

COMBAT REPORT THIRD BATTALION 27TH INFANTRYCAMPAIGN AGAINST THE JAPANESENEW GEORGIA, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS

(Period: July 29 - Sept. 10, 1943)

On the morning of July 31, 1943, the 3rd Bn, 27th Inf., embarked at Kukum Beach, Guadalcanal, B. S. I., and departed for New Georgia the afternoon of the same day. Transportation used consisted of one LST and two LCI's. The Bn was understrength, consisting of 27 officers and 546 men. The morale of the entire unit was high.

The Bn arrived at New Georgia, B. S. I., before daylight on August 1 and immediately started disembarking operations on the tiny island of Sasevale. The last units had unloaded by 1400, and the balance of the day was spent in reorganizing and moving into bivouacs. Enemy planes raided the debarkation point but no casualties or damage to equipment was suffered. The Bn bivouaced on Sasevale.

On the morning of August 2 the Bn moved by assault boats to the island of New Georgia, landing at Lilana Beach, and proceeded by marching to the Parachute Drop area. This move was completed by 1400. Co. L was immediately sent to establish road blocks on Baxter Road between the Parachute Drop and RJ-W. This was accomplished by placing platoons at intervals of 500 yards. Three reconnaissance patrols were sent out by Bn, all three reporting negatively. The Bn less Co. L dug in for all-around defense and spent the night at the Parachute Drop.

On the morning of August 3 Co. I moved by Baxter Road to RJ-W. From there a patrol was sent northward along Bairoko Trail for a distance of approximately 500 yards. Upon returning the patrol reported encountering an enemy machine gun position and a bivouac area just as they were starting to turn back. Co. I was ordered to move to the north along the same trail, establish a defensive position just short of the enemy location, and await further orders. In the meantime Co. K had moved to and occupied for defense RJ-W. Co. L maintained its block on Baxter Road and Hq. Co. and Co. M remained at the Parachute Drop.

At 0800 on August 4 Co. I, having received orders to drive northward along the trail, made contact with the previously located Japs. In developing this resistance and in attempting to locate the enemy's flanks Co. I soon committed all of its units. The Japs were defending high ground, were well dug in, and were employing the fires of mutually supporting machine guns, both light and heavy. During the fierce fighting that ensued, Co. I succeeded in locating the flanks of the enemy position, but due to the early commitment of units and the small size of the company, no reserve was available to envelope his flanks. (This was not a coordinated Bn attack since all rifle companies had been assigned separate and distinct missions on this date.) Co. I continued to make a holding attack until relieved on Regimental order by units of the 1st Bn, 27th Inf., which Bn had been assigned the mission of moving northward along Bairoko Trail to Bairoko. This was accomplished at approximately 1300. Co. I then moved to the old 148th Inf. CP area for the night's bivouac.

On this same date Co. K was given the mission of following Co. I north along Bairoko Trail and upon reaching a point 1000 yards from RJ-W was to move due west across country, find the so-called Truck Trail, and establish thereon a block to prevent the use of this route by Japs evacuating from the Bunda area. Due to the early resistance met by Co. I, Co. K was ordered to leave the Bairoko Trail at a point nearer RJ-W than had been previously designated. After moving through dense jungle westward for about 500 yards Co. K encountered a large occupied Jap bivouac. In attempting to pass this resistance and continue on its mission it was discovered that the entire area was occupied by small, active groups of the enemy. Due to the fact that this company was being forced to fight continuously, the company commander realized that he would be unable to

reach his objective on the Truck Trail that day, and on his recommendation the company was ordered to return to RJ-W. From there they moved to the area occupied by Co. I, where both companies joined with Hq. Co. in forming a night bivouac.

During the morning of this date the Regimental Commander directed that Co. M be moved from the Parachute Drop and occupy the Bairoko Trail from RJ-W north for a distance of 400 yards. This was accomplished by 1130.

Co. L was relieved from its road block at 1300 and was ordered to move to RJ-J, thence northward along Truck Trail for a distance of 800 yards and install the block which Co. K had been unable to establish. At 1630 the leading elements of Co. L encountered strong enemy resistance along Truck Trail not far from RJ-J, and because of the time of day was unable to attack further. They therefore withdrew to RJ-J and dug in for the night.

The entire Bn was consolidated at RJ-J on the morning of August 5. Orders were received for the Bn to attack and seize Twin Hills, which lay astride the trail about 400 yards north of RJ-J. Company commanders were assembled at 1100 and orders for an attack at 1215 were issued. The general plan of the attack was as follows: Co. K to attack in the right zone of action with its objective the high ground to the right of the saddle between Twin Hills; Co. L to attack in the left zone of action with objective the high ground to the left of the saddle. Co. M was to establish a base of fire for the attack from a position approximately 200 yards east of RJ-J, using 81mm mortars only. Co. I was to remain in a cover position near RJ-J in Bn reserve, and was to be prepared to assist in the attack in either zone of action. The location of the enemy resistance on the previous day had determined the use of the double envelopment. The attack was a complete surprise to the enemy and after furious fighting the objectives were gained at 1400.

Leading elements of Co. K contacted the enemy at 1500. At approximately 1530 Co. K had deployed as skirmishers and had started the assault. In the fighting which followed well emplaced machine guns protected by riflemen were encountered, as well as numerous Jap concussion grenades. It is believed that the attack caught the Japs off guard since no snipers were met until the main enemy defensive position was reached. Eighteen of the enemy were killed. Our own casualties were two killed with four officers and nineteen Bn wounded.

At 1100 one platoon of Co. L was sent out to make a wide envelopment and secure a foothold on the left ridge upon which further operations could be put into effect against the Japanese positions in this zone of action. This platoon succeeded in gaining the high ground without opposition and joined the remainder of Co. L about 400 yards west of the saddle. The plan of action was to have one rifle platoon move along the top of the ridge toward the saddle, the second rifle platoon to envelop the enemy's left flank, and since a base of fire could not be used, to have the weapons platoon protect the rear and flanks of the company in its attack. An estimated force of a full platoon of the enemy was encountered by the platoon making the envelopment. The company commander at this point decided to use the platoon advancing along the top of the ridge to reinforce the enveloping platoon and make a wider envelopment to the left. This was disapproved by Bn order since the high ground dominated the enemy position. The attack was continued as previously planned and by 1630 the enemy had been dislodged from their positions leaving about six dead. Co. L was then ordered to leave a security detachment on the high ground and to push east toward the saddle with the remainder of the company. At this time Co. I less weapons platoon was ordered to follow the route used by Co. L and to organize the high ground west of the saddle by nightfall. Both Co.'s L and K succeeded in gaining their objectives, the high ground in their respective zones of action, but did not make contact in the saddle on this date.

Much booty including rifles, clothing, medical and radio equipment was left behind by the enemy. Many maps, diaries and other papers believed to contain valuable information were found and sent to Division B-2. The ground captured was a large Japanese bivouac area which could conservatively accommodate at least a Bn. Co. I less weapons platoon, following the route used by Co. L, moved to the high ground occupied by Co. L, and in conjunction with them organized it for night defense. A forward CP was established here also. Co. M, the weapons platoon of Co. I and Hq. Co. remained at RJ-J.

Early on August 6 Co.'s L and I secured the saddle and organized it for defense. Co. M, less 81 mm mortar platoon, moved from RJ-J, following the route taken by Co. L on the previous day, and occupied positions held by Co. L on the high ground. Hq. Co. following the Zieta Trail (heretofore known as Truck Trail) moved up and consolidated within the Bn defense area.

On this day the Bn received the following order: The 3rd Bn will move across-country with the mission of reaching Zieta. At 1600 Co. L was ordered to move generally northwest following the Zieta Trail for about 600 yards and establish a block on the trail. This move by Co. L was unopposed, and the block was emplaced as directed.

On August 7 the remainder of the Bn moved along the Zieta Trail toward the position then occupied by Co. L. Co. J, which was the leading company in this move, encountered snipers, but quickly disposed of them. During this action Capt. David L. Baird, commanding Co. J, was wounded and 1st Lt. William H. Little assumed command. The Bn reached Co. L at 1300 without further opposition. Co. G of the 2nd Bn moved up and joined the Bn. At this time it was planned for future operations to send a strong reconnaissance and combat group well to the front with the mission of finding a route to Zieta and also to locate and maintain contact with the enemy. In accordance with these plans Co.'s I and L moved out along the trail early in the afternoon and reached a small banana grove approximately 1600 yards from the Bn bivouac. No opposition was met, and they dug in for the night on high ground overlooking the trail.

On the morning of August 8, Co. G, led out moving along the Zieta Trail and passed through Co.'s I and L. The remainder of the 3rd Bn followed Co. G and consolidated with Co. I and Co. L at their bivouac area, preparing an all-around defense. The remainder of the 2nd Bn passed through this area during the afternoon. There was no enemy activity this date.

On the morning of August 9 the 2nd Bn met and engaged the enemy at a point about 600 yards north of our bivouac. The 3rd Bn moved up and gained contact with the 2nd Bn, and occupied two precipitous hills adjacent to and on each side of the trail. The advance of the 2nd Bn being held up, these hills and the ravine in between were organized for defense and the night was spent in this area.

On August 10 Co. I was ordered to make an envelopment of the enemy left flank which was at this time opposed frontally by Co. E. At 0900 Co. I moved east through the dense jungle, then turned north and finally attacked in a north-westerly direction. By 1300 they had reached the top of a narrow ridge held by the enemy. In order to effectively cover their zone of action it was found necessary to attach a platoon of Co. K. This platoon followed the same route as Co. I, and was placed in the line on the left of Co. I with the mission of filling the gap between Co.'s I and E and maintaining contact with both units.

The attack jumped off at 1400 from the hill top, and had progressed but a short distance when strong enemy opposition was encountered. This resistance consisted of light machine guns and rifles, firing from well emplaced and well camouflaged positions, as well as Jap concussion grenades. Stiff fighting followed, with our lines unable to advance appreciably because of the denseness of the jungle growth and the automatic fire being met. At about 1700 the order was given to dig in for the night, and a cordon defense was established. The remainder of the Bn bivouaced in the same area as the night before.

At about 1100 on August 11 Co. E less one platoon was ordered to move following the route taken by Co. I previously and to extend Co. I's right flank. At about 1200 Co. K reached Co. I and went into position. At 1300 Co. E, a platoon of Co. K, Co. I and the remainder of Co. E, abreast and formed as skirmishers, attacked west by north toward Zieta Trail. Using smoke grenades and intense rifle and machine gun fire combined with aggressive movement the attack moved forward pushing the Japanese back. Several machine gun emplacements were destroyed in this action. After the initial success, however, the attack was not followed through. Tanks were heard coming up and it was decided to coordinate the attack with the tanks spearheading the assault. Much time was spent in attempting to maneuver the tanks into position and as a result the initiative that had been gained was lost. It became evident that the tanks could not be employed. By this time it was too late in the day for another attack, and the companies dug in on the ground gained. The remainder of the Bn bivouaced as on the previous night.

Early on August 12 it was decided to lay artillery fire on the Jap positions, and Co.'s I and E were accordingly pulled back to the vicinity of the Bn bivouac. Co. E was also withdrawn and reverted to the 2nd Bn. A Bn attack order was issued: following the artillery preparation, the 2nd Bn was to go into reserve; Co.'s K and L were to attack along the Zieta Trail with Co. I on the left; two tanks were to spearhead the attack, with successive advances of twenty-five yards by the tanks to be followed up immediately by skirmish lines of the attacking companies. The remainder of the Bn was to follow closely behind the leading companies.

The artillery started registering, sensing entirely by sound, at 0817 and completed a ninety minute preparation at 1100. The attack was started as planned, and had proceeded about 200 yards when one of the tanks became stuck, and was unable to pull out of the soft jungle bottom. The advance was quickly resumed with both attacking companies keeping abreast of the single tank, and moved northwest along the Zieta Trail.

At about 1300 the advance had progressed to the Zieta River, beyond which it was apparent the tanks could not continue until a bridge was put in. A brief halt was made so that units could reorganize, and the advance was again taken up with Co. L leading, followed in order by Co.'s M, I, Hq., and K. Good progress was made and at 1600 the forward elements of Co. L had reached a point approximately 1000 yards south of where Zieta was supposed to be located. At this time the leading scouts of Co. L observed several Japanese, apparently an outpost, withdrawing northward along the Zieta Trail. They also reported hearing sounds of chopping, Jap voices and other noises coming from the heavy jungle to their immediate front. Believing that the enemy thus located was probably the same group that had been opposing the Bn all the way from Twin Hills, and that they were in the process of digging in for another delaying action, an immediate attack was ordered for Co. L. They advanced with two platoons abreast, and quickly encountered strong machine gun, grenade and sniper fire. Two casualties were sustained, including Capt. Oliver A. Roholt, commanding Co. L. The lateness in the day precluding the further development of the Jap positions, orders were given to dig in for the night. A Bn square was formed with Co. L on the north, Co. I on the east, Co. K on the west and Co. M on the south. Sniper fire was received while digging in, but no further casualties were received.

First Lt. William J. Stroh, Co. M, was given command of Co. L early on the morning of August 13. It was decided to postpone the attack of the Jap positions until artillery could be placed on them. The entire Bn was withdrawn approximately 150 yards. Registration by one Bn of light and one battery of medium artillery was begun at 1010, and was completed at 1100. Sensing was done entirely by sound and the impact area was adjusted in close to our lines of the previous night. A twenty minute preparation was started at 1100, with the two attacking companies, I on the right and K on the left, moving up as close as possible to the artillery fire during the closing minutes. At 1120 the attack got under way, and it was discovered that Jap snipers had moved in following our withdrawal for artillery. It was therefore necessary for the attacking companies to fight their way up to the line of departure. This was quickly done, and the attack progressed a few yards beyond the advance of the day before.

The leading elements of both companies were pinned to the ground by the fires of mutually supporting Jap machine guns, both lights and heavies, as well as intense sniper and grenade fire. The very dense jungle along both sides of the trail made observation practically nil, and any attempt by the riflemen to work their way forward was met by a hail of automatic fire and concussion grenades. Both attacking companies attempted enveloping maneuvers on their respective flanks, but the same type of resistance was encountered. The small size of the companies made effective flanking movements difficult, since practically the entire unit was needed as a holding force to the front. In an attempt to out-flank the enemy positions, Co. S was sent around the right flank of Co. L in the afternoon, but because of a swamp encountered was forced to make too wide an envelopment, and contact with the enemy was not made. They were therefore withdrawn to within the Bn square, and the attacking companies late in the evening fell back to their lines of the previous night. Casualties during the day's fighting had been fairly heavy considering the depleted strength of the Bn.

The attack was resumed at 0730 on August 14, with Co. I replacing Co. L on the right, and Co. K again attacking on the left. Even more automatic fire was encountered than had been met on the day before, and the attacking units were unable to advance. Co. I was again sent around the right flank, but as on the day before was forced to make a wide sweep and did not locate the Jap's left flank. Clearing of an 81mm mortar position had been started early in the morning, and was completed at 1400. Mortar fire was then placed in rear of the Jap lines, and adjusting by sound was walked in to the minimum range which could be employed. Another attack was then launched, but met with the same intense hostile fire. In an effort to utilize the full fire power of our troops, several men were equipped with BAR's and were placed in the front lines of Co.'s K and I. The entire line then opened fire and attempted to move forward, but met with the same results as before.

This attack was in progress when it was learned that four Marine light tanks were on their way to the front lines, and plans for their immediate employment were made. At 1500 these tanks were guided to a point in rear of the junction of Co. K and Co. I, near the Zieta Trail, and passed through the attacking riflemen. One tank immediately became blinded because of a demolished wind-shield, and was withdrawn. Of the three tanks remaining, one went to the east or right of the trail and the other two to the left of the trail. The riflemen followed closely staying roughly abreast of the tanks on both sides. The tanks commenced firing with their machine guns and 37's, and in turn drew the fire of practically the entire Jap line. The action of the tanks and the location of Jap machine guns and pill boxes was coordinated by Capt. Ben F. Ferguson, Commanding Co. K, who wrote the information on slips of paper and passed them to the tank commanders through the pistol port. Several pill boxes were destroyed during this action, yet no appreciable slackening of enemy fire could be noted. The tanks were forced to withdraw to replenish their ammunition supply, and the lateness of the hour prevented another attack. Company E, which had remained out on the flank during this action, was again withdrawn to within our lines, and the companies dug in where they were, making a net advance for the day of approximately 50 yards. Casualties had again been fairly heavy, but the employment of the tanks had raised the spirits and morale of the men immeasurably.

On the morning of August 15 the 2nd Bn passed through the lines of the 3rd Bn at 0800, and spearheaded by the tanks attacked along the Zieta Trail. The opposition that had been met on previous days by the 3rd Bn was not met, and the well-prepared Jap positions and emplacements were passed through. The attack progressed satisfactorily toward Zieta. Our Bn, less one machine gun platoon of Co. M which had been sent to reinforce a Co. N block on an east-west trail, followed closely behind the 2nd Bn, maintaining contact with them. Zieta was reached at about 1200.

At 1300 Co. L was ordered to move westward along a trail leading from Zieta with the mission of reconnoitering the trail and locating the block placed on this trail by Co. H on the previous day. At about 900 yards from Zieta Co. L located the block, then unoccupied, and continued to move westward along the trail. At 1500, when about 800 yards from Zieta, they encountered Jap sniper fire.

Co. K was ordered initially to establish an all-around defense of Zieta Garden. Orders were then received for Co. K to reinforce Co. L, and accordingly they moved out along the same trail at 1400. Co. K had just made contact with the rear of Co. L when the sniper fire was received by Co. L. Major Davis directed that an attack be made by Co.'s L and K on the enemy resistance.

By 1545 Co. K had been placed on the left of Co. L, and a base of fire consisting of four light machine guns had been established astride the trail. The plan of attack: to sweep the Japanese line with intense automatic fire while the riflemen infiltrated forward; for one platoon of Co. L to move westward along the bank of the Zieta River, which was on our right, with the mission of turning the Jap's left flank.

The attack was started as planned at 1600, and immediately heavy automatic and rifle fire was encountered. After thirty minutes of sharp fighting it was decided to dig in for the night on the ground gained and to resume the attack early the next morning. The platoon making the envelopment was withdrawn and a sardon defense was established. One Jap was killed by an outpost while our men were digging in. Artillery was called on to place harassing fire 400 yards to the west of our lines throughout the night.

At 0800 on August 16 the attack was resumed by Co.'s L and K but no opposition was met. The advance was continued with both companies beating out the jungle on both sides of the trail. A large Jap bivouac was passed through with no sign of the enemy. At about 1000 the scouts reported that the end of the trail had been reached and a lagoon had been encountered. A Jap landing dock and several engineer boats were discovered. This point, which was about 1000 yards from Zieta, had evidently been used as a supply point for Japanese troops at Zieta and along the Zieta Trail. Co.'s K and L established a block in the vicinity of the dock to deny the enemy further use of this area.

On August 15 and 16, the Bn less Co.'s K and L bivouaced in an all-around defense at Zieta Garden. On the 17th of August Co. I relieved Co. K at the block previously established at Lulu Channel; Co. K returned to the Bn bivouac. On August 18 Co.'s I and L were relieved by a detachment of the 148th Inf; upon their return to Zieta Garden the Bn was again consolidated, and spent the night of August 18 there.

On August 19th the Bn moved to Co. F's bivouac of the night before, a move of some 1600 yards to the northwest, and remained there through the night of August 20. While there a patrol consisting of a rifle platoon was sent to the west to attempt to locate a route to Piru; another patrol was sent northward to locate Mt. Turkey, and others were sent out for security purposes. The route to Piru was not discovered; the patrol to Mt. Turkey succeeded in reaching it without difficulty, and all other patrols reported negatively.

On August 21 the Bn moved following the 2nd Bn which had started cross-country for Piru. The Bn bivouaced for the night in the area occupied the night before by the 2nd Bn.

The Bn pushed westward at 0730 on August 22, following the route of the 2nd Bn, and had crossed the swamp between the trail and Piru by 1200. No enemy had been encountered. The occupation of Piru terminated the campaign on New Georgia Island.

The stay at Piru was devoted to the establishment of beach defenses and patrolling to include Sunday Inlet, and reorganization and rehabilitation of the Bn. The sector defended extended over a frontage of 3600 yards, with the causeway at Cutter Point approximately in the center. This was effectively covered by Co's I, L, and M, by strong points, from east to west respectively. Co. K less one platoon was held in reserve. The weapons platoon of Co. I established a block at the extreme right flank, extending 150 yards inland from the beach. Security patrols were frequently sent out, and Sunday Inlet was patrolled three times, all with negative results. Several air raids were experienced nightly, with but two casualties suffered. The Bn butchered beoves four times while at Piru, and barbecued beef was eaten by all hands.

Casualties received by the 3rd Bn during this campaign, including those at Piru, were 15 killed and 71 wounded. In addition a total of 137 were evacuated because of sickness.

Japs known to have been killed totalled 93.

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