. Morton, 33. The Provisional Tank Group (PTG) consisted of the Provisional Tank Group Headquarters, 192nd Tank Battalion, 194th Tank Battalion, and the 17th Ordnance Company. Commanded by Brig. Gen. James Weaver, the PTG was a rapid reserve force capable of attacking Japanese positions, providing a rear guard during retrogrades, and bolstering Philippine Army morale with their presence. Despite the limited logistical capacity of the PTG, the armor formation repeatedly proved its utility throughout the battle.

24. Maj. John W. Whitman, "US Army Doctrinal Effectiveness on Bataan, 1942: The First Battle" (master's thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1984).

25. Col. Edmund J. Lilly Jr., "Notebook #19: The Story of the 57th Infantry Dec 8, 41," Col. Edmund J. Lilly Jr. POW Papers, <https://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/resources/archival/lilly/notebook19.asp>.

26. Colonel Lilly replaced Col. George Clarke as the Philippine Scouts' 57th Infantry Regiment commander in January 1942. The regimental S3 at the time was Capt. Harold K. Johnson, who in 1964 became the 24th chief of staff of the US Army.

27. The lack of US/Philippine anti-air capacity for maneuver elements ceded control of the air to the Japanese, which enabled the Japanese to quickly gain control of the artillery counter-battery firefight. American and Filipino units firing during the day quickly became targets for Japanese air attacks, allowing for only limited daylight fire support.

28. Maj. Ernest Brown, "The Operations of the 57th Infantry (PS) (Philippine DIV.) Abucay, January 1942 (Personal Experience of a Company Commander)," 10.

29. Lilly, "Notebook #19."

30. Lilly.

31. Brown, "The Operations of the 57th Infantry," 11.

32. Elements of the Philippine Army's adjacent 41st Infantry Regiment supported the 57th Infantry's counterattack; the sudden appearance of personnel wearing Philippine Army blue denim pants confused the 57th Infantry personnel, who were not used to operating with the Philippine Army.

33. The unit was part of the Philippine Army's 51st Infantry Division.

34. Edwin Ramsey and Stephan Rivele, *Lieutenant Ramsey's War* (New York: Knightsbridge, 1990), 64

35. Ramsey and Rivele. 69

36. Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*, 139, 300, 312.

37. In a fascinating story, the PT-34 executive officer, Ensign Iliff David (Rich) Richardson, became a guerrilla leader then later was commissioned as a US Army intelligence major. While attempting to get his naval back pay, Richardson had Uniform Code of Military Justice charges against him for suspicion of drawing two paychecks, one from the US Navy and one from the US Army.

His 1945 memoir, *An American Guerrilla in the Philippines*, later was made into a movie.

38. Lt. Col. Adrianus van Oosten, “The Operations of the 1st Battalion, 45th Infantry (PS) (Philippine Division) in the Battle of the Tuol Pocket, Bataan, 29 January–19 February 1942,” Advanced Infantry Officers Course, 1947–48.

39. Maj. Manuel T. Flores, “An Analytical Study of the Defense of Bataan” (brief, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1949).

40. The success of the American and Filipino forces during the Battle of the Pockets would be remembered by the Japanese. Following the fall of Bataan, the Japanese separated out the American officers of the Philippine Army’s 91st Division before beheading and bayoneting between 350 and 400 Filipino officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted prisoners near these positions. This occurred over a two-hour period during the Pantingan River Massacre on 11 April 1942.

41. Major General King originally arrived in the Philippines in 1940 from the Army War College, where he had been the director of the War College’s War Plans.

42. The surrender was exactly seventy-seven years to the day after Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia.

43. Robert Reynolds, *Of Rice and Men* (The Leicht Press, 1949), 32.

44. Marc Gallicchio, “Army Advisers and Liaison Officers and the ‘Lessons’ of America’s Wartime Experience in China,” in *The U.S. Army and World War II, Select Papers from the Army’s Commemorative Conferences* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1998), 353–66

45. Theresa L. Kraus, “Chinese Offensive” in *The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II*, Center of Military History Publication 72–39, 10.

46. The commander of the China Theater, Lt. Gen. Albert Wedemeyer, established his headquarters with a very similar structure to today’s headquarters; his small forward command post located forward focused on operations, intelligence, and planning while the rear headquarters located 400 miles to the rear of the forward headquarters focused on the sustainment and administrative functions.

47. Hampton Sides, *Ghost Soldiers: The Epic Account of World War II’s Greatest Rescue Mission* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001).

48. The Army Air Corps began bombing operations in the Mediterranean in June 1942. Guadalcanal was invaded in August 1942 and North Africa in November 1942.

49. Despite numerous challenges such as the leaking of the Rainbow 5 war plan in the *Chicago Tribune* just days prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States was able to focus on its strategic goals and focus assets on achieving those end states.

## Chapter 10

### Surgeons to the Front: Twentieth-Century Warfare and the Metamorphosis of Battlefield Surgery

Thomas S. Helling and W. Sanders Marble

It had begun with Dominique Jean Larrey more than 100 years before. That magnificent surgeon of Napoleon Bonaparte's *Grande Armée* had once lamented that "Serious disasters afflict my soul and plunge me into the deepest grief," addressing the plight of wounded soldiers at the front.<sup>1</sup> Unable to leave, they languished on the battlefield as comrades-in-arms fought around them—and over them—their wounds, mangled limbs, and torn flesh offering no solace but unremitting pain.<sup>2</sup> Dominique Larrey had changed all that. His *ambulance volante*—literally, "flying" medical units—speeding to the edge of combat to aid and comfort fallen troops, even as muskets cracked overhead.<sup>3</sup> This would initiate the metamorphosis of battlefield medicine from the safe confines of field hospitals placed outside the range of artillery to the very front line trenches, firing pits, and encampments of modern warfare.

Yet at the dawn of the twentieth century, collecting combat wounded was the primary task of stretcher-bearers, medics, and physicians in the front lines—in "close combat." A modicum of care could be provided—morphine for pain, splinting of fractures, bandaging of bleeding wounds—but little else. At the time, most academicians felt nothing more ambitious **should** be done. Gunshot wounds from military firearms were thought clean, producing punched-out holes and tracts that nature would, by and large, take care of. The prevailing opinion, one shared by distinguished members of *l'Académie de Chirurgie*, was that these wounds "heal very quickly."<sup>4</sup> Deeper injuries—those violations of body cavities—produced such mischief that surely one could not meddle, not in the heat of battle with all the dust, dirt, and danger. "Capital" operations, indeed, "ought not to take place on the field or in the ambulances" because personnel and material are not available, there is not the necessary time, and the patient, so "exhausted from pain, fatigue, the journey, and loss of blood" is in no condition to bear surgery so soon, observed a British surgeon attached to the French Army during the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>5</sup> French *médecin inspecteur* Edmond Delorme argued into 1914: "In principle, immediate laparotomy [abdominal surgery] is to be rejected. The most recent wars, those of Transvaal, Manchuria, Balkans, affirmed its harmfulness."<sup>6</sup> Surgeons were urged to be "stingy" in their front line surgery and focus on

*l'empaquetage-évacuation*, packaging, and evacuation.<sup>7</sup> Reserve any major operations for field hospitals where, out of range of artillery and danger from enemy intrusion, delicate surgical procedures could be completed at leisure.

## The Great War

August 1914 would dramatically alter the paradigm of casualty care. Gigantic cannon, high explosives, and the machine gun soon invalidated all pre-war suppositions and strategy. More than eighty percent of wounds were due to shell fragments, which caused multiple, shredding injuries. “[T]here were battles which were almost nothing but artillery duels,” a chagrined Edmond Delorme observed.<sup>8</sup> Mud and manured fields took care of the rest. Devitalized tissue was quickly occupied by *Clostridia* pathogens, and gas gangrene became a deadly consequence. Delays in wound debridement, prompted by standard military practice, caused astounding lethality. Some claimed more than fifty percent of deaths were due to negligent care.<sup>9</sup> And the numbers of casualties were staggering. More than 200,000 wounded in the first months alone: far too many for the outdated system of triage and evacuation envisioned just years before. American observer Doctor Edmund Gros visited the battlefield in 1914:

If [a soldier] is wounded in the open, he falls on the firing line and tries to drag himself to some place of safety. Sometimes the fire of the enemy is so severe that he cannot move a step. Sometimes, he seeks refuge behind a haystack or in some hollow or behind some knoll. . . . Under the cover of darkness, those who can do so walk with or without help to the *Poste de Secours*. . . . Stretcher-bearers are sent out to collect the severely wounded . . . peasants’ carts and wagons [are used] . . . the wounded are placed on straw spread on the bottom of these carts without springs, and thus they are conveyed during five or six hours before they reach the sanitary train or temporary field hospital. What torture many of them must endure, especially those with multiple fractures!<sup>10</sup>

It was in this climate that an obscure Parisian military surgeon by the name of Maurice Marcille surfaced with his outlandish idea of a motorized surgical team capable of traveling to the front and operating on soldiers in need of urgent attention. His colleague Paul Hallopeau provided proof of concept, operating under a canvas tent hung from the side of a truck just behind the trenches in the fall of 1914. Seventy-five patients passed through his “surgical suite,” limited only by the fatigue of the surgeon. Mortality remained substantial but almost certainly would have been higher without immediate treatment.<sup>11</sup>

Thus was born the forward surgical unit. The French would argue and modify but maintained the basic format, now calling Marcille's concoction the *ambulance chirurgicale automobile*, or "auto-chir" for short. The units would become a mainstay of the battlefield, equally useful in static trench warfare and in the war of movement which characterized the closing year of the conflict. The American Expeditionary Forces adopted the French model and fielded five mobile surgical hospitals before the Armistice of November 1918.<sup>12</sup>

## The Second World War

World War II caused further iterations of forward surgical care. American forces in the Pacific were challenged by enormous distances from battlefield to hospital care. Front line surgery would be of the essence. Col. Percy Carroll, in charge of medical support for Army operations in New Guinea, witnessed it first hand:

I was up there and saw these boys, sometimes abdominal wounds, chest wounds, legs almost shot off, and hemorrhage and so on, in shock—in which they had to depend just upon company aid people to take care of them. . . . I said [to Gen. George Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army] I want surgery in the front lines. . . . I want surgery where it's needed.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, **bring the surgeons to the patient**. Large, ponderous hospitals would be totally impractical. Something much lighter and more portable would be necessary to surmount the rugged geography and small-unit actions of the South Pacific. Carroll would call his compact units "portable surgical hospitals." Two surgeons—four doctors total—and twenty-five enlisted would form the core of his groups; these young vigorous men were able to literally carry the entire hospital on their backs. Once established, each would house up to twenty-five patients. The entire effort had a singular purpose in Carroll's mind:

This [portable surgical] hospital . . . was designed for one purpose and one purpose alone in combat and that is to perform lifesaving operations on patients who, if evacuated without such skilled attention, would probably die en route.<sup>14</sup>

Carroll's portable hospitals were indispensable during the Buna campaign in northeastern New Guinea at the end of 1942 into 1943. These men worked under conditions as hostile as those of the common infantryman, in jungles soaked with daily downpours, baked in stifling heat, dripping with relentless humidity, and inhabited by the small denizens of wilderness fauna. Surgery was often done bare-chested, covered only by rubber

aprons; gloves were cleaned after each case in bichloride of mercury and used again. And all within hundreds of yards of Japanese positions. It was not unusual to see canvas riddled by bullet holes. Major George Marks's 5th Portable Surgical Hospital saw 389 battle wounds during nineteen days of combat. Two hundred required surgery, including a dozen with chest injuries and seven who needed exploratory abdominal surgery.<sup>15</sup> All together the twelve portable hospitals deployed around Buna handled 1,800 combat casualties and an additional 5,500 medical problems. Their amazing work was highlighted by Col. Augustus Thorndike from the Surgeon General's Office who reported:

Perhaps the most valuable development in military medicine in this theater [Southwest Pacific] concerning the care of the sick and wounded was the organization, development, and operation of the portable surgical hospital. . . . The patients . . . received the best housing and the best medical and nursing care available within hundreds of miles.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 10.1 A patient receives plasma at the 4th Portable Surgical Hospital in New Guinea near Buna Village, December 1942. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur embraced them. They accompanied his troops along the northern coast of New Guinea as he leap-frogged in a se-

ries of regimental-size amphibious landings. They proved ideal for loading and deploying in small landing craft, even remaining afloat to service the wounded. And when MacArthur invaded Leyte Island in the Philippines in October 1944, thirteen portable hospitals accompanied him; the portable hospital teams set off into the primitive wilds and tropical rainforests as they had done in New Guinea, even on occasion toting supplies on their backs. It had to be so. Roads and weather were atrocious. Ambulances bogged down, up to their wheel wells in mud. Wounded often arrived by native carts or *carabao* harnessed to *travois* reminiscent of the Indian wars of the American West. The 7th Portable Surgical Hospital functioned as the only medical unit supporting the 21st Infantry Regiment when it landed seventy miles to the south of the main force on A-Day and again when the regiment was re-directed to the northern coast at Capooan. Again completely isolated, the portable hospital managed numbers of wounded soldiers, many of whom suffered ghastly injuries and had lain for hours in rain-drenched foxholes.<sup>17</sup> In blinding storms, surgeons efficiently cleaned, debrided, and dressed contaminated open wounds and pumped blood and plasma into shocked victims.

More traditional land warfare unfolded in the Mediterranean and European theaters. Of course, that perennial small unit resource, the battalion aid station, was available and generally accessible. But these were notoriously spartan affairs. Often not much more than a shell crater, gully, or bombed-out dwelling, the battle aid station was at least shelter for wounded men. Battalion surgeons could be seen bent over, crouched, kneeling and all the while poking, prodding, splinting—usually bare-handed. Their medics held plasma, shone flashlights, pulled pulped tissue out of the way. And then the plight of the critical, determined efforts to shove in an airway, slice through a throat, or maybe clamp off a femoral artery lent a surreal aura to this makeshift infirmary. At the ready were plasma bottles—no blood available—of which there were plenty. It was not unusual to give as much as 200 units in a three-week period of combat. The surgeons had only arm and leg splints for fractures, bandages of various sizes and shapes, and a limited supply of surgical instruments. And syrettes loaded with a hefty dose of thirty-two milligrams of morphine—used quite liberally—were a mainstay of treatment, of incalculable benefit for the wounded. Waystations only, these posts would collect wounded and send the more serious cases farther back. Intense surgical attention was simply not possible this far forward.

By now it was common creed that the gravest danger to the critically wounded soldier was delay in treatment. Yet battlefield evacuation still

took much too long. Hours if not days might elapse before the casualty actually saw a surgeon. Army Surgeon General James Magee had set up the Surgical Consultants Division to investigate, recommend, and improve wartime surgical care. Gen. Fred Rankin was chosen as the Chief Surgical Consultant. In turn, Rankin looked to Dr. Edward Churchill—already at forty-seven the John Homans Professor of Surgery at Harvard—as consultant to the newly formed North Africa Theater of Operations Command (NATOUSA), later to include all campaigns in the Mediterranean (MTOUSA). Churchill immediately understood that the greatest detriment to the wounded soldier was time. He referred to the time lag between injury and initial surgery as the “golden period.” “[E]very hour added to the time-lag between injury and initial surgery increases the loss of life and limb,” he wrote.<sup>18</sup> Churchill had paid special attention to the work of New Zealand surgeon Dr. Douglas Jolly who, as a British volunteer, organized a twelve-man mobile surgical unit during the Spanish Civil War. “Even the most serious abdominal wounds rarely failed to reach the operating table and . . . almost half survived, whereas in the First World War only one third lived,” Jolly wrote.<sup>19</sup> His casualty organization was based on a “three-point forward system:” dressing station, mobile hospital, and then evacuation to a base hospital.<sup>20</sup>

Churchill liked the idea of a mobile surgical hospital. The Army Medical Department had already included Auxiliary Surgical Groups (ASGs) in its Tables of Organization, modeled in some respects after the complementary surgical groups, the *groupe complémentaire de chirurgie*, employed by the French *Service de santé* during World War I. In fact, elements of Colonel James Forsee’s Second Auxiliary Surgical Group had sailed with the Eastern Task Force for Operation Torch, landing east of Algiers shortly after the main landings on 8 November 1942.<sup>21</sup> Churchill had also seen the effectiveness of the British “advanced surgical centers” in North Africa (during Operation Torch) and felt the Auxiliary Surgical Group (ASG) was an ideal counterpart. His intent was to marry skilled surgeons, the existing holding capacity of field hospitals, and the influx of critical patients close to the point of wounding, at most only a few miles away.<sup>22</sup> Key features would be mobility and quality. Surgeons were picked based on their training and reputation: at least three years of formal residency and certification by the new American Board of Surgery were required. To furnish hospital beds and limited convalescence, clearing companies or field hospital platoons would be ideal, close enough to the front to intercept non-transportable casualties. Churchill called these “first-priority hospitals.” There would be no time for meatball surgery here. Skill would be the essence. He felt that for chest or



abdominal trauma, “initial surgery cannot be carried on as a hasty, slap-dash and bloody spectacle;” he insisted that proper repair of these injuries might take hours—“reparative surgery,” it would soon be called.<sup>23</sup> “Surgeons assigned the responsibility of caring for the wounded in a first-priority surgical hospital must be highly trained and experienced, as their tasks are the most exacting of military surgery,” Churchill emphasized.<sup>24</sup>

The ASGs were multispecialty formations. Each included a number of surgeons and surgical skills. Most common were general surgeons, likely to be in greatest demand. “The general surgeon of modern warfare has become the surgical specialist of trauma,” he claimed.<sup>25</sup> As many as four such “general” teams—two surgeons each—would be necessary at a busy field hospital in order to work around the clock. Other subspecialists like thoracic surgeons, neurosurgeons, plastic surgeons, maxillofacial surgeons, and orthopedic surgeons, would also be a part but probably not used far forward. More likely they would be put in evacuation hospitals farther away. Each ASG team was to have an anesthetist, a surgical nurse, and two enlisted personnel. Churchill also stressed accurate recordkeeping, for the expressed purpose of reviewing experiences and improving results—a prototype quality assessment program.

A total of five ASGs—each composed of a number of surgical teams—was formed before war’s end. Forsee’s group had twenty-four general surgery teams, six thoracic teams, six maxillofacial teams, six “shock” teams, and six neurosurgery teams. Despite some skepticism from battlefield commanders, the Auxiliary Group worked flawlessly. Landing at Anzio in early 1944, Forsee’s teams were portioned out to American and British field hospitals. General Surgery Team No. 18, for example, performed 270 operations on 184 critical patients, losing 22 to catastrophic injuries. Near Bastogne, Belgium, in December 1944, men of General Surgery Team 20, 3rd ASG, moved in with the 326th Airborne Medical Company (101st Airborne Division) and were positioned in a supposedly safe area outside of the town at a crossroads location called Herbairmont. They were the only surgical element for the entire division. By the afternoon of their arrival, 19 December, the teams were busy operating on a number of casualties suffering grave head, chest, abdomen, and extremity trauma. That evening, still working, the group was surprised by a German column motoring down the Houffalize road. Burp guns erupted on the tents, and surgeons bolted for cover. Capt. Gordon Block remembered:

Machine guns opened up . . . tracers tore through the canvas. The wounded lying on stretchers groaned as some were hit a second time with fragments. I remember thinking, “Son, you’ve had it now.”<sup>26</sup>

The entire team was taken captive and spent the rest of the war in prisoner of war camps in Germany.<sup>27</sup> Lack of surgical support for the embattled garrison in and around Bastogne would have heavy consequences on the morale, let alone health, of the troops. It was for that reason that surgeons and surgical supplies were flown in on two occasions. On Christmas Day, Maj. Howard “Buck” Serrell, one of the surgeons from the 4th Auxiliary Surgical Group, was flown to an empty field just outside of the town of Bastogne in a single-engine Stinson L-1 Vigilant piloted by Lt. Ancel “Gordon” Tafinger. He was whisked to safety by airborne troopers and began to sort through the hundreds of casualties piled up in the flimsy warehouse-like building at the back of Heintz Barracks in Bastogne, the location of the 101st Airborne command post. “It was a frightful and terrible sight” he wrote in his diary.<sup>28</sup> The scent of gangrene was unmistakable, of course.

A small chamber adjoining the riding stable, unheated, with only one dangling light bulb would serve as Serrell’s operating suite. He operated through the night, choosing those wounds most in danger of developing gangrenous infections.<sup>29</sup> The following day a plywood glider landed in that same field filled with more 4th ASG surgeons, headed by Harvard-trained Lamar Souter and packed with 600 pounds of supplies. Surgeons were ferried to Heinz Barracks where they met a blood-stained Buck Serrell and the tell-tale smell of sweat and pus. According to Serrell, some of the wounded had lingered there for days. One surgeon commented that it looked like a pitiful Civil War encampment for the infirm.<sup>30</sup> Within twenty-four hours, the group had completed more than fifty operations with only a handful of deaths. By 27 December, Patton’s Third Army had broken through and relieved the besieged garrison. Nevertheless, Serrell, Souter, and the three other surgeons who accompanied them saved life and limb of more than a few bloodied and maimed troopers—and did immeasurable benefit for the morale of a collection of abandoned and anxious wounded.

With the resounding success of Carroll’s portable surgical hospitals and auxiliary surgical groups, it was clear, by the end of the war, that forward surgical units were not only feasible, but practical, and effective. Skilled, experienced surgeons were placed where they were needed the most—at the front. Innumerable critically wounded benefitted from urgent, expert care with minimum delays. Third Army Surgeon Charles Odom summed up the indisputable evidence for these teams:

Early, skilled care of the wounded, as near the front as possible, conclusively proved its worth. Such care can best be provided by

proper triage, with diversion of nontransportable casualties to the platoon of a field hospital staffed by trained surgical teams and located in close proximity to the clearing station.<sup>31</sup>

But what did the future look like? Were these skilled surgeons to be part of a designated mobile hospital unit—such as Carroll’s portable surgical hospitals—or complementary teams attached to regular field hospitals as Churchill had advocated? Brig. Gen. Frederick Blesse, surgeon of the predecessor of Forces Command, was convinced of the benefits of forward surgical care and set about designing a mobile surgical hospital with organic surgeons and allied personnel. Churchill and colleague Col. Michael DeBakey also championed the idea but proposed independent surgical teams to be attached rather than assigned; they thought this would give greater flexibility to the unit. However, Blesse won out, and a sixty-bed surgical hospital was created, soon to be known as a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, or MASH.<sup>32</sup> Fourteen physicians (including five surgeons), twelve nurses, and ninety-seven enlisted were allotted and assigned to staff a mobile sixty-bed unit, totally self-sufficient with tentage and operating space. General assumptions were that these units would support division-size formations and become the Army’s *de facto* forward surgical unit.<sup>33</sup>



Figure 10.2. The 475th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital in Saudi Arabia. Courtesy of Kentucky Army National Guard.

## The Korean Conflict

It was in Korea that they were first tested. Three—the 8055, the 8063, and the 8076 MASH—were quickly dispatched to Korea in the summer of 1950 as sparse American infantry were being hammered south of Seoul. Lt. Col. Kryder Van Buskirk, a urologist by trade, assumed command of the 8076 and found that of the ten doctors assigned to his unit, seven had completed only an internship. Only one had finished a surgical residency. Buskirk, as a urologist, would be the second “general surgeon,” somewhat shy of his allotted five surgeons. On their first day of operation, five abdominal wounds rolled through the doors; three died on the operating table. Thirty-five patients were admitted that day, seventy-five the next. The nurse anesthetist, Lt. Katherine Wilson, was so busy administering ether that she was “nearly anesthetized from the fumes.”<sup>34</sup>

Following the Pusan breakout, MASH units followed the troops. Col. Frank Neuman’s 8063 MASH dashed up the peninsula, passing the 8055 MASH and motored on toward the Yalu River. On 27 October, they arrived at Anju on the south bank of the Chongch’ on River, a mere forty miles from the Manchurian border. Neuman found a schoolhouse to set up their hospital, but extra space was needed. Tents were erected outside as well, and just in time. The hospital was “overwhelmed” with victims of the Unsan ambush. In a thirty-six-hour period, doctors treated more than 700 patients. But in their zeal to keep up with the infantry, Neuman’s outfit found itself way out in front of the troopers, more like a reconnaissance unit than a field hospital. A few injured Chinese prisoners of war even filtered in, amazed so it seemed, that they were fighting Americans; the Chinese were regular army troops, very professional, not the hodge-podge of volunteer irregulars assumed by Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

For the duration of the conflict, MASH units served, for the most part, as stationary field hospitals. Enlarged to 200 beds, they now more closely resembled small evacuation-type hospitals. Their mobility had been seriously curtailed, but then the battle front for those stagnant years of 1951–53 remained stationary as well. Yet, because of helicopter evacuation, their mission was unchanged: urgent treatment of unstable, “non-transportable”



Figure 10.3. A receiving ward in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital in Korea. Courtesy of Army Medical Department.

casualties. The place of forward surgical care seemed firmly cemented in battlefield medical doctrine. What was different, however, was the speed of evacuation. The utility of helicopter transfer from points close to front lines—mostly battalion aid station or nearby collecting points—to MASH units was fully realized in Korea, cutting time to surgical care and obviating—in many cases—the need and imperative of any more sophisticated surgical care in proximity to battalion aid stations.

## **The French War in Indochina**

Further confirmation of this was seen in Indochina. At the same time as the Korean conflict, French expeditionary forces were battling Hồ Chí Minh's revolutionary government. In the wilds of central and northern Annam (the name formerly assigned to what is now central and northern Vietnam), small unit forays into the mountains and remote sanctuaries of the Việt Minh necessitated highly mobile and compact medical units sturdy enough to accompany infantry and endure lengthy periods of isolated sustained activity. The French had further modified their *auto-chir* formations developed during World War I into advanced surgical posts. Now referred to as surgical "*antennes*" (*antennes chirurgicale*), these teams comprised a sole physician, usually someone with at least a modicum of surgical training; a chief nurse; five specialized nurses—an anesthetist, a scrub nurse, a sterilizer, and operative assistant; and a "*reanimateur*," a resuscitator. The unit carried tents, instruments, cots, stretchers, operating tables, sterilizer, medicines, and dressings weighing four tons and could be loaded onto trucks or flown in on two C-47 "Dakota" aircraft. Even lighter units accompanied paratrooper formations, called *antenne chirurgicale parachutiste* (parachute surgical *antennes*). Like ground surgical units, the parachute teams had a single physician-surgeon and a number of nurse assistants. Their equipment was packed in thirty-two bundles (some wicker-framed to better absorb landing impact), totaling almost two tons. They had a holding capacity of thirty to sixty beds and could easily perform ten or twelve operations before resupplying, a situation that uncommonly occurred.<sup>35</sup> Their directive was clear: evaluate (triage), resuscitate, evacuate. Only rarely, with critically unstable patients, would they perform any extensive surgery, and then often under the direst of conditions and circumstances. These teams were truly the leanest surgical units conceived. They would locate with battalion-sized combat formations in the most hostile of situations; burrow into the earth, often sandbagged and timber-reinforced; and care for the wounded, even under artillery and small arms fire. They needed access, of course, to air evacuation, the only practical mode of transport in the mountains of northern Tonkin, so placement near airstrips

was imperative. Here, too, helicopters were introduced as evacuation craft. At first, the flimsy looking Hiller 360—piloted by a lone officer—would carry two litter patients strapped to either side. Neurosurgeon Valerie Andre attained notoriety by becoming one of the first two helicopter pilots, often flying right to the front lines to pick up wounded on the battlefield. By 1953, large bulbous Sikorsky choppers had arrived, capable of carrying up to six litter patients and an accompanying medical attendant.

The *antennes* achieved greatest notoriety from their work during the siege of Điện Biên Phủ in early 1954. Four were deployed to the *base aéroterrestre* in northwest Tonkin, near the border with Laos. Under brutal conditions, including almost daily heavy bombardment, the physicians performed amazing feats of resuscitation and stabilization of all types of wounds. Disaster struck when Việt Minh antiaircraft artillery was able to completely shut down incoming and outgoing flights, condemning the wounded to the underground dungeons of *antenne* hospitals. Yet, the value of having onsite medical support provided some degree of comfort and aided the morale of the beleaguered garrison.

### **The American Vietnam War**

The US Navy more or less adopted the French idea of close-in surgical support in America's Vietnam War a decade later. Marine medical battalions (run by the Navy), organic to each Marine division, were split into component companies, each to support a Marine regiment. The medical companies could operate a seventy-bed facility, including some surgical support. These collecting and clearing units, as they were called, were staffed by physicians whose expressed function was "triaging, sorting, transporting, and temporary hospitalization and evacuation after first aid and emergency surgical measures have been performed."<sup>36</sup> These were portable surgical hospitals capable of rapid repositioning to keep up with their maneuver regiments. In Vietnam, because of the nature of combat, these units most often resided in nearby military encampments that would also afford some degree of security. Doctors were qualified to perform minor and major surgical procedures—whatever was needed to salvage life or limb. In fact, oftentimes two or three operating rooms would be used for resuscitative procedures, including complex chest or abdominal procedures. They were more like Korean-era MASH units. However, small detachments could be deployed, much like the French *antennes*.

In fact, during the 1968 siege of Khe Sanh, a special "clearing platoon" of "C" (Charlie) Med of the Third Marine Division was sent to the combat base for medical support. Manned by a handful of doctors and hurriedly

sandbagged in, the small detachment saw 372 patients in its underground operating space during the first ten days of the Vietnamese offensive.<sup>37</sup> Just like at Điện Biên Phủ, evacuation was paramount. Doctors were concerned with stabilization only, often working under incoming artillery fire. Complete care could only take place at better-equipped hospitals. High explosives would rattle timber beams and surgeons' fingers. Vital was Khe Sanh's airstrip, the target of repeated Vietnamese attempts to isolate and strip the garrison of any hope of escape. "I can't tell you how important Charlie Med was to the morale of all of us at Khe Sanh," said combat engineer Lt. Bill Gay, himself a patient from a random artillery shell.<sup>38</sup> Simply the **perception** of medical care was enough to allay the fears of the combat Marine.

### **After Vietnam: Surgery then Hospitalization**

"A fundamental determinant of mortality among the wounded is the speed with which they are given medical care, particularly first aid, resuscitation, and initial surgery," wrote Gilbert Beebe and Michael DeBakey in 1952.<sup>39</sup> What is the essence of combat casualty care? STOP THE BLEEDING. Most combat deaths are from exsanguination; a good number bleed to death very quickly—within 90 minutes—from horrible mutilative wounds. Almost two-thirds of battlefield deaths occur in this fashion. Hemorrhage, even in contemporaneous literature, is responsible for almost half of all combat mortality.<sup>40</sup> Yet, keep in mind that a minority of wounded will have life- or limb-threatening injuries, perhaps ten to fifteen percent. Most wounded would survive despite the nearness of medical care. But for the direst wounds, *the* major factor in reversing this dismal picture of spiraling shock and demise is TIME: time to rescue and evacuation, time to medical attention, and time to surgical intervention. Someone, somewhere must stop the bleeding—and soon, within an hour is the oft-quoted time period, the "golden hour."

What can be done to shorten the time period? History is replete with those efforts to get medical providers to the patient sooner. Medics and corpsmen have been trained to recognize signs of hemorrhage and expedite evacuation. Physicians with some surgical (i.e. interventional) capabilities have been put closer and closer in proximity to the battlefield. But the closer one is to the lines of combat, the fewer treatment options become available. Major surgical procedures under fire are notoriously difficult and dangerous. To date, less invasive techniques are available to temporize internal bleeding such as "quick-clot" agents or REBOA (resuscitative endovascular balloon occlusion of the aorta) technology and could be activated at the level of battalion aid stations. Perhaps the future will

see trained specialists—doctors and paramedics—at the front armed with devices that can control internal bleeding without the need for emergency entry into body cavities. But it all must happen fast. And evacuation from the battle area is still paramount. Today’s air transport systems rapidly bring wounded to full-fledged surgical stations, but battlefield access is a function of enemy presence, terrain, and weather. And interference with evacuation capabilities, as witnessed by the French at Điện Biên Phủ, can be crippling for the welfare of the troops and eventually for morale. Nevertheless, at some point, strictly resuscitative care may not be enough. At some point, just as the French realized in Indochina or the Marines at Khe Sanh, surgical capabilities must be a stone’s throw away—embedded with combat units, however threatening the environment may become. In other words, the proper blend of mobility, capability, and sustainability will be necessary to provide life-supportive help, including surgical expertise, so close to the wounded as to fall within that Golden Hour of opportunity.



Figure 10.4. A portable operating room in Iraq. Courtesy of Army Medical Department.

## **An Uncertain Future**

Medical advances in the 1960s and 1970s saved lives. Helicopters moved severely wounded soldiers to the operating table, and intensive care units kept post-operative patients from dying. But these advances came at



a logistical cost.<sup>41</sup> In World War II, the medical system could function with .35 pounds of medical supplies/man/day; by the 1980s, that had risen to 1.55 pounds. The most mobile hospital, the MASH, became no more than 65-percent mobile with organic transportation and a lumbering footprint. It took twenty-seven aircraft to move a 250-personnel MASH. Recognizing the need for surgical support, and the problems of having a hospital forward, the Army experimented with getting surgical capability forward as a team, and moving a post-operative patient back by helicopter to a hospital ward. History had furnished the prototypes and the incentives.

For the Grenada intervention in 1982, the 5th MASH was too bulky, and a surgical team was improvised to deploy with a “slice” of the 307th Medical Battalion.<sup>42</sup> Line and unconventional units at Fort Bragg tested various teams that would fit in one C-130. The team could treat up to sixty patients without re-supply and could hold up to twelve critical casualties, but was only for a few hours—it was not a hospital, and relied on prompt evacuation.<sup>43</sup> For Operation JUST CAUSE, the December 1989 removal of Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega, the 5th MASH and the 56th Medical Battalion set up two forward surgical teams (FSTs) at Howard Air Force Base in the Canal Zone. The FSTs took in 129 casualties and performed 73 operations, 22 of which were classified as major cases.<sup>44</sup>

In Operation Desert Storm, forward surgical teams had limited operative experiences but were reasonably mobile. Meanwhile, conventional hospitals had been too heavy to move. Even the Army’s highest-readiness hospital, the Fort Bragg-based 5th MASH, had been too slow on the battlefield in its full formation. Justifiably, the Army shifted to FSTs, trimmed to twenty medical staff and limited but adequate operative capabilities. They would work in the brigade rear, not the division rear; could move with only a few vehicles; and had very restricted holding capacity—basically, stabilize and evacuate (much like French *antennes chirurgicales*). But immediate access from the front lines is the true value of FSTs. Wounded could be taken from battalion aid stations directly—by ground transport—to FSTs. From the FSTs, though, there *must* be access out. Inability to remove critical patients to higher echelons of care would be the death knell of any forward surgical effort. Điện Biên Phủ proved that. Air supremacy is key.

FSTs soon proved almost as popular as the MASH had been as the twenty-first century unfolded. In the maneuver phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom, FSTs performed as expected. They were mobile, operated, and stabilized wounded; then patients were flown to the rear. When a secure battlefield developed (and control of the air was maintained), combat support hospitals (CSHs) and MASH units took over, relaying patients

directly from the front lines. Spoiled by their effectiveness, though, field commanders still wanted “their” FST attached even though stopping a medevac at a FST that had less capabilities than a CSH would be worse for the wounded.

And it all came down to that crucial issue—TIME—that elusive target: the “Golden Hour.” Promoted by R. Adams Crowley in the 1970s as the span after which trauma patients would have much diminished chances of survival, it became a buzzword among trauma surgeons (actually surgeon Edward Churchill had alluded to it in the 1940s).<sup>45</sup> There is nothing magical about the Golden Hour. It merely signifies that time is of the essence. Obviously for hemorrhaging men and women, the sooner the bleeding stops, the better; there is little argument about that. The Golden Hour provides a realistic target in which to frame resuscitative care. As a result, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates directed in 2009 that US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq implement a Golden Hour policy: medical support must be organized so that potential casualties could receive surgical care within an hour.<sup>46</sup> Partly this mandate was met by deploying more air ambulance units, partly it was met by not operating in areas remote from bases, and at times it was met by moving very small surgical teams forward. These Golden Hour Offset Surgical Treatment Teams (GHOST-Ts) could move to a forward base, or even accompany an operational team. While the Golden Hour mandate did not apply to other areas, the Army tested expeditionary resuscitation surgical teams that could carry all their mission equipment in rucksacks, “backpack surgeons” harkening back to the portable surgical hospitals of World War II.<sup>47</sup>

Yet all these efforts relied on prompt evacuation, both from the battlefield, and after surgery. With few enemy air defenses, such a system could work. Those happy circumstances may not be the norm, and more recently the military has been exploring the skills, equipment, and training required for prolonged field care, mainly applying before surgery. Medics may have to tend the wounded for hours or days, going back to the conditions before 1914, but with better equipment and training to sustain life before the wounded can be evacuated to surgery. But combat surgeons are wise to remember the now-popular maxim, retold by countless battlefield medics over the decades: STOP THE BLEEDING. And stop it as early as possible. This imperative, though, must be balanced against the hazards to physicians, medics, and patients rendering care far forward and within range of enemy fire.

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## Chapter 11

### Assured Mobility and River Crossing Operations

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*Large-scale ground combat is the most demanding and lethal end of the conflict continuum and the benchmark against which the Army is equipped and trained . . . and is . . . focus[ed] on destroying or dislocating enemy forces or securing key land objectives that reduce the enemy's ability to conduct operations.*<sup>1</sup>

—Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations*

Close combat is characterized by face-to-face engagements with the enemy on difficult terrain “where enemies seek to negate friendly advantages in technology and weapon capabilities.”<sup>2</sup> “The last 100 yards” is a metaphor for close combat, large-scale ground combat operations (LS-GCO) conducted during the final stages of achieving an objective or completing an operation.

Numerous river crossing operations were conducted during World War II in support of larger combat operations. The crossings met fierce enemy opposition from direct-fire small arms, mortars, and artillery during the assault across the river to establish a beachhead: representing the last 100 yards of these operations. A historical case study of the Saar deliberate river crossing provides the backdrop for examining what our operations doctrine describes as one of the most challenging combined arms missions. A brief review is also presented of river crossings under fire conducted since WWII, demonstrating how infrequently our Army has conducted these operations over the last sixty years. A summary of the evolution of Army Operations Doctrine from 1941 to 2017 is reviewed to provide context for the evolution of Engineer Doctrine during the same time period.<sup>3</sup> The chapter closes with proposed implications for future deliberate river crossings in LSGCO.

#### **Saar-Moselle Triangle**

The Moselle River crossing conducted in November 1944 by the US Army is perhaps the most studied and written-about combat river crossing in US history. The crossing was a vital objective for the capture of Metz, part of an area from Trier to Metz considered by Allied forces to be the best avenue for exploitation supporting the advance to the Rhine River.<sup>4</sup>





on the Switzerland border. The Saar-Moselle Triangle is an area starting at the divergence of the Moselle and Saar rivers in the north, continuing for approximately 16½ miles south along each river. The triangle is bordered at the south by almost thirteen miles of a section of the Siegfried Line known as the Orscholz Switch running from Orscholz west to Besch across from Remich, Luxembourg.<sup>5</sup>

Third Army engaged in nearly a month of fierce fighting in an attempt to establish a corridor through the switch and bridgeheads over the Saar River. Precarious bridgeheads were established across the Saar by three divisions; however, they only consisted of footbridges and ferries. The Third Army advance slowed to a halt. By mid-December 1944, Patton was making plans for a new offensive including the use of airstrikes by the IX Air Force. The plan was abruptly abandoned to redirect four divisions of the Third Army as a counterattacking force during the Battle of the Bulge.<sup>6</sup>

Operations within the Saar-Moselle Triangle recommenced in January 1945. Third Army's mission fell to XX Corps to clear the triangle and surmount the Orscholz Switch, clearing the way to secure Trier.<sup>7</sup> XX Corps relied on the 94th Infantry Division (ID) and 10th Armored Division (AD) to lead the offensive. The 95th Infantry Division and Third Cavalry Group defended the Corps front.<sup>8</sup> The XX Corps plan was to attack the switch line through a simultaneous effort of all 94th ID regiments. Two combat commands of the 10th AD would pass through the breach, proceed to obtain the high ground overlooking Trier, and initiate fire into the city. One combat command of the 10th AD would then seize two bridges known to be intact over the Saar at Kanzem and Wiltengen.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike the attempts to penetrate the switch in November and December 1944, the 94th ID only encountered light and sporadic enemy resistance. Probes of the switch were conducted for a month, leading to a breakthrough on 19 February commencing before dawn and complete by 1800 hours. In a single day, there was an opening in the switch with very few casualties.<sup>10</sup> Then 10th AD passed through the opening on 20 February and by the 21st completed the clearance of the Saar-Moselle Triangle.<sup>11</sup>

The crossing of the Saar River to secure Trier still lay ahead. The terrain west of the Saar River had a steep incline, with marshy ground near the river bank and sheer cliffs to the east. The Saar averaged 125 to 150 feet in width and 15 feet in depth. In January, the river was swollen and turbulent with a seven-mile-per-hour flow.<sup>12</sup> On 20 February, 10th AD was ordered to execute an assault river crossing to seize a bridgehead in the vicinity of Ockfen commencing the night of 21 February. The plan

had infantry of the 376th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) crossing the Saar in engineer assault boats to establish a bridgehead while Task Force Chamberlain, Combat Command A simultaneously seized the bridges at Kanzem and Wiltengen.<sup>13</sup>

The truncated planning and coordination timeline for the assault river crossing resulted in three attempts before it was successful. The originally scheduled early morning assault was delayed for lack of preparation to ensure engineer assault boats were available.<sup>14</sup> The second attempt, made at 1630 hours during daylight without benefit of the cover of darkness, encountered a ferocious barrage of very accurate automatic fire. The enemy fires also prevented the chemical company from providing a smoke screen. The attack was halted and rescheduled for later that day at 2300 hours.<sup>15</sup>

The third attempt again met with continuous machine gun fire; however, the accuracy was poor because of the cover of darkness. Two infantry battalions completed the crossing employing 200 boats, with only 27 still serviceable at the end of the assault.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, stiff enemy resistance prevented the 376th RCT from securing the bridgehead and their objective to construct a bridge for 10th AD to cross tanks and vehicles.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, Task Force Chamberlain met light resistance en route to the Kanzem and Wiltengen bridges, arriving within striking distance of the Wiltengen Bridge at 0345 on 22 February. Unfortunately, the Germans blew up both bridges before the task force could secure them.<sup>18</sup>

XX Corps also planned a diversionary attack by the 94th ID resulting in the surprise crossing of the Saar and establishment of a bridgehead in the vicinity of Taben. Over three days, the bridgehead was extended to 1½ miles deep and engineers constructed two floating treadway bridges. On the 25th of February, the 94th ID crossed tanks, tank destroyers, and motor transport—completing the first successful crossing of the Saar River. As a result of their success, 94th ID became the main effort of XX Corps.<sup>19</sup> By 27 February, a continuous bridgehead and a heavy pontoon bridge were completed between Saarburg and Beurig.<sup>20</sup> Trier was subsequently captured on 2 March.<sup>21</sup>

## **River Crossing Operations Post-World War II**

By the commencement of the Korean War, engineer combat battalions in armored divisions had been expanded to include an organic float bridge company. In “Engineer Tactical Policies Study No. 72,” the General Board, US Forces, European, reviewed engineer tactical functions for river crossing and bridging, and general procedures to coordinate engineer support to a field army.<sup>22</sup> The board recommended that organic capability

for bridging be reestablished at division level, reverting back to pre-WWII organization.<sup>23</sup> River crossing operations planning and resourcing remained at the corps level. Despite the additional bridging capability at the armored division, retention of the Corps Engineer roles for planning and resourcing proved to be a weakness. The assault river crossing of the Nak-tong River failed because divisions did not have the flexibility required to adapt to the changing enemy situation.<sup>24</sup>

Changes in tactical bridging technology prior to the Vietnam War again increased the capability of organic bridging companies in armored divisions and led to reintroducing organic bridge companies in infantry divisions. However, the type of operations conducted during the Vietnam War primarily required line of communications bridging. There were no opportunities to validate the improved river crossing assault bridging technology and the addition of bridging units to infantry divisions. Additionally, no assault river crossings were performed during Grenada operations in 1983, Panama in 1989, or Operation Desert Storm in 1991; therefore, there were no opportunities to validate the changes in bridging equipment and the engineer bridge companies.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 11.2. A Bradley fighting vehicle commander from the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division radios his crossing time to his headquarters during Operation Joint Endeavor. Courtesy of Joint Combat Camera Center.

The 1995 Operation Joint Endeavor in the Balkans also had no assault river crossings. However, the 502nd Multi-Role Bridge Company constructed the longest float bridge in American history: 2,239 feet of line of communication bridging and the only major route into the operational area.<sup>26</sup>

In 2003, during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), US Army V Corps finally had the opportunity to conduct river crossings in a combat zone. During the attack to Baghdad, the major bridges across the Euphrates River had been rigged for demolition; many were severely damaged before US forces could capture them. Engineers emplaced medium girder bridges across missing spans of damaged bridges. In one case, an assault float bridge crossing of the Euphrates was conducted under fire. The V Corps' 3rd Infantry Division's deliberate crossing of the Euphrates River was the only assault float bridge crossing under fire during OIF. No US corps or division has executed a river crossing under fire since.<sup>27</sup> One other significant assault float bridge was constructed during OIF across the Tigris River. The "Birthday Bridge" float bridge in Tikrit spanned 580 meters, one of the longest assault bridges constructed in an area of combat operations.<sup>28</sup>

The most recent protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have not had any significant assault river crossings. The focus of new brigade engineer battalions has been on defeating improvised explosive devices and new counter-improvised explosive device tactics.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 11.3. Birthday Bridge over the Tigris River. From *Engineer*, July–September 2003.

## Saar River Crossing Doctrinal Comparison

The crossing of the Saar River during WWII provides the opportunity to examine a major river crossing through the lens of current doctrine. It is appropriate to use a major river crossing operation from WWII because the US Army has not conducted a river crossing operation of this scale and complexity since the end of WWII. Gap crossing fundamentals and engineer terrain variables from Field Manual (FM) 3-90.12, *Combined Arms Gap-Crossing Operations* provide the basis to evaluate the Saar River crossing.<sup>30</sup> The gap crossing fundamentals include: Surprise, Extensive Preparation, Flexible Planning, Traffic Control, Organization, and Speed.

**Surprise** minimizes enemy advantages. The terrain west of the Saar River had a steep incline with marshy ground near the river bank and sheer cliffs to the east. It was a poor location for bridging but good for the element of surprise. The Saar averaged 125 to 150 feet in width and 15 feet in depth. In January 1944, the river was swollen and turbulent with a seven-mile-per-hour flow.<sup>31</sup> A German officer interviewed after the war said, “No one could have expected that the Americans would attack across this steep country, but they did.”<sup>32</sup> During the crossing in the vicinity of Taben, the 3rd Battalion, 376th RCT took advantage of the terrain to achieve the element of surprise. Their advance to the objective was not detected by the enemy and amounted to an infiltration.<sup>33</sup>

The element of surprise was sacrificed during the 1st Battalion, 376th RCT river crossing attempt near Ockfen. The initial attempt to assault the river during darkness was delayed because engineer assault boats were not available. After a second failed attempt during daylight, a third assault was successful with 1st and 2nd Infantry battalions completing the crossing. However, unrelenting enemy resistance prevented them from securing the bridgehead. As noted in FM 3-90.12, “Forces that fail to achieve surprise may also fail in a crossing attempt.”<sup>34</sup>

**Extensive Preparation** ensures synchronized operations. The truncated planning and coordination timeline was exacerbated by the lack of a reconnaissance, no training or rehearsals, and poor coordination for engineer troops and assault boats.<sup>35</sup> From FM 3-90.12: “Full-scale rehearsals are essential to clarify roles and procedures, train personnel, inspect equipment, develop teamwork, and ensure the unity of effort.”<sup>36</sup> The first crossing attempt was delayed because of poor coordination of engineer assault boats. The enemy initially defending the river line was a small force consisting of fortress battalions, machine gun groups, and *Volkssturm*. The delay provided the enemy time to reorganize and man the fortifications of

the Siegfried Line covering the crossing area.<sup>37</sup> The second assault crossing attempt encountered the reinforced German defenses and was repulsed by a barrage of very accurate automatic fire. The third assault crossing was successful, though the bridgehead was never secured because of continuous machine gun fire. It was not discovered until after the third successful assault that the German 2nd Mountain Division had arrived as reinforcement.<sup>38</sup> “Comprehensive intelligence of the enemy’s composition, disposition, and crossing area terrain must be developed early,” according to FM 3-90.12.<sup>39</sup> The most influential element of planning by XX Corps was a diversionary attack by the 94th ID in the vicinity of Taben. “Commanders plan and initiate deceptive operations.”<sup>40</sup>

**Flexible Planning** “allows the force to salvage the loss of a crossing site or to exploit a sudden opportunity.”<sup>41</sup> A diversionary attack by the 94th ID resulted in the surprise crossing of the Saar and establishment of a bridgehead near Taben. The 94th ID’s success resulted in the re-designation of the division as the XX Corps main effort.<sup>42</sup> The Corps commander redirected elements of 10th AD to pass through the Taben bridgehead. This ultimately led to XX Corps and 3rd Army reestablishing the initiative and capturing Trier.

**Traffic Control** “is essential to cross units at the locations and in the sequence desired.”<sup>43</sup> The river crossing by the 94th ID encountered challenges because fog caused “lost” units and traffic jams. A field trains unit found themselves off their route in the city of Kastel, causing a delay of an engineer convoy carrying river assault equipment. The Kastel traffic jam also affected the movement times of two assaulting companies, resulting in uncoordinated attack equipment.<sup>44</sup> Fog also affected the crossing in the vicinity of Staadt with the consequence that two units arrived simultaneously, with only enough assault boats to cross one unit at a time.<sup>45</sup>

Regarding **Organization**, FM 3-90.12 indicates that commanders’ command and control nodes “take on additional functions in deliberate gap crossings. . . . [P]rocedures that the controlling HQ establishes must be clear, simple, and rehearsed by all elements to ensure responsive support of the plan and unity of command.”<sup>46</sup> The Saar River crossing operations effectively employed command and control measures that are still reflected in current gap-crossing operations as control mechanisms and elements.<sup>47</sup>

FM 3-90.12 describes **Speed** as “a race between the crossing force and the enemy to mass combat power on the far side. The longer the force takes to cross, the less likely it will succeed.”<sup>48</sup> The Third Army timeline for the assault river crossing was accelerated in an attempt to continue

the momentum from the clearing of the Moselle-Saar Triangle. The river crossing operation near Ockfen resulted in three attempts before it was successful; the enemy had time to reorganize and reinforce their defenses; therefore, stiff enemy resistance prevented the 376th RCT from securing the bridgehead.

The Engineer terrain variables include: Observation and fields of fire, Avenues of approach, Key terrain, Obstacles, and Cover and concealment (OAKOC). **Observation and Fields of Fire** must be considered from a friendly and enemy perspective. An assaulting force “masked from enemy observation enhances surprise and survivability.”<sup>49</sup> The crossing at Taben was advantageous to the 302nd RCT from both perspectives. Once Hocker Hill was secured, it provided the 302nd RCT with clear observation and the ability to effectively target indirect fires. The Germans had not expected it possible to cross the river in this location and, therefore, had no direct fire weapons covering the site.<sup>50</sup>

**Avenues of Approach** “to the crossing site should be capable of handling a large volume of traffic . . . provide for lateral movement between the primary routes . . . [avoid] sharp or constricted turns, narrow roadway width, and overhead obstructions.”<sup>51</sup> The area had a small road network, and roads were in poor shape.<sup>52</sup> Cities had narrow streets with an erratic layout.<sup>53</sup> The Germans had constructed their Saar River defenses to ensure that they covered likely avenues of approach.<sup>54</sup> The 302nd Infantry crossing site was selected because it was one of very few areas with a road which went down to the river’s edge. The initial assault across the river was effective under the cover of fog. As the fog lifted, effective enemy indirect artillery fires covering the approach to the river and crossing sites caused the assaulting force to delay securing the bridgehead until the onset of darkness.<sup>55</sup>

FM 3-90.12 notes that **Key Terrain** “targets indirect-fire suppression and obscuration for breaching operations.”<sup>56</sup> The terrain west of the Saar River had a steep incline with marshy ground near the river bank, and sheer cliffs to the east that prevented fording. The Saar averaged 125 to 150 feet in width and fifteen feet in depth.<sup>57</sup> In January, the river was swollen and turbulent with a seven-mile-per-hour flow.<sup>58</sup> The western approaches favored the enemy defending from the high ridges on the east.<sup>59</sup> Taben was selected as the 302nd Infantry crossing site because it had a road which went down to the river’s edge. According to one account:

[The opposite shore] consisted of a twelve-foot vertical retaining wall. Perched on top of the wall and paralleling the river were a

highway and a railroad. Beyond these the terrain rose in a vertical rock cliff some 400 feet high. . . . Taben was practically everything that a good crossing site should not be.<sup>60</sup>

The Germans did not consider this area to be an avenue of approach so only covered it with small arms and machine gun fire as well as artillery fire.<sup>61</sup>

**Obstacles** are a consideration for breaching during the assault and countermobility for a rapid defense of the bridgehead.<sup>62</sup> Unexpected obstacles added to the disorganization of the crossings.<sup>63</sup> “Several yards from the far shore, the assault boats hung up on partially submerged barbed wire” preventing the boats from going farther. Infantryman had to swim and wade to the far shore.<sup>64</sup> The defenses of the Siegfried Line reinforced the natural river obstacle requiring reduction of pillboxes and minefields.<sup>65</sup>

**Cover and Concealment** “requires planning for obscuration/assault positions for breaching operations.”<sup>66</sup> The initial assault near Ockfen was planned for the early hours of darkness for concealment; this operation was delayed. The second assault conducted during daylight planned on using smoke for cover; however, the enemy fire was so intense the chemical companies could not create the smoke. The third assault was conducted during hours of darkness and had the additional concealment of foggy weather; this assault succeeded.

## **Evolution of Engineer Doctrine 1941–2017**

The focus of this Engineer Doctrine review is the evolution of engineer missions, with a concentration on river crossing operations doctrine. The review will form the basis for examining the Saar-Moselle Triangle case study and identifying implications for deliberate river crossing operations during future LSGCOs. Engineer Doctrine has maintained a broad set of enduring missions as it has kept pace with the evolution of Army operations doctrine. Two broad engineer missions have remained constant throughout the doctrinal evolution: mobility and countermobility, though the terminology has changed. Three other broad missions of the engineers have always been present in many different forms: survivability, topography, and other engineer services across the theater.

In 1941, Corps of Engineer missions identified in Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations, Field Service Regulations*, were construction and demolition, facilitating friendly movement, and hindering enemy movement.<sup>67</sup> Survivability missions, though not labeled as such, were described in various areas of the manual such as provide for shelter and comfort of our troops, provide camouflage material and give assistance in its use, assist in flank and rear area security, and execute works of a special character



including building command and observation posts. The topography mission of survey and map production was performed by a grouping of Special Engineer troops, as well as within several other general engineering functions performed across the theater.

The doctrinal evolution of Army Operations Doctrine during the Cold War drove Engineer Doctrine changes:

The Army's ideas about warfighting were evolving in a number of key areas: from service independence (an unequivocal claim in the 1954 FM 100-5) to service interdependence; from defense to offense and then to a more proper balance between the two; from battlefield linearity to greater fluidity; from set-piece battle to simultaneous operations throughout the depth of the battlefield. Throughout, doctrine reflects the adaptation of technology to new weapons systems and capabilities, organizations, missions, training, leader development, and soldier support. In this way, doctrine continues to be the Army's engine of change.<sup>68</sup>

The first major change to the engineer roles occurred in the FM 5-100, *Engineer Operations* (1996) when they were explicitly revised to Mobility, Countermobility, Survivability, General Engineering, and Topographic Engineering. Subsequent versions of FM 3-0, *Operations*, in 2001, 2003, and 2008 transformed the ideas into the concept of Full Spectrum Operations—ultimately re-conceptualizing the environment of operations—now characterized by instability, hybrid threats, and persistent conflict.<sup>69</sup>

Engineer river crossing doctrine evolved with Army doctrine in FM 31-60, *River-Crossing Operations* (1962), FM 90-13, *River Crossing Operations* (1978), and FM 90-13, *River Crossing Operations* (1998).<sup>70</sup> The 2004 version of FM 3-34, *Engineer Operations*, introduced a new multi-functional concept: Assured Mobility.<sup>71</sup> The concept ultimately became embedded across several Army warfighting functions as a multi-branch means of integrating operations.<sup>72</sup> Subsequently, the 2008 FM 3-90.12, *Combined Arms Gap Crossing Operations* adopted the Assured Mobility construct, marking a significant shift in river crossing doctrine. One major change was in the operational approach to engineer structure and engineer equipment to support the modular force. The second important change was the expansion of the art of river crossing operations to apply to all gap crossings in support of combat maneuver and line of communication.<sup>73</sup> River crossing fundamentals were changed to Gap Crossing Fundamentals, river crossing considerations became Gap Crossing Considerations, and engineer terrain variables were reorganized to observation

and fields of fire, avenues of approach, key terrain, obstacles, and cover and concealment: OACOK. The doctrinal changes eliminated the recognition of river crossings as a special operation. This was a significant departure from the long-standing (from 1941 to 2008) recognition of river crossing operations as a special engineer mission because of their complexity and unique challenges. However, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-90.4, *Combined Arms Mobility* (2016), continued to emphasize: “The deliberate wet-gap crossing is one that requires the use of rafting (non-bridging) and bridging assets. . . . Typically, wet-gap crossings are one of the most difficult types. They generally require significant augmentation of mobility support assets.”<sup>74</sup>

The latest revisions to Army Operations Doctrine shifted from Full Spectrum Operations to Unified Land Operations (i.e., ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, 2011; ADP 3-0, *Operations*, 2016; ADP 3-0, *Operations*, 2017).<sup>75</sup> The 2017 update reintroduced the potential for large-scale ground combat operations (LSGCO) because of the resurgence of sophisticated “Peer Threats.”

The transition to Unified Land Operations (ULO) was reflected in FM 3-34, *Engineer Operations* (2011), and updated in FM 3-34, *Engineer Operations* (2014).<sup>76</sup> A formalized Engineer Framework was added consisting of interrelated capabilities of Combat Engineering, General Engineering, and Geospatial Engineering. Subordinate to the capabilities were four Engineer Lines of Support: Assure Mobility, Enhance Protection, Enable Force Projection and Logistics, and Build Partner Capacity and Develop Infrastructure.<sup>77</sup> The Assure Mobility Engineer Line of Support synchronizes the combat, general, and geospatial engineering capabilities. This allows a commander a position of advantage against an enemy through mobility operations and denies the enemy the freedom of action to attain a position of advantage through countermobility operations.<sup>78</sup> The renewed focus on LSGCO introduces the potential for executing large-scale river crossing operations not conducted since WWII.

## **Implications to Future Large-Scale Ground Combat Operations**

The analysis of the Saar River crossing demonstrates that today’s gap crossing doctrine would also have been relevant during WWII. It seems river crossing operations transcend the evolution of US Army Operations and Engineer Doctrine. The fundamentals, considerations, and terrain variables of OACOK—expanded to all forms of gap crossings—have not changed much throughout the decades since WWII. Deliberate river crossing operations historically required extensive planning and significant re-

sources. Technological advancements have only resulted in incremental changes to river crossing tactics, techniques, procedures, and equipment. The most effective tactical method for a rapid crossing of a large river is still fundamentally pontoon bridging. The military force is still extremely vulnerable during these operations as it masses and then is canalized as it crosses the tactical bridging.

The challenges of wet-gap crossings are also fundamentally unchanged. The FM 5-6, *Operations of Engineer Units* (1954) future trends for capabilities have not advanced significantly.<sup>79</sup> The military now has greater air transport capacity, and multi-purpose amphibious vehicles have been developed with improved fording capability. Increased rotary wing lift capabilities can accelerate the assault force capture of the bridgehead. Increases in range, mobility, and precision of artillery and other weapons likely will not result in a significant advantage when facing peer and near-peer threats. These increased capabilities have not been significant enough to eliminate the requirement for maneuver forces to execute deliberate wet-gap crossings. The challenge still exists for the use of weapons of mass destruction, and it is anticipated that future operations will create new challenges.

The Gap Crossing Fundamentals for planning and executing river crossings will become extremely critical in two areas. Surprise will be more difficult to attain because of advanced sensors as well as cyber and space capabilities. Speed becomes a relative consideration. Deliberate river crossings are inherently slow in establishing bridging and crossing the force. Targeting and precision munitions capabilities have increased substantially and can be used to destroy bridging material sites and bridging faster than it can be constructed. All of the engineer variables of OAKOC become more complex with new multi-domain characteristics to each variable.

In consideration of intractable characteristics of deliberate river crossings, to include their long-standing presence in doctrine as a “special operation,” it may be prudent to reexamine the decision to generalize all gap crossings within Assure Mobility. This doctrinal change eliminated the recognition of river crossings as a special operation and includes the assertion that “river crossings are simply one focused set of challenges among all of the possible gap-crossing operations.”<sup>80</sup> Of greater concern is the Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-34.22, *Engineer Operations-Brigade Combat Team and Below* (2014) description of the river gap crossing as an “implied task” of analyzing the engineer mission.<sup>81</sup>

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## Chapter 12

### **The Meuse-Argonne, 1918: Company-Level Close Combat, the Beginnings of Fire and Maneuver from the Trenches into the Open Fields Beyond**

David Scott Stieghan

The greatest revolution in United States infantry tactics and organization occurred in 1918 in preparation for combat on the Western Front during World War I. While training in France, the US Army and Marine Corps transformed from a force that relied on linear and skirmishing methods into small unit formations that use the same tactics and weapons for fire and maneuver that infantrymen would recognize today. The American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) came of age during the last forty-seven days of the war at the Battle of Meuse-Argonne located in the hilly region of Alsace-Lorraine, France. More than 1.3 million soldiers and marines fought in this war-ending battle, and around 28,000 died of their wounds. While only half of the 4.7 million Doughboys (a common traditional term for American infantrymen) then in uniform made it overseas before the 11 November 1918 Armistice ended hostilities, those who marched into combat helped the Entente Allies overwhelm Germany and the Central Powers and bring the war to a close. While grand strategy and the operational art were important to the conduct of the war, it was the ability of US soldiers and marines to cross “No Man’s Land,” the contested space between opposing trench lines, and close with the enemy in the largest battle in American history that made the difference and ended the Great War.

The United States declared war on Germany and the Central Powers on 6 April 1917 and joined the Allies in a war that began two-and-a-half years earlier. While American military leaders carefully studied the new forms of war through journals and newspaper accounts, little was done to prepare for the possibility that the United States would enter the conflict with land forces. Weapons and tactics developed for trench warfare seemed unnecessary for a military that did not think they would need them. The United States studied the Great War with great professional interest from afar but considered massive trench warfare preparation irrelevant until the situation suddenly changed. When notified of the decision by President Woodrow Wilson and the US Congress to declare war on the Central Powers in 1917, the US Army found itself in a quandary without doctrine, tactics, or weapons suitable for the modern industrial war in Europe.

Upon joining the war, the United States immediately began to build a massive military force. Nearly 24 million men registered for the draft and enlistees filled recruiting stations across the nation, but what to do with a million recruits became an issue. There were no barracks or training camps, no uniforms, few rifles, and, worst of all, not enough sergeants and officers available to train the influx of rookies. The decision was made to use existing Regular units as a cadre for a few divisions to send to France as rapidly as possible. The National Guard would be called up, federalized, and raised to full-strength with volunteers. Composed of two dozen divisions of draftees, the National Army would be organized next to provide around half of the divisions needed in France. While the plan was good on paper, the shortage of everything needed to create these divisions resulted in chaos.

Within a month, the first Regular and National Guard units scheduled to deploy gathered in East Coast camps and waited for scarce transport shipping to take them to Europe. There, the various elements were formed into divisions and began training, assisted by veteran foreign advisors. None of the existing pre-war American leadership had any knowledge of trench or industrial warfare. No AEF senior Army and Marine leaders knew how to fight anyone other than the Apaches, Spaniards, and Mexican Villista bandits, so everyone was learning at the same time. To make matters worse, there were no helmets, gas masks, automatic rifles, machine guns, field artillery, aircraft, or other necessary tools besides what the French could provide. With the exception of rotating small units into British or French trench sectors, the first few divisions to arrive could do little to prepare to occupy an American sector. While the Army would take months to recruit new soldiers and at least six months or more to develop and educate both commissioned and non-commissioned officers, American industry would take a year and a half to two years to mobilize for war.

In addition to the Regular and National Guard divisions, each “National Army” division was composed of draftees. These men waited at home to be called by their local draft boards to serve in division groups of about 28,000 men. They would be turned into soldiers when the Army had enough uniforms, rifles, training posts, barracks, rifle ranges, and sergeants. The AEF commander, General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing, believed that reliance on the rifle would restore the power of maneuver and end the trench deadlock. His orders to US officers training troops were emphatic: “All instruction must contemplate the assumption of a vigorous offensive.”<sup>1</sup> He never wavered in his conviction that trench warfare someday would need to give way to open warfare. Pershing continued

pointing out that the essential weapon for the US Army had always and would continue to be the rifle. Indeed, the general insisted that American troops be taken to rifle ranges as frequently as possible to rapidly improve their marksmanship skills.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to improving rifle firing skills, General Pershing required that soldiers vigorously train to break through the trench deadlock on the Western Front by moving the enemy out into the open country beyond to engage them in open combat:

It was my opinion that the victory could not be won by the costly process of attrition, but it must be won by driving the enemy out into the open and engaging him in a war of movement. Instruction in this kind of warfare was based upon individual and group initiative, resourcefulness, and tactical judgment, which were also of great advantage in trench warfare. Therefore, we took decided issue with the Allies and, without neglecting thorough preparation for trench fighting, undertook to train mainly for open combat, with the object from the start of vigorously forcing the offensive.<sup>3</sup>

Before marching out to the rifle ranges, new soldiers learned to don a uniform and adjust their equipment. After training to load, fire accurately, and clean their weapons, they returned to their barracks to prepare for deployment directly to France. Some National Army and National Guard division rookies boarded trains bound for the Western Front as soldiers within six weeks of leaving civilian life. They were rushed overseas to be trained by experienced Allied instructors in the new ways of fighting industrial warfare. Many arrived in France prepared to do little more than shoot and salute.

For a full year after the AEF arrived in France, it was still transitioning to new formations, weapons, and ways of warfare. No set tactical doctrine yet existed. Shortly after the declaration of war, the US War Department decided to adopt French weapons and formations for combat on the Western Front. While it was organizing divisions and training leaders in the United States prior to going overseas to fight, the Army distributed *Instructions on the Offensive Conduct of Small Units* to leader training camps in 1917 and used it as the early basis for training what was to become the AEF. The manual included versions of the new French formations for advancing through artillery barrages, machine gun, and rifle fire across No Man's Land.<sup>4</sup>

In 1916, the French Army settled on a means to empower an infantry platoon of around forty men to lead the advance through a reorganization

of its formation and man-portable specialty weapons. In addition to traditional rifle squads of around eight men led by a corporal, small teams and groups were organized to wield hand grenades (often called hand bombs), rifle grenades launched up to 200 meters from cups attached to the muzzle end of rifle barrels, and the new light automatic rifle, the Model 1915 CSRG Chauchat. These light weapons were developed to allow infantry soldiers to carry explosives and automatic fire across No Man's Land and into the enemy trenches. They were designed to help destroy troops in trenches and bunkers and to hold gains. Assaulting Allied troops could then break up the inevitable German counterattack on their foothold in the enemy trenches. Attacking units were expected to perform this position-holding mission when they were weakest.

While it was always costly in terms of lives to get across the open space between the lines and through the barbed wire obstacles, it proved most difficult to maintain a decimated assault force short on ammunition, water, food, and particularly leaders, inside the newly captured trenches. The holding attack became the approved method to capture key terrain as a preliminary to continuing an advance. Though agonizingly slow and costly, and moving a few kilometers each attack every few weeks or months, it was the only method the generals could envision for regaining maneuver on a battlefield dominated by machine guns protected in trenches.<sup>5</sup>

On 14 January 1918, the US Army officially adopted a new regulation that reorganized all infantry units. From 1778 to 1918, the rifle company was the smallest permanent organization of American infantry troops with 100 soldiers. The commanding captain was armed with a pistol while all other soldiers carried rifles and bayonets. With the stroke of a typewriter, the Army adopted a new French-type company that grew to 256 men and was subdivided into four rifle platoons and a headquarters platoon.<sup>6</sup> Each of these new rifle platoons contained fifty-nine soldiers led by a platoon leader (lieutenant) and a platoon sergeant. The platoon became the smallest tactical unit and was organized into two half-platoons, each led by a sergeant. Figure 12.2 shows the composition of the 1st Half Platoon (on the right), which included "liaison" or scouting troops and soldier teams and groups armed with hand bombs (grenades), rifle grenades, and automatic rifles (two teams). The 2nd Half Platoon on the left included the other auto-rifle squad of two teams and two eight-man rifle squads. The two halves of the platoon were designed to fight in tandem as a support-by-fire element on the right and a maneuver element on the left. The platoon leader could use the unit's 1st Half Platoon to keep an enemy machine gun occupied in front with rifle grenades, hand grenades, and a few auto-rifles,

while the 2nd Half Platoon would maneuver under cover to a flank to destroy enemy machine gun positions with grenades and bayonets. This new formation was a machine gun killing machine.<sup>7</sup>

Armies on all sides adopted similar combat group formations, but by 1918, the Germans had developed entire battalions of “storm troopers” to infiltrate enemy trench lines in small groups to penetrate into Allied rear areas. The advanced guards of each of the five German offensives of the spring and summer of 1918 were led by storm trooper battalions. They were stopped by resurgent Allied armies joined by newly arrived American troops rushed from training areas. The inexperienced Doughboys of the US 3rd Division dug in at a bend of the Marne River, and the 4th Marine Brigade crossed wheat fields to counterattack into Belleau Wood to help save Paris from capture.<sup>8</sup>

After filling to full-strength with recruits and only a few weeks of basic preparation, entire divisions were shipped to France in 1918 to complete their training. In many units, the 250-soldier companies were often not divided into platoons or smaller units until they arrived to be billeted outside of French villages. Often, new platoon leaders joined their companies on the trains headed to US ports or after they arrived in France. Additional officers required selection and training at officer training camps (OTCs) before assignment. Then the confusing process began of rotating junior officers and non-commissioned officers to specialty weapons or gas schools for a few weeks at a time. When the leaders returned, they would instruct their units in the use of hand bombs, rifle grenades, automatic rifles, and other weapons and tools just as they were being issued to the troops for the first time. After the soldiers learned how to use the weapons as individuals, their platoons and companies were introduced to the modern methods of fire and maneuver.

In the *History of Company B*, the former commander of Company B, 311th Infantry Regiment, 78th Division, Capt. B. A. Calonna, reminisced about the moment that the new formations and tactics were presented to his unit:

An orderly brought around late that night some red covered books and leaflets [*Offensive Combat*], and we were told that these would be put into effect the next day. These were the new system of combat formations, involving absolutely new extended order drill and formation of the company . . . so the next morning we sailed forth, books in hand, and worked the formations out step by step. Everyone was quick to see that this was something like a

business, as of course our old army regulations were absurd when it came to using the new special weapons such as automatic rifles, hand and rifle grenades, and so on. So the new formations were mastered remarkably quickly.<sup>9</sup>

The US 27th and 30th divisions trained with the British Army and were left on “loan” as combat troops through the end of the war. While issued British small arms to make supply more efficient, they retained their small unit combat formations. One of their British advisors, Lt. L. G. Pinnell, observed in his diary: “the system of organization adopted by the Americans is halfway between ours and the French. . . . It is out of the question to attempt to influence the course of training or system they will adapt. I’m afraid things must take their course.”<sup>10</sup> The US II Corps leaders would maintain their half platoon formations.

On 18 August 1918, Cpl. D. H. Sheehan, Signal Corps, took a series of pictures of a United States rifle platoon demonstrating the new half-platoon formations, perhaps to illustrate a planned training document. Figure 12.1 is a US Army Signal Corps photo of a Marine infantry platoon rehearsing open order formations behind the lines in Northern France. Figure 12.2 shows the organization of an early 1918 rifle platoon organization. Four images taken at the same place that day illustrate various deployments of a rifle platoon by half-platoons in a large open field for clarity. Note that the



Figure 12.1. Platoon in attack, single wave combat groups for taking strong points. Each close group of two marines is an auto-rifle team with an auto-rifleman and 1st assistant marching alongside wielding a Chauchat automatic rifle. From the National Archives, US Army Signal Corps Collection.



In August following the first spring and summer 1918 battles, the General Headquarters, AEF, published a small pamphlet, *Combat Instructions*, filled with fine-tuning directives for small unit leaders based on battlefield observations and reports. It urged leaders from battalion level and below to simplify their formations and get soldiers to spread out more on the battlefield to prevent needless casualties from machine guns and artillery fire.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 12.3. The 1st Half Platoon is deployed across the front and to the left, advancing toward the camera. The rear of the 2nd Half Platoon is seen moving to the right to seek a way to take out the notional enemy machine gun by a flank attack. From the National Archives, US Army Signal Corps Collection.

In preparation for upcoming First Army operations, a secret memorandum directed companies and battalions to use infiltration as well as fire and maneuver tactics when approaching enemy strongpoints past the frontline trenches:

Meanwhile, a portion of the infantry must push by the flank of enemy's position under the cover of these successive fires and continue the advance, the following infantry elements taking the strong point from the flank or rear **or** both. As soon as the resistance is subdued, these latter elements must be reorganized immediately and put in march to support the continued advance of the leading elements. [In addition]. . . it is essential that section, platoon, company, and battalion commanders . . . are trained in employing every possible means to secure fire superiority and then to drive forward by the flanks of the smothered strong point under the cover of this fire superiority.<sup>13</sup>



## The Platoon Formation in Line Intervals and Distances (as in I. D. R.)

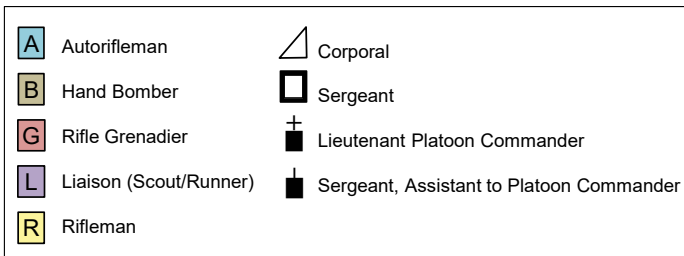
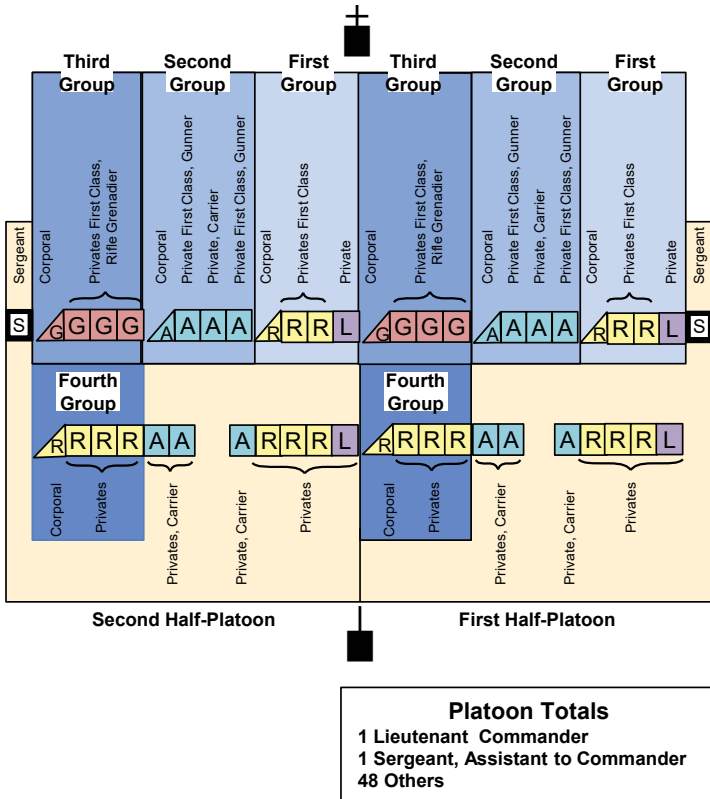


Figure 12.4. This illustration of the second form of rifle platoon initial formation used in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive appeared in Major Henry H. Burdick's April 1919 *Infantry Journal* article, "Development of the Half-Platoon as an Elementary Unit." Note that the full-strength rifle platoon dropped from fifty-nine to fifty soldiers. The two half platoons were identical, and each of the delineated groups was essentially an eight-man squad. Created by Army University Press, original from *Infantry Journal*, April 1919.

After the St. Mihiel Offensive, small AEF units began to experiment with alternate formations to make maneuver simpler and to train groups to continue fighting regardless of leader casualties. For example, 80th Division rifle companies simplified things by organizing both half-platoons as identical sets with the same squads, groups, and sections containing equal numbers of assigned weapons. The hand bomb, or hand grenade, teams were omitted and each platoon soldier was issued at least two hand grenades instead. The formation illustration outlined in figure 12.4 was prepared by a combat infantry battalion commander and published in the April 1919 *Infantry Journal*:

In the Soissons-Rheims offensive attack formations of platoons, companies, and battalions were too dense and followed too rigidly the illustrations contained in "Instructions for the Offensive Combat of Small Units." Waves were too close together and individuals therein had too little interval, columns were lacking in elasticity and little attempt was made to maneuver.

A close study of the best means to correct these faults led to greater emphasis being placed on the half-platoon as an elementary unit. Experiments conducted in rear areas developed the formations illustrated which were utilized in the last Argonne offensive and thoroughly justified their efficacy by greater maneuver power, better control, rapidity of deployment, and conservation of life.<sup>14</sup>

The simplification of the half platoon formations and small unit maneuvers occurred just in time. After the depot divisions were stripped of combat arms troops replacements, rookies were rushed in to directly fill units depleted by heavy combat. Sent forward with replacement troops to the 57th Pioneer Infantry, Cpl. Richard A. Pierce remembered how raw his group was:

We drilled in the so-called mud camp [Camp Wadsworth, South Carolina] for a few days; we were given a lot of instruction about "saluting" and then were shipped to Hoboken for shipment to France. [There] we were given *five minutes* of rifle instruction. It went like this: "Unstrap your gun, get in prone position, and aim at the enemy between the legs and above the knees. In the excitement of battle, you will shoot higher and probably hit his stomach."<sup>15</sup>

Capt. Frank B. Tiebout of the 305th Infantry discussed the minimal instruction provided to incoming soldiers:

Our ranks had been depleted by deaths, wounds and illness. While officers and platoon sergeants were assembled at headquarters for their thrilling instructions, a welcome issue of replacements was

received from the 40th [Depot] Division. Most of these new men had been in civilian clothes on the Pacific Coast in July [1918]. They had had almost no practice with the gas mask. Very few of them, if any, had ever thrown a live grenade. Some had fired not more than fifteen rounds with the service rifle.<sup>16</sup>

An infantry sergeant who was pulled out of line to attend officer training camp, Joseph D. Lawrence, recalled: “Open warfare was stressed, because we were told that the war would not end until we drew the Germans into the open. Rumor reached us that the Americans were preparing a gigantic drive into thickly wooded and fortified country and our training would be cut short.” Lawrence’s class of “90-day wonders” would be commissioned upon graduation and sent to lead rifle platoons after combined pre-commission and branch training that lasted only six weeks.<sup>17</sup>

Following the success of the St. Mihiel Salient Offensive, the AEF pulled most of its divisions out of the line and shifted them fifty miles west to attack between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest. All available combat divisions were placed on the first and succeeding lines of attack and jumped off on 26 September 1918. Although half of the units were green and many veteran divisions were filled with replacements, all were prepared to attack German strongpoints and continue the offensive through open ground and forests toward Sedan and Metz.<sup>18</sup>

While the Germans occupied numerous fortification lines in the wooded ridges before the main Hindenburg Line across the Meuse River, many were more like a series of machine gun nests placed among rifle pits and fox holes rather than the formal continuous trench systems typical of the rest of the Western Front. The open fields were covered by machine guns and artillery fire directed from the dense woods that covered each hill and ridge on either side of the river. In the first attacks, Doughboys punched through the three lines of resistance to the Meuse River and halted along the Hindenburg line, bloodied and exhausted. After each infantry formation sustained more than fifty-percent casualties, other units were brought up to pass through and continue the attack or relieve the survivors on the front.

Lt. Maury Maverick, 28th Infantry, 1st Division, described the enemy they faced in the Meuse-Argonne:

There were [German] soldiers who had trained four years at the front. They had left their lines checkerboarded with machine guns, had left their men in the rear to fight to the death, and had slowly moved out the heavy masses of troops. Most of us who were young American officers knew little of actual warfare—we had

the daring but not the training of the old officer of the front. The Germans simply waited and then laid a barrage of steel and fire. And the machine gunners poured it on us.<sup>19</sup>

Leaders at all levels felt the strain of figuring out how to advance, particularly as they lost experienced officers and sergeants and their units dwindled. Lieutenant Maverick soon received a battlefield advancement to company commander but was required to do more with fewer men:

Our company numbered two hundred men. Within a few minutes about half of them were either dead or wounded. [Captain] Felbel was killed outright, and I did not even see his body. A runner came to me and told me he had been killed. I took command of the company. There was not a single sergeant [left in the company].<sup>20</sup>

A few minutes into the renewed assault, Maverick received a wound that took him out of the war.

When the field artillery batteries displaced forward to support the infantry, they crossed a recent battlefield. Cpl. David S. Garber, a cannoneer, noted that “in a clump of trees nearby there were four machine gun emplacements sunk in the ground. They were made of armor-plate with small openings to fire through. Directly in front of these nests were twenty dead Americans, killed while charging these machine gun emplacements.”<sup>21</sup> The inexperience of individual soldiers and their leaders resulted in needless losses. Pvt. John L. Barkley, a Medal of Honor awardee from the 4th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Division, recalled:

We kept gaining ground, but always at a stiff price. The new men were suffering most; they tried to hurry things too much. The old-timers had learned how to go slow and make their fire count. There was a lot of bayonet fighting.<sup>22</sup>

Arriving in time for the second big push of the offensive, 2nd Lieutenant Lawrence led his platoon over the top a few days after commissioning. As recalled in his memoirs: “He [1st Lt. Charles Grasse, company commander] then gave the signal, I leaped to the trench parapet, followed by my men, formed them in line of combat groups (squads in single file), and quickly deployed them, for the fire was so heavy. . . . We went forward by rushing a few paces and falling in shell holes, if available. If not available, we fell flat on the ground.”<sup>23</sup> That bloody day continued with remarkable feats of fire and maneuver, and bravery:

Finally the command came to advance again and the line moved forward by rushing a few paces and falling prone. . . . In several

rushes my platoon reached the patch of woods referred to above, but only half the line was covered by it, the other half extending into the open. . . . I noticed that the two Heiser brothers, not over eighteen and twenty years old, were operating a Chauchat automatic rifle vigorously and apparently with deadly effect; one was firing the gun while the other fed the ammunition. It did not take long to exhaust their ammunition at the rate they were firing and when the last round was gone, they tossed their gun aside, jerked out their .45 automatic pistols, and carried on with them.<sup>24</sup>

The learning curve was steep when soldiers were getting killed. Those who survived to absorb the lessons of small unit fire and maneuver and the coordination with artillery learned to “make haste slowly.” Sgt. Harold L. Denny remembered that Capt. William Kelly, 168th Infantry, 42nd Division, called his sergeants together to brief them on a coming attack:

We will attack at 11 o'clock this morning. There will be a barrage. I know it's tough that we've got to hit it again, but the brigade has been ordered to take the hill, even if it is wiped out in doing it. Now men, it's serious. We're going to have losses. We've only 85 left. We have to keep casualties as low as possible. We'll advance one man from each squad at a time. I think that way we can hold losses to the minimum.<sup>25</sup>

Captain Kelly was advocating individual squad fire and maneuver. Each small unit would observe, suppress enemy fire, and send one man at a time forward as a fleeting target to gain ground on the enemy. It was an expensive lesson learned at such a great cost, but it would save lives and allow troops to use supporting fire and ground to their advantage.<sup>26</sup>

By 1 November, the AEF was hitting its groove. Units had suffered tremendous casualties, but the surviving troops had figured out methods of fire and maneuver as well as how to properly use artillery support. For the next few weeks, the Germans experienced an unstoppable American force that was not only brave but increasingly experienced in the modern way of war. As the exhausted Germans realized that they could not stop the mighty force that grew in strength and effectiveness every day, their lines began to collapse. Maj. Thomas T. Reilly, 165th Infantry, 42nd Division, witnessed the climax of combined arms in close battle:

In the morning, at the jump-off, I followed the first wave of marines up to the edge of the woods. I stayed there a while watching. As like all mornings in that position, there was a mist coming up from the ground. You couldn't see much at first. I never heard any

artillery like it. . . . As the light came up and the mist cleared, it looked as if a volcano was riding right up the hill to the front. The Marine units just marched behind it in a line of skirmishers and the usual attack formation. . . . After the first couple of battalions had passed, I went down toward the town to see what had happened. Just before I left the edge of the woods, a German came in with his hands up. Spoke broken English. He hadn't been hit. He said that he hadn't seen anything like that barrage in four years.<sup>27</sup>

The AEF soldiers and leaders struggled to learn to fight until the last few weeks of the war. In fact, the ability of the Americans to organize rifle platoons in the First and Second Armies to fight as efficiently as their allies and foes in such a short time, proved a miracle. Most American units fought poorly at all levels until near the close of hostilities. Most soldiers and marines who fought in Belgium and France had no knowledge of the obsolete forms of war that their senior leaders had experienced or studied. Everything was new, and the old hands could teach them very little about how to fight a modern machine war. Everyone was learning at the same time. The Doughboys proved that while they arrived ignorant, they were not fools.

While still in the United States, junior AEF officers were educated by senior instructors in forms of warfare that were obsolete. The prewar class of professionals did not understand modern machine war and had no time after combat operations began to gain relevant experience in tactics or weapons. The senior leaders had not seen a division in twenty years and had no idea how to lead or supply the large combined arms formations used in the Great War.

The British and French as well as the Germans viewed the AEF with disdain, believing the Americans entered battle as a seemingly hopeless group of novices. However, the veteran European armies had charged into machine guns and rifles and lost millions of troops for tiny gains during the three-and-a-half years before the Americans arrived to join the fight. The overwhelming strength, potential battlefield dominance, and bravery of the American force convinced the Germans to sue for peace, as they collapsed at the front and at home in November 1918. The reality of inevitable defeat was summed up in a German officer's unmailed letter to his wife found in a captured dugout: "The Americans are here. We can kill them but we can't stop them."<sup>28</sup>

A few weeks after combat ended with an armistice, the US War Department published a new manual in Paris: *Infantry Drill Regulations, (Provisional) American Expeditionary Forces, Part I, 1918*. By the time

these pocket-sized booklets arrived in the hands of AEF leaders training small units in the newest attack formations, the shooting had ceased with an armistice and the Doughboys had reached their occupation stations along the Rhine River inside Germany. The new rifle platoon did away with half platoons, groups, sections, and teams. Instead, identical rifle squads became the building blocks for the rifle platoon. The infantry squad was now simplified into eight men: a corporal who led seven riflemen, including one who also used a detachable rifle grenade launcher and another a Browning Automatic Rifle. Later, the number of soldiers shifted from eight to twelve and improved weapons were added; however, US Army and Marine Corps infantry squads have changed little in their use of fire and maneuver to take and hold ground then kill or capture their enemy since the Doughboys of 1918. A Revolutionary War Continental soldier of Gen. Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben's day could have fallen into line or skirmished with fellow American infantrymen in the 1916 Punitive Expedition in Mexico. But a Doughboy who fought in the Meuse-Argonne in 1918 would understand fire and maneuver tactics using specialty weapons utilized by the US Army infantry and US Marines of today.

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## Chapter 13

### The Vosges Mountains Campaign, 1944: The Rescue of the “Lost Battalion” by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team

Capt. (USAF Reserve) David F. Bonner

*Go for broke!*

—Motto of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team

#### The Battleground

Prior to the fall of 1944, no modern army had ever successfully fought its way through opposition in the Vosges Mountains of France. In the late eighteenth century, the French Revolutionary army chose to bypass the mountains altogether by moving south across the Rhine River. The Germans as well bypassed this formidable obstacle during the Franco-Prussian War by marching north. Both French and German forces also became hopelessly bogged down in trench warfare in the western foothills of the Vosges Mountains in the last days of World War I. The combination of rough terrain, high elevation, and well-constructed fortifications along the Maginot Line presented a formidable challenge to any Allied forces. However, the broad-front strategy implemented by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower in the western European Theater of Operations (ETO) called for an attack all across the western front in the late summer and autumn of 1944. Following the attack up the Rhone Valley in late September, the responsibility fell on the US Seventh Army to advance through the Vosges Mountains and maintain the contiguous front.

The rugged natural terrain and newly constructed field placements of the Vosges presented an imposing barrier for the advancing Seventh Army. The mountain peaks in the southern part of the range, called the High Vosges, provided a virtually unobstructed field of view for long-range fire in all directions. Even in poor weather conditions with limited visibility, an attacking force would have no comparable advantage and would have to be at nearly point-blank range to identify its targets. Most high ground in the Vosges overlooks steeply graded slopes that do not provide approaching troops any cover or concealment. The thick forests also added difficulties for the advancing Seventh Army. The vast evergreen trees provided natural concealment to enemy positions, and tree cover amongst the densely packed woods made any kind of nighttime visibility or maneuver difficult. With the Germans firmly dug in, controlling the high ground, and

occupying a defensive position, any frontal infantry assault against them would clearly favor the Germans.

The heavily wooded areas and steep terrain of the mountains also inhibited most vehicular operations. Nearly all of the major roads along the mountain passes were unpaved and hard to navigate in poor weather. The steep slopes also made it difficult for troops to call in armor support. Even though German and American tanks of this period were capable of climbing slopes of seventy-percent incline (depending on the model), the speeds while climbing these steep grades were reduced to a mere five to ten miles per hour.<sup>1</sup> This made armored tank columns perfect targets for German anti-tank gunners.

Radio communications in the mountains also proved to be problematic. All radio sets at the regimental level were frequency-modulating (FM) radios and, therefore, were line-of-sight devices. In the heavily wooded and mountainous terrain of the Vosges, the range and effectiveness of radio combat communications were severely limited. The Germans had a clear advantage under these conditions, because they were given sufficient time to install wire communications in advance.<sup>2</sup> Without reliable communications during combat operations, American commanders were often forced to rely on messengers, which was slow, cumbersome, and dangerous for the men.

Finally, the rugged terrain and occasionally harsh weather conditions placed enormous physical strain on the soldiers of the Seventh Army. Negotiating the steep slopes of the Vosges, while carrying all of the necessary ammunition and field equipment under combat conditions, had devastating effects on the soldiers. A human physiology study conducted by the US Military Academy found that the metabolic response of a well-conditioned male soldier carrying forty-two pounds of equipment (the approximate weight for a World War II infantryman) increases exponentially while climbing a vertical slope.<sup>3</sup> This situation also clearly favored the Germans, who were occupying a relatively sedentary and protected defensive position.

It was in this unforgiving environment that the soldiers of the US Seventh Army would attempt to dislodge an enemy force that had been ordered to “fight to the last man.” But among all the crack units of the Seventh Army, no one felt this burden more than the men of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT).

## **The Nisei Soldiers**

The 442nd RCT was designed as a self-contained battle unit comprised of 3,800 men among the 442nd Infantry Regiment, the 232nd Com-

bat Engineer Company, and the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion. Like most of the units in the US Seventh Army, they had already been battle-tested in Italy, but the key distinction of this particular regiment was that it was made up almost entirely of second-generation Japanese-American (Nisei) soldiers. But unlike the other racially segregated units of the war, such as the Tuskegee Airmen or the Navajo Wind Talkers, most of the men of the 442nd volunteered for military service directly from internment camps.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, fear and suspicion quickly began to spread throughout the United States, leading to growing tensions regarding the nearly 160,000 Americans of Japanese descent living in Hawaii and the 120,000 living on the US mainland. Rumors began to circulate that Japanese enemy agents had infiltrated the United States in preparation to aid Japanese military forces in an attack on the West Coast. Japanese sympathizers were also believed to reside among the Japanese-American farming community who would launch sabotage missions to blow up oil and gas lines under the fields in central California. Behind these rumors and suspicions resided the question of whether Japanese-Americans could be trusted. Did their loyalties lie with their birth country, or with their ancestral homeland?

Amid the growing fear of another attack by Japan, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which called for the evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. The order authorized the Secretary of War to exclude “any and all persons of Italian, German, and Japanese ancestry” from certain “military areas” on the West Coast.<sup>4</sup> However, the order was only enforced on people of Japanese ancestry and not on Italians or Germans, who greatly outnumbered the Japanese living in the United States. Evacuees were given only days to collect their most essential personal items and report to assembly areas, followed by relocation to internment centers for the duration of the war. As a result, they were forced to abandon their homes, businesses, and vehicles, and leave them to the mercy of the government or their neighbors. Many would protest, but the Supreme Court later ruled that the evacuation was within the war powers of the federal government.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the fact that there was “not a single documented act of espionage, sabotage, or fifth column activity committed by an American citizen of Japanese ancestry or by a resident alien on the West Coast,” as was later noted in a report issued by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, the Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants) were considered enemy aliens and therefore ineligible for naturalization under federal law.<sup>6</sup> The Nisei (second-generation Japanese-Americans),

however, had full status as American citizens by virtue of being born in the United States. This also meant that male Nisei were subject to the Selective Service draft and were eligible to enter the armed forces. In April 1942, the Selective Service national board reclassified all those of Japanese ancestry as 4-C “undesirable aliens.”<sup>7</sup> Some Nisei already in military service were discharged, while those remaining were reassigned to stations in the interior of the country or on the East Coast.

In response to significant public pressure against Executive Order 9066, the government decided to give the young Nisei men an opportunity to prove their loyalty and commitment as Americans. In June 1942, Nisei of Hawaii who had been members of the Hawaiian National Guard as well as draftees were assembled into a Provisional Infantry Battalion, sent to the mainland, and designated as the 100th Infantry Battalion.<sup>8</sup> During the early days of training, the 100th demonstrated an excellent performance record but was still viewed with suspicion by military authorities. This is evident by the fact that the men of the battalion were issued wooden simulated weapons.<sup>9</sup> Their orders indicated that they were to be placed on garrison duty, most likely to guard communication lines. The men of the 100th, however, were incensed and began petitioning the War Department, demanding combat duty. Their pleas were eventually heard, and the department scheduled the unit for combat deployment.

As a result of the exemplary record of the 100th, the government determined that it would be appropriate to form a larger combat unit. President Roosevelt authorized the activation of a regimental combat team comprised of Nisei soldiers in the enlisted ranks and limited officer ranks. The result was the activation on 1 February 1943 of the 442nd Infantry Regiment at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. The majority of the enlisted men were volunteers from Hawaii and the US mainland; almost all of the mainlanders volunteered directly from the internment camps, leaving their loved ones behind.

## **Arriving in France**

After an extensive summer 1944 campaign in northern Italy, where the 442nd was under constant fire from German units in Cecina and Castellina, the regiment was re-deployed to France and attached to the 36th Infantry Division (ID) of the Seventh Army. The 442nd arrived at Marseille on 29 September and also received 675 fresh replacements from the States.<sup>10</sup> The regiment then traveled 500 miles by train through the Rhone Valley, where it would link up with the 36th ID for an assault on the German-held French

town of Bruyeres. By the time the 442nd RCT arrived, the 36th ID had already been heavily engaged and was facing a shortage of foot soldiers.

Bruyeres was a major railroad and highway hub on the way to St. Die, the primary objective for the Seventh Army. Due to its strategic location, only fifty miles from the German border, the German Army had turned it into a garrison town.<sup>11</sup> The fall of Bruyeres would mean an open road to the German border for the American forces. Therefore, the German command issued standing orders to its soldiers that the town should be held at all costs.<sup>12</sup>

Like the rest of the surrounding area in the Vosges Mountains, Bruyeres had good natural defenses. The Vologne River to the southwest was a marshy valley floor, which restricted movement to the roads. Secondary roads were largely blocked by trees and, after the German occupation began, no one had bothered to maintain the forest trails so the ground was covered with underbrush and bushes.<sup>13</sup> Most of the roads leading into Bruyeres had been either mined or booby-trapped, and high ground to the northeast and west of the town was firmly held by German infantry that had emplaced anti-tank guns, pillboxes, and automatic weapon sites.



Figure 13.1. Battle of Bruyeres, 24 October 1944. Courtesy of the Seattle Nisei Veterans Committee.





shelters and were amazed to see what one of them called “little men with yellow skin and slanted eyes.”<sup>14</sup> Pfc. Stanley Akita said, “They didn’t believe we were American soldiers. I don’t think they knew what a Japanese looked like!”<sup>15</sup>

The ceasefire did not last, as the Germans counterattacked from a hill east of the town. At one point during the engagement, the Germans fired on a group of medics wearing Red Cross insignia and killed Sgt. Abraham Ohama, who was being carried away on a stretcher. The sight of this enraged many of the 442nd soldiers, who charged up the hill yelling “Banzai!” and engaged in brutal hand-to-hand combat with the Germans that lasted for nearly thirty minutes.<sup>16</sup> First Sgt. Jack Wakamatsu of Company F described the event:

At about noon, T/Sgt. [Technical Sgt.] Abe Ohama was hit by an enemy sniper, while leading his 2nd Platoon. As he lay in an open area, some of his men tried to assist him. These men naturally drew enemy fire. Aid men and litter bearers, under a white flag of truce, moved out to assist Sgt. Ohama. These men also drew fire. . . . T/Sgt Ohama was shot, mortally wounded, while on the litter. . . . The effect on us of Sgt. Ohama’s death was unbelievable. Never had the men of our Company been so shaken and angered by the death of a comrade. . . . After Abe died, our company began to move with a single purpose: to punish those responsible for his death. Company F mounted a charge up Hill 503 with fixed bayonets and a cry for vengeance. . . . We charged up that hill and a great many enemy soldiers died with twenty minutes of fierce hand-to-hand combat. . . . Sgt. Akira Hamaguchi was one of the leaders of that charge, called “Banzai Hill.” . . . I believe the enemy forces were completely overwhelmed by our screaming charge. Those not killed scattered and ran for their lives. Men of Company H of our battalion also assisted our men. We defeated a greater force which had position and advantage over ours, but lacked our anger and resolve.<sup>17</sup>

The 442nd was next ordered to take the town of Biffontaine, another German-held strongpoint located six miles to the east and guarded by four hills. After eight days of door-to-door fighting, the 442nd secured the town and was pulled off the line for two weeks of rest in the small town of Belmont. Unfortunately after only two days, the 442nd was called back for one of the most difficult missions of the French campaign. They were ordered to rescue the 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment of the Texas National Guard.



Figure 13.3. The fight to rescue the “Lost Battalion,” Vosges Forest, October 1944. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

## **The Lost Battalion**

On the morning of 23 October, Maj. Gen. John Dahlquist, commander of the 36th ID, ordered the 141st Regiment to send a battalion-strength patrol “to work along a trail through the Forêt Domaniale de Champ, east of Bruyeres, and to secure the heights north of the village of La Housiere.”<sup>18</sup> The 1st Battalion, 141st Regiment was assigned the task and told to advance through the ridge as far and as fast as possible. By nightfall, the Germans had infiltrated behind the battalion and attacked the command group. The 1st Battalion had outrun other units on their flanks and was effectively cut off.<sup>19</sup>

The battalion was, in fact, never actually lost. Division Headquarters knew their exact position on a hilltop east of Biffontaine, behind German lines. 1st Battalion’s strength at the time was 275 men who were quickly running out of food, water, and ammunition. They were also starting to succumb to the elements, suffering from trench foot, frostbite, and pneumonia.<sup>20</sup> The 1st Battalion limited its radio signals to only two a day in order to conserve battery power, but the messages were crystal clear. Lt. Marty Higgins, now the highest-ranking officer in the battalion pleaded

to Headquarters: "Send us medical supplies," "We need rations," "My wounded need plasma."<sup>21</sup>

Several rescue missions were attempted but failed. A breakout mission by the Lost Battalion itself failed as well and left more than fifty men missing in action. On 28 October, Major General Dahlquist ordered the 442nd to make contact with the Lost Battalion and rescue them at all costs. The battalion's supplies were nearly depleted, and airdrops were not working because of the dense forest treetops. On 29 October, the 100th and 3rd Battalions of the 442nd RCT advanced through the ridge, but there was no room to maneuver; only a frontal assault was possible. At first the Nisei soldiers were barely able to advance as heavy rain and wet ground slowed their progress. In addition, the land was littered with booby-traps, as well as German machine gun nests and snipers.

With casualties mounting, and almost no gains after a full day of fighting, Lt. Col. Alfred Pursall, one of the few Caucasian officers in the 442nd, leaped out and shouted, "Okay boys, let's go!"<sup>22</sup> Brandishing a .45-caliber pistol in his hand, Pursall charged up the hill heedless of enemy fire. He was followed by Sgt. Joe Shimamura, and soon after by Pfc. Bill Kochiyama and Pvt. Sanji Kimoto. Before long, the entire 1st Platoon was charging up the hill screaming "Banzai!" just as they had done at Biffontaine.<sup>23</sup> Another soldier, Pfc. Mickey Akiyama, who was the first volunteer from Manzanar Relocation Center, was shot in the head during the charge but miraculously managed to bandage himself then put his helmet back on and rejoined the advance. In his helmet, he kept a photograph of his baby daughter Mariko.<sup>24</sup>

On 30 October at 1400, Company I finally reached the 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment, which had a remaining strength of 211 men. The rescue of the Lost Battalion soon became an irresistible story in the American press, but little to no mention was made about the relief soldiers being Japanese-Americans. After the press died down, Major General Dahlquist called a 12 November parade and ceremony to honor the 442nd for the rescue mission.

Once the entire regiment was assembled, Dahlquist turned to Lt. Col. Virgil Miller, the regiment's executive officer, and angrily remarked, "I ordered that all the men be assembled!" Miller replied firmly, "Yes, sir. All the men are what you see."<sup>25</sup>

When the 442nd had entered the Vosges Mountains Campaign a month before, its strength had been 2,943 men. Of that number, 161 were killed in action, 43 were missing in action (MIA), and roughly 2,000 were wounded (882 with serious wounds); 13 medics were among the dead as

well. At the time of the recognition, the regiment was less than a third of its authorized strength.

Following the French Campaign, accusations began to surface against Major General Dahlquist for negligence and misuse of the 442nd RCT. The unit had been pushed almost continuously since it was first assigned to the 36th ID, and rumors of discrimination against the Nisei soldiers were circulating. Indeed, racism and discrimination among the division leadership seemed to be logical reasons for apparent misuse of the 442nd RCT, especially given the tensions back in the United States. However, a close examination of the 36th ID's battlefield reports and messages seem to indicate otherwise. While racism may have existed, it did not appear in any way to be a motivating factor for the difficult missions assigned to the 442nd RCT. The driving forces seem to be as simple as troop strength levels, combat fatigue, disciplinary records, and unit cohesion. At the time the Vosges Campaign started, the 442nd RCT simply had the best disciplinary record of any unit attached to the 36th ID, had a reputation for accomplishing its missions, and was nearly at full strength for troop levels.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 13.4. Color Guard of the 442nd RCT stands at attention while citations are read on 12 November 1944 at Bruyères Sector, France. This was the recognition ceremony ordered by Maj. Gen. John Dahlquist. Courtesy of the US Army Signal Corps.

## Why They Fought

The Nisei soldiers of the 442nd RCT came from very different backgrounds, despite their common ethnic heritage. Some grew up in urban areas, while others came from rural farming communities in central California. They used different slang and spoke with distinct regional dialects. The social differences were nowhere more pronounced than between the mainland Nisei and those from Hawaii. And yet with all of these differences, the men of the 442nd shared a cultural bond that sustained them through one harrowing mission after another. It is also the foundation of what maintained their spirit and determination during campaigns like the Vosges Mountains.

Through analyzing the oral histories of the 442nd, social differences between the Nisei from different regions are unmistakable but, upon careful examination, a shared culture emerges as well as several common themes about why they joined the army and what motivated them to fight for their country. While the individual life stories are as varied as each man, they all seem to draw inspiration from the same source. Although they do not reference it specifically, all express ideas found in Meiji-era values that were imparted to them by their Issei (first-generation) parents and schoolteachers. These values became a wellspring of strength to each rifleman, artilleryman, scout, or combat medic as they faced unending barrages of enemy fire.

The question of loyalty was obviously foremost on the minds of the military leadership as well as the American people; but even before the war, national allegiance was a non-issue for most of the Nisei. Yoshiaki Fujitani (442nd, Military Intelligence Service) recalled an event he witnessed in Hawaii less than one year before the attack on Pearl Harbor:

As a young man, I remember the visit of the Japanese plenipotentiary, Mr. Yosuke Yamamoto, Japan's delegate to the League of Nations prior to World War II. In his speech in Hawaii, he emphasized that the Nisei were Americans, they should be loyal to America. This sentiment was echoed repeatedly by our religious leaders, Japanese schoolteachers, and our parents. A good Nisei, therefore, was first a good, loyal American.<sup>27</sup>

Ted Tsukiyama (442nd RCT, 522nd Field Artillery) recalled the day he left home for induction into the army; all of the Issei told their sons: "*Kuni no tame ni*" (for the sake of our country). "There was never any doubt what that meant to us. The only country we ever knew was America."<sup>28</sup>

Twelve Virtues of Kyōiku Chokugo	
1. Koko	Be filial to your parents.
2. Yuai	Be affectionate to your brothers and sisters.
3. Fufu No Wa	Husband and wife be harmonious.
4. Hoyu No Shin	Trust your friends.
5. Kenson	Bear yourselves in modesty and moderation.
6. Hakuai	Extend your benevolence to all.
7. Shugaku Shugyo	Pursue learning and cultivate arts.
8. Chino Keihatsu	Develop intellect.
9. Tokki Joiu	Perfect moral powers.
10. Koeki Seimu	Advance public good and promote common interests.
11. Junpo	Respect the Constitution and observe the laws.
12. Giyu	Should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State.*

\* Urging selfless sacrifice during war.

Figure 13.5. “Twelve Virtues” of *Kyōiku Chokugo*. Created by Army University Press.

Although expressed in different ways, the devotion to country exhibited by the Nisei and reinforced by their home communities can be linked back to one of the “Twelve Virtues” of *Kyōiku Chokugo*, namely “*giyu*” (should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State). *Kyōiku Chokugo* was a concept derived from Japanese Imperial Rescript on Education issued by the Meiji Emperor in 1890. It was meant to instill a renewed sense of nationalism and service to country and was, therefore, incorporated into the school curriculum for all Japanese students.

First-generation Japanese immigrants who came to the United States in the early 1900s brought those values with them, and likewise incorporated them into the curriculum of the Japanese language schools that their Nisei children attended. These lessons were modified to reflect a loyalty to their new home country, but the core concepts were virtually unchanged.

The other related concept that was ingrained in the minds of the Nisei Soldiers was “*haji*” (shame). Throughout the archived interviews, nearly every 442nd veteran mentioned this concept in one form or another. Lt. Daniel Inouye, who would later become a US senator from Hawaii, recalled talking to the men of his platoon on the morning of their first battle in Italy:

I asked every one of them, “what were they thinking about, last night?” Everyone gave me the same answer in a different way. . . . “I hope I don’t dishonor my family,” “I hope I don’t bring shame,” “I hope that my father is not ashamed of me.” The thought of bringing shame to the family was unbearable!<sup>29</sup>

Many of the Issei parents were terrified by the thought of their sons going off to war; but once they had committed to it, the parents often admonished them not to forget their traditions and values. When Nelson Akagi (442nd, 522nd Field Artillery) left home, his father’s parting words were “*Shikari shinasai* (be a man) and “*Kamei ni kizu tsukeru bekarazu*” (never bring dishonor to the family). Akagi commented, “I never thought I’d hear my father tell me that!”<sup>30</sup>

Among the interviews, one of the most poignant stories of family duty came from Hiromi Suehiro of the 100th Battalion while he was serving in Italy:

I remembered a letter from my mother so I took the letter out. It doesn’t get dark in Italy. At that time, I think it was around 8:00, I could still read it. You know, the letter started out with the usual salutations: “everybody’s fine, how are you?” You know, so don’t worry about us. She said, “soon you will be fighting the enemy. My son, do not be a coward. Be brave for your father and your family.” And I think that my mother loved my father that much. She knew from the day I volunteered that some day she would have to say the words that she said to me in her letter. “Don’t disgrace my husband and your family.” And I said to myself, “How can I hurt her by being a coward?” So I made a silent vow to her.<sup>31</sup>

The Nisei were raised by their Issei parents who had grown up mostly during the Meiji period in Japan. According to a report by Magner White,

the Issei were “more Japanese than the Japanese themselves because they were anchored by the traditional mores without being aware of the transformations in modern Japan.<sup>32</sup> Because of the rigor in the Meiji education system, Japanese living in Japan or other countries were certain to maintain their unique cultural identity. This cultural essence was passed down to the Nisei, and it was demonstrated through the sense of obligation to their families and by their tenacity as frontline combat soldiers.

### **Training and Unit Cohesion**

The average soldier in the 442nd RCT was five feet three inches tall and weighed 125 pounds. The minimum height for Army service at the time was five feet three inches. However, there were some volunteers in the 442nd that were only four feet eight inches and weighed slightly more than 100 pounds.<sup>33</sup> How could men of this stature ever hope to become a lethal, combat-effective infantry unit?

From an operational standpoint, the success of the 442nd can be attributed to its extended training period before deployment to the European theater and the unique troop replacement system specific to the unit. Beginning with the first group of volunteers from Hawaii, who formed the 100th Battalion (later incorporated into the 442nd), soldiers were activated in June 1942 and did not see combat until August 1943. Likewise, the 442nd RCT was formed in February 1943 and did not deploy until June 1944. Training during this period was intensive and, in addition to building combat proficiency, also fostered a sense of teamwork and trust among the men. But the rigor and intensity of its training was only a portion of the formula that created the regiment’s cohesion and battlefield success.

### **Personnel Stability**

By being segregated, the 442nd was not subject to the same Army troop replacement policies that often resulted in other units receiving sub-standard recruits with poor training. Once deployed to combat zones, many Army units did not function properly after absorbing raw recruits; in some cases, veteran soldiers were outright hostile to them. Among the units that experienced this was the famed “Band of Brothers” E-Company of the 101st Airborne Division. “For one thing the new guys tended to draw fire because they bunched up, talked too much, or lit cigarettes at night. For another, veterans just didn’t want to make friends with guys whom they expected to die soon.”<sup>34</sup>

Replacements for the 442nd RCT, on the other hand, were from the same stock and upbringing. When a Nisei was drafted, he already knew



the unit to which he would be assigned, and likely knew one or more of its members. The replacements trained together as a unit and were deployed in large groups rather than as individuals. Upon arrival at their operational units, the fresh recruits were usually quickly assimilated by veterans who took them under their wing.<sup>35</sup>

The shared sense of purpose in its mission that was at the core of the 442nd RCT's unit cohesion was bolstered by other social factors. The extended training period before deployment to Europe not only enabled the soldiers to gain greater proficiency as a combat unit; it also enabled a sense of camaraderie to develop. From internment to engagements on the battlefield, the result of these shared experiences was a closeness unknown to outsiders. Over time the men came to know each other's life stories, what they did before joining the Army, why they volunteered, and the family they left behind. Their trust and knowledge of each other was absolute. In addition, the unique troop replacement system specific to their unit ensured that they would only receive men they likely already knew, and who shared the same objectives and values.

## Decorations Received by the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team

21	Medal of Honor
52	Distinguished Service Cross*
560	Silver Star**
28	Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of second Silver Star
7	Presidential Unit Citation (Highest Award for Combat Units)
1	Distinguished Service Medal
22	Legion of Merit Medal
15	Soldier's Medal
4,000	Bronze Star
1,200	Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of second Bronze Star
9,486	Purple Heart (Wounded & Casualties)
12	French Croix de Guerre
2	Italian Cross for Military Merit
2	Italian Medal for Military Valor

\* Includes nineteen Distinguished Service Crosses upgraded to Medals of Honor, 1 June 2000.

\*\* Includes one Silver Star upgraded to a Medal of Honor, 1 June 2000.

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Figure 13.6. Decorations received by the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team. Created by Army University Press.

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## Chapter 14

### The Future of Close Combat

Maj. Gen. Gary M. Brito and Lt. Col. Alicia L. Pruitt

*When the nation calls on the Army to fight and win its next war, the operational environment will be unlike the circumstances of our recent experiences. It will be defined by an enemy who will challenge our ability to maintain freedom of maneuver and superiority across the air, cyberspace, land, maritime, and space domains and the electromagnetic spectrum.<sup>1</sup>*

—Gen. David Perkins

Infantry and armor companies, battalions and brigade combat teams, and major organizations within the maneuver force will remain the tip of the spear and penetrate the enemy to enable the full power of echelons above brigade in future combat operations. It is widely agreed that future conflict will see US Army maneuver battalions engaged with their greatest opponents over the last century.

Emerging operational environments, advances in technology, and anticipated enemy, threat, and adversary capabilities demand well-trained and lethal ground combat forces. Even though there is renewed recognition and deeper discussion of the tactics required to employ capabilities within and across multiple domains, the requirements for lethal, adaptable, and agile combined arms units will remain a staple in both US and coalition land force organizational structures.<sup>2</sup>

The operational environment in which US and Allied forces expect to engage the enemy will be nothing short of chaotic with simultaneously contested domains of land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace. The US Army is revising and updating its Multi-Doman Operations concept to propose solutions to defeat multiple layers of stand-off in both competition and conflict.<sup>3</sup> The added complexities of state and non-state actors are nested with real-time global communication capabilities. These enemy forces will be entrenched in dense urban and subterranean environments, postured to provide a strong defense against US and coalition forced-entry capabilities. Future adversaries will prove to be aggressive academic students of military doctrine, political practices, and culture, increasing the potential for predesignated targets across multiple domains. US forces will possess a new generation of ground combat vehicles with increased lethality via

employment of a new generation of small arms weapons systems as well as combat power preservation equipment using robotics, unmanned aerial systems (UAS), enhanced optics, and refined soldier lethality sharpened in individual and collective training.

### Historical Review: Kasserine Pass 30 January to 22 February 1943<sup>4</sup>

In November 1942, Allied forces launched Operation Torch, the amphibious invasion of North Africa. Seeking to liberate North Africa from Axis occupation, British, American, and Free French forces first established a foothold in Morocco and Algeria and then began moving east toward Tunisia where they intended to cut off Axis lines of communication. At the same time, British forces in Egypt began pushing Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps west into Libya and toward Tunisia. As planned, the Allied armies were pressuring Axis forces from two directions with the goal of either destroying them or forcing them off the African continent.

In December 1942, the Allied offensive from the west stalled at the Western Dorsal Mountains in Tunisia, stopped primarily by the German defenders who held air superiority. The newly appointed Mediterranean commander, Lt. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, decided to halt and regroup his

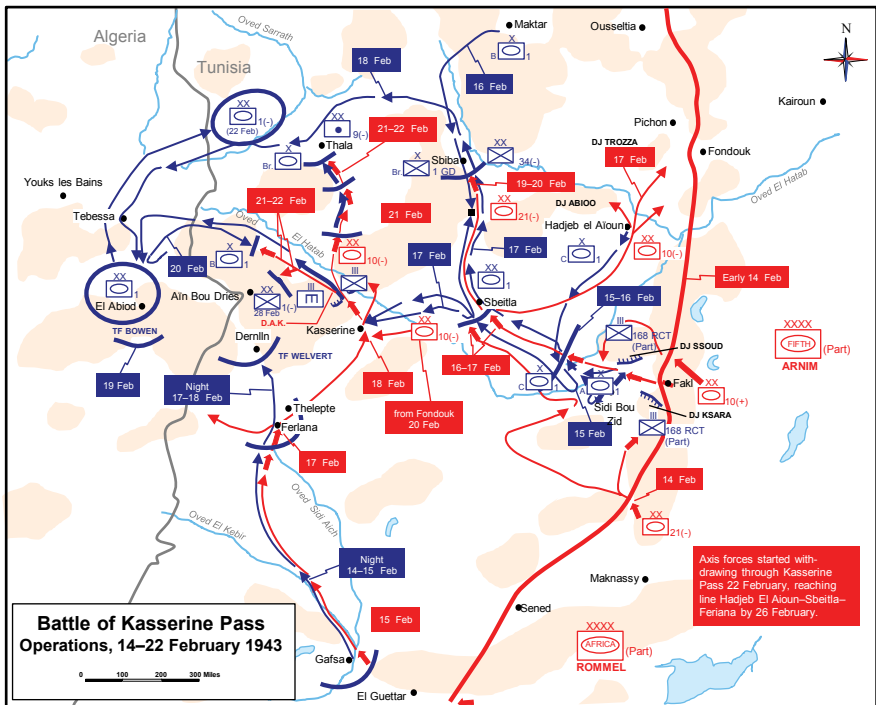


Figure 14.1. Battle of Kasserine Pass Operations Map. Created by Army University Press. 266

forces. By January 1943, Rommel and other Axis commanders had decided to concentrate their combat power in Tunisia as the means of maintaining lines of communication through the port at Tunis.

Instead of remaining in the defense, however, Rommel chose to attack Allied forces in the Dorsal Mountains of western Tunisia, hoping to penetrate Allied lines and disrupt and demoralize his enemy.

The most vulnerable point in the Allied defense was a two-mile-wide pass in the mountains at Kasserine. Elements of two divisions of the US II Corps defended the area in and around the pass. The soldiers of the corps, especially those in the 1st Armored Division, had seen some success against Italian troops immediately after the landings. However, this was to be their first combat action against the veteran Afrika Korps.

The Germans began their offensive on 30 January and initially were stopped in the Faid Pass, east of Kasserine. Then on 14 February, Rommel renewed the attack at Sidi Bou Zid, bypassing forward elements of the 34th Infantry Division that had occupied high-ground positions that did not mutually support one another. Elements of the 1st Armored Division moved forward to counterattack and relieve the trapped soldiers of the 34th. However, the US tank columns fell victim to German forces during two days of intense combat. At the end of this action, the 1st Armored Division had lost almost 200 pieces of combat equipment (including ninety-eight tanks) and suffered 500 casualties.

Rommel took advantage of the failed American counterattack and moved forward, pushing toward Kasserine Pass. Some US units defended their ground; others broke under the pressure. The Germans seized the pass on 20 February. However, by that date, US forces stiffened and stopped Rommel's advance before it seized the critical town of Tebessa. As Allied reinforcements arrived from the west to strengthen the defense, Axis forces began a slow withdrawal east and ultimately surrendered Tunisia in May 1943.

The Battle of Kasserine Pass revealed that the US Army was not prepared for the complexity or rigor of modern mechanized warfare. Gen. Omar Bradley reflected on these events as "probably the worst performance of US Army troops in their whole proud history."<sup>5</sup> Historians attribute the defeat with its attending loss of 183 tanks and nearly 6,500 casualties to an inability to employ the fundamentals of doctrine, command, and organization. Given that US forces had been training for modern combat operations since 1941, these shortcomings might seem surprising. Moreover, some units had more recently refined their skills and sharpened their

lethality. The 1st Armored Division, for example, completed an extended period of training in Northern Ireland just before embarking for Operation Torch in what could be compared to a current EUCOM Regionally Aligned Forces mission. However, not all American units in Tunisia had trained to the same standard. Some, particularly the National Guard infantry units, were unfamiliar with newer weapons and unpracticed in combined arms operations. Organization and disposition for combat—especially the tendency to piecemeal forces rather than concentrate combat power—was also a critical factor in allowing early German gains in the battle for Kasserine Pass.

In the final analysis, this was the first serious test of US soldiers in the European theater of operations. American units had been pushed to the limit by a determined and skilled adversary, exposing gaps in capabilities and a fundamental understanding of what was required to win in large-scale combat operations. In the weeks and months following the battle at Kasserine, the US Army began the arduous process of learning and adapting that would forge the force that defeated the Axis in Western Europe.

### **The Emerging Operational Environment**

In the future, the US Army will face a more lethal battlefield than it has faced in decades, threatening its ability to fight and win. As noted by Gen. Stephen Townsend, “[N]ation-state-level competition has re-emerged, as evidenced by recent actions by both Russia and China.”<sup>6</sup> US forces will face peer adversaries that can deny and degrade technological advantages. Our tactical, operational, and strategic goals will be violently contested by peers who have closed the technology gap and developed unique doctrines and technologies focused on defeating and destroying Army forces at all echelons.

It is likely that future fights will be an “away game” involving aggressive anti-access and area denial fights. For the first time since 1944, we may not have air superiority. Across all domains, first contact with the enemy will not commence upon arrival in the theater of operations. It will be at home station through social network hacking, propaganda, disruption of military families, and infiltration of human resource and logistics systems.

Army ground combat units will be contested across all five domains (air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace) in what has been described as a peer-matched, highly lethal, or hyperactive battlefield.

The proliferation of advanced weapons technologies drives shorter combat decision cycles. Similarly, advances in sensor and effects tech-



nologies, specifically, are shifting toward smaller combat formations that can move faster and more easily evade detection. Dense urban terrain and subterranean operations will require the enhanced use of cyber, UAS, and electronic warfare capabilities. Future warfighting will require joint integration across multiple domains executed at the company or platoon level. Sydney Freedberg Jr. offered this assessment:

As weapons become longer-ranged, more lethal, and more precise, ground units must move farther to close with the enemy and disperse more widely to avoid presenting easy targets. “With sensors everywhere, the probability of being seen is very high, and as always, if you can be seen, you will be hit, and you will be hit fast—with precision or dumb munitions—but either way you will be dead,” [Gen. Mark] Milley said. “So that means just to survive our formations, whatever the wire diagram looks like, will likely have to be small, they’ll have to move constantly, they will have to aggregate and disaggregate rapidly.”<sup>7</sup>

A critical implication of using smaller forces as the elements of engagement and empowering more junior leaders to operate independently is the potential impact that platoon and company-level leaders could have on the geopolitical environment.

## **Maintaining Superior Lethality of the Maneuver Force**

US Army maneuver forces can, and are, evolving across the spectrum of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) to mitigate the threat posed by future adversaries. UAS, robotics, and cyber warfare systems will be coming of age just as combined arms warfare was in the late 1930s and early 1940s. US forces must leverage these maturing technologies and tactics to “change the way we fight today and ensure overmatch against our adversaries of tomorrow.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to maintain the advantage in all domains, we must have an Army equipped and trained to contribute to the joint force, win in all domains, and destroy the enemy in the last 100 yards. This requires battalions and companies to be well-trained in their respective Mission Essential Tasks and supported by brigade and division to ensure a decisive edge in cyber, electronic warfare, and other non-kinetic forces of warfare. Furthermore, brigades and below must be able to operate semi-autonomously within a degraded environment and capable of maintaining the offensive. Command posts must be expeditious, mobile, and defensible. Soldiers must be fit and savvy with technology available at echelons below brigade.

Integration of infantry, armor, and fires will be critical with synchronized logistical support.

## **Cross-Domain Maneuver**

As the Army aggressively works to refine and expand on the Army Operating Concept as a whole, the Army Functional Concept for Movement and Maneuver works to ground the vision of future armed conflict that refines and expands the Army's ability to enable Joint Force freedom of movement and action across Multi-Domain Operations.<sup>9</sup>

**Air:** Maneuver companies, troops, and batteries will continue to use organic UAS capabilities that will improve as technologies mature. Enhanced communication and data transmission technologies will add easier, on-the-fly access to UAS assets at echelons above the brigade level. Unit-level threat UAS identification training will help mitigate the threat posed by future adversaries with robust armed and unarmed UAS programs.

**Maritime:** The maneuver force will be trained and equipped to conduct battlefield maneuver in support of sea-port of debarkation (SPOD) operations including amphibious assaults and shipboard operations.

**Land:** Company commanders will employ reconnaissance, movement, and fires (lethal and non-lethal) to open positions of relative advantage that can be exploited and successively synchronized in time and space with friendly elements across the joint and combined forces.

**Space:** Troops will need to receive extensive training in legacy systems and procedures to mitigate the loss of global positioning system (GPS) and timing transmissions.

**Cyberspace, including electronic warfare (EW):** Units will train to recognize and counter or mitigate enemy attempts at jamming of or interference with mission command and communication systems. Key to mitigation efforts will be continued training in analog legacy systems like maps and compasses.

## **Some Specific Materiel Solutions**

The next-generation ground combat vehicle (NGCV) encompasses a family of vehicles currently under development under the supervision of the NGCV Cross-Functional Team. The NGCV program includes the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle (AMPV), Mobile-Protected Firepower (MPF), Optionally Manned Fighting Vehicle (OMFV), future Robotic Combat Vehicle (RCV), and next-generation main battle tank.<sup>10</sup>

Increased soldier lethality will be built on a foundation of extended initial training and improved technologies in firearms, ammunition, optics, night vision, and communications. The Next Generation Squad Weapon (NGSW) is currently templated to come in automatic rifle (AR) and standard rifle versions with improved ammunition and fire control systems linked to improved optics designed to put precision munitions into the hands of individual soldiers. Enhanced night vision capabilities being designed into the Enhanced Night Vision Goggle-Binocular (ENVG-B) system will link to weapon systems providing head-up, integrated targeting capability. “Other initiatives include a fighter-jet-style head-up display linked to mission command and navigation systems, new sensors operating across the electromagnetic spectrum, mini-drones, and exoskeletons.”<sup>11</sup>

Improved technologies and tactics for the use of robotics will enhance force protection by delegating some inherently dangerous tasks to automated systems. Additionally, robotic equipment can effectively multiply the force, enabling a smaller force to accomplish more with greater efficiency.

### **Constants through the Modernization Process**

While acting to enhance the lethality and effectiveness of combat formations, our leaders and soldiers must renew a dedication to several principles which remain constant through the advances. This list includes some of the most important:

1. The company will remain the tip of the spear, even in large-scale operations. In the fast-paced, lethal operating environment of the future, the combat platoon and company will become ever more critical to the exploitation of momentary gaps in a potential adversary’s capabilities. The agility and flexibility of the smaller force will define the unit employability.

2. The empowerment of subordinate leaders through mission command principles will continue to serve as a combat multiplier. As we learned from the disaster at Kasserine, subordinate leaders on the ground are best positioned to effectively employ organic and attached assets.

3. Basic military leadership principles will ensure effective changes in technology, employment, and force structure. Leaders will continue to lead from the front—exemplifying technical and tactical expertise and engendering servant leadership.

4. Individual soldier skills have always influenced battlefield outcomes. This fact will become even more pronounced as future battles are won or lost by ever-shrinking groups of combatants. Expanded common

task training and testing as well as leader training and certification will serve to groom a more effective force across the domains of combat.

## **Conclusion**

The tip of the spear of US Joint and Allied combined forces will strongly resemble contemporary combined arms tactical units, though much more technologically advanced. The lethal capabilities of the infantry and armor companies and battalions will remain paramount against the opposition of a near-peer competitor met in a chaotic multi-domain environment. The Army continues to refine its designs of what future capabilities are employed at what echelon through the DOTMLPF-P construct in order to ensure that the United States remains relevant and ready to deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars when called upon.

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