

Authority MM7133 017
By RTS Date 4-8-65

CONFIDENTIAL

COMBAT REPORT 27TH INFANTRY

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE JAPANESE

ARUNDEL, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS

AND OCCUPATION OF KOLOMBANGARA ISLAND

During the time the 27th Infantry was at Piru Plantation, Arundel Island was patrolled by elements of the 43rd Division. After patrols had crossed the island and the slight resistance had been overcome, Arundel was officially announced as cleared. A few days later, however, patrols encountered enemy strong-points on North Arundel, the main defenses guarding Blackett Strait, the narrow strip of water separating Arundel from Kolombangara.

The entire coast of North Arundel is void of suitable landing beaches, all approaches being dense jungle, mangrove swamps, and coral rock. The typical Solomon Islands rain forest generally covering the entire area.

SEPTEMBER 10:

At 0900 the components of the 27th Infantry at Piru were ordered to prepare to move with combat equipment later in the day. In the afternoon the Regiment (less the 1st Battalion and Anti Tank Company at Enogai Inlet) boarded three LVTs and proceeded to Bustling Point. For the Arundel operation the 27th Infantry was attached to the 43rd Division. The Commanding Officer, 27th Infantry, was placed in command of all units on North Arundel. Attached to the 27th Infantry were units of the 169th and 172nd Infantry.

The bulk of the Japanese forces were concentrated on Sagekarasa Island and the commanding terrain of Bomboe Peninsula immediately south of Sagekarasa. The plan of the Regimental Commander was strategically bold and simple. The 2nd Battalion was to attack swiftly to the east and drive the enemy on Bomboe Peninsula into the supposed block held by the 1st Battalion, 172nd Infantry, running north from the eastern extremity of Bomboe Lagoon. By the time the enemy would have contacted the block our forces would have cleared the terrain south of Stepping Stone Island, preventing the enemy on Bomboe Peninsula from joining those on Sagekarasa. The two groups could then be destroyed separately, the Bomboe force being caught between two pincers, and Sagekarasa being cleared by the 3rd Battalion.

SEPTEMBER 11:

The 2nd Battalion proceeded by small personnel craft from Bustling Point to the landing point at East Bomboe. The defense block of East Bomboe, maintained by a company of the 169th Infantry, was passed through by two companies, and the high terrain to the east of the landing was secured in preparation for the attack the following morning.

The Regimental Command Post was established at Bomboe Village.

SEPTEMBER 12:

The attack to the east was launched by the 2nd Battalion, two companies abreast, at 0730, left and right flanks secured by the north and south shores of the narrow peninsula. By 1030 the assault companies had passed through a freshly evacuated enemy bivouac area of approximately 200 troops some 1300 yards east of the line of departure. Resistance was met in the vicinity of the 62 grid line but was quickly overcome. Another freshly evacuated bivouac area was encountered, and from this point on delaying forces of at least one automatic weapon and several riflemen were met successively at regular intervals of two to three hundred yards. These forces were overcome as they were met, and by 1600 the assault had advanced 3000 yards.

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The morning of the 12th the 3rd Battalion followed the route of the 2nd Battalion to East Bomboe. At 1430 one company placed a block at each end of a north-south trail running through the bivouac area the 2nd Battalion had passed near the 62 grid line.

SEPTEMBER 13:

At 0730 the attack of the 2nd Battalion was resumed with resistance encountered 350 yards to the east. The advance was slowly continued until the left assault company was pinned down by intense heavy and light machine gun and rifle fire. The right company, having met only slight resistance, attempted to flank the enemy, but were stopped by intense fire after reaching the crest of high ground to the northeast. The Battalion suffered eight casualties during the day.

The 3rd Battalion, assigned the mission of clearing Sagekarasa, moved to the area south of Stepping Stone Island, the best approach to the objective. After a reconnaissance from the northern shore of the peninsula one company waded the neckhigh strait. The company was to make the crossing to Stepping Stone, and if the island were clear, to proceed to Sagekarasa, driving through to the north shore. Depending on the opposition met by the leading company, another was to drive across Sagekarasa, parallel to and west of the leading company. A platoon of 4.2" chemical mortars attached to the Regiment prepared supporting concentrations in conjunction with the Battalions 81 mm mortars.

The current around Stepping Stone was swift and most of the island was a mangrove swamp, however, the crossing was successfully accomplished. Artillery fire from Bustling Point had driven the Jip installations to the western end of the island, and the move of the Battalion was unopposed.

Some infiltrators and one column of Nips approached the western company's lines, but all were killed or driven off.

To protect the left flank of the Regiment the outlying islands west of Sagekarasa were outposted. Before dawn the Regimental Reconnaissance Platoon with twelve men from the 3rd Battalion patrolled the islands, and when they were cleared, the 169th Infantry outposted them. The patrols paddled assault boats under cover of darkness to within 100 yards of the shore and swam the remaining distance with full combat equipment. Islands 4 - 10 were outposted 13 September, and 1 - 3 the 14th.

SEPTEMBER 14:

Repeated attempts on 13 September to contact and definitely determine the location of the 1st Battalion, 172nd Infantry, were unsuccessful. The 2nd Battalion had reached the point supposedly blocked by this Battalion with no signs of them. A patrol by-passed the Nips and contacted the Battalion somewhat farther east than had been expected. The block was not in effect, the 1st Battalion, 172nd Infantry, being a composite unit of only 250 men, all suffering from fatigue and lack of food. The unit was ordered to attack on an azimuth of 290 degrees and contact the right flank of the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry. Strong resistance was met, and the unit was ordered to by-pass it and join the 27th Infantry.

During the day and night several fire fights ensued as the opposing forces felt out their fronts and improved their positions.

Shortly after daylight the 3rd Battalion on Sagekarasa engaged in a brisk fire fight with enemy forces from the west who employed light machine guns and grenades.

In the late afternoon the sporadic firing that had been taking place

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during the day suddenly increased in intensity as the enemy attempted to work into our lines. Light machine guns and grenades prevented an enemy break-through, although at times the Nips, hidden by the dense jungle growth, advanced to within a few yards of our positions.

At 2115 the OP on Island # 1 reported barges approaching the north-west shore of Sagekarasa. During the day, observers on Island # 1 had adjusted concentrations on this known enemy barge landing. These concentrations, consisting of light and medium artillery and 4.2" and 81 mm mortar fire, were laid down with unobserved results.

SEPTEMBER 15:

The 1st Battalion and Anti Tank Company were released from their defensive assignment at Enogai Inlet. The Battalion proceeded to Bustling Point, bivouacing here for the night.

During the morning the lines of the 2nd Battalion were strengthened by the composite unit of the 172nd Infantry, and an attack was launched at 1150. The attack met with little success, and the Nips countered, making a small penetration which was quickly thrown back. Casualties were heavy on both sides.

Shortly after daylight the enemy on Sagekarasa attacked along the anti-fire west line. Again the dense jungle growth permitted the enemy to advance unobserved to within a few feet of our positions; but as before, grenades and light machine guns prevented a break-through. 81 mm mortars searched parallel to and as close as 35 yards in front of the 3rd Battalion lines. Between mortar rounds intense small arms fire was laid down to prevent the Nips escaping from the impact area of the mortars.

The enemy was obviously reinforcing from Kolombangara by barge at night. The Regimental Commander requested a naval destroyer, corvette, or similar craft to be placed under his control, eliminating normal communication channels and permitting immediate counter action against the reinforcing barge activity. The request was disapproved, and the length of time consumed in requesting naval assistance through normal channels was so great (communication to New Georgia was very poor and slow) that we had to rely solely on our own Infantry and Field Artillery weapons to combat this activity which each night was strengthening the enemy to our front.

SEPTEMBER 16:

The 1st Battalion moved from Bustling Point to east Bomboe and went into position in rear of the right flank of the 2nd Battalion.

Nip positions in front of the 2nd Battalion were heavily shelled, and intermittent automatic and rifle firing continued throughout the day.

At 1630 six light tanks landed at East Bomboe and moved to the rear of the 2nd Battalion, mainly covering the noise of the tanks. This coupled with the seeming impossibility of either landing or employing tanks on Bomboe Peninsula afforded a complete advantage of surprise.

On Sagekarasa the 3rd Battalion, following an 81 mm mortar preparation, attacked, three companies abreast, to the west. Enemy resistance was determined and intense, and only 200 yards were gained during the day, each foot bitterly contested.

Nip barges were active shortly after dark. The concentrations were laid, and the barges turned east. Direct hits were scored by a 37 mm Anti Tank gun and two .50 cal. machine guns on the north shore. Those barges not sunk retired to Kolombangara.

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SEPTEMBER 17:

The 1st and 2nd Battalions combined for a coordinated attack at 0740 along an azimuth of 60 degrees. The tanks, in waves of three, spearheaded the attack, the second wave protecting the first. The Infantry troops followed closely behind the tanks which moved by bounds. Grenadier and HE ammunition was fired by the tanks' 37 mm guns at point blank range. The tanks were controlled by radio from the 2nd Battalion Command Post which also had telephone communication with the front-line company commanders who located many of the enemy machine gun positions. The attack broke through to the sea around noon, pinching off the center of enemy resistance. After reorganization the advance was pushed to the east. Another 350 yards was reached before increased resistance and the approach of nightfall necessitated digging in for the night.

This successful tank-supported attack apparently caught the Nips by surprise. Many freshly killed bodies were found in addition to numerous hastily covered shallow graves.

Throughout the day mortars and artillery shelled western Sagekarasa.

SEPTEMBER 18:

The 1st Battalion, using two tanks, launched a limited objective attack to improve positions. After a short gain the Nips counterattacked but were driven back with heavy losses, however, both tanks were put out of action; one caught fire, and the other was hit by Anti Tank fire.

The Anti Tank Company was attached to the 3rd Battalion as a rifle company and ordered to advance east along Sagekarasa, and if not opposed, to cross to the western end of the adjoining peninsula and there emplace a block. The move was effected, and the company began to organize the block. Before positions could be dug or fields of fire cleared, the Nips attacked in force. The position became untenable, withering fire being brought down by the enemy, and the company withdrew. The withdrawal could not have been successfully effected had not the 2nd Battalion on Bomboe Peninsula been able to lay heavy flanking fire across the Nip front.

In the afternoon two companies from the 1st Battalion were also attached to the 3rd Battalion. After a preparation of artillery and mortar fire an attack was launched to the west, meeting with little success. Nip light and heavy machine gun fire was intense.

SEPTEMBER 19:

During the morning additional tanks were moved in rear of the 2nd Battalion, bringing the total to eleven. All eleven tanks were employed abreast, the entire line advancing by a series of short bounds. After each short advance the weapons of all tanks thoroughly swept the entire area to their front. The assault companies maintained close physical contact with the tanks at all times. This plan depended on the sweeping preponderance of fire power of the massed tanks to completely overwhelm and demoralize the enemy. The attack was highly successful, overrunning the enemy positions and breaking his will to resist. 450 yards were gained by this attack.

On Sagekarasa the attack to the west was resumed at 0830, preceded by a more intense artillery and mortar preparation. The same resistance was met, but a few Nip positions were reduced by flame throwers and anti tank grenades.

During the night naval guns on Kolombangara heavily shelled Sagekarasa

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and Bomboe Peninsula. This was obviously an attempted diversion of attention from the heavy barge activity heard around the northwestern end of Sagekarasa. Whether the enemy was reinforcing or evacuating was not known. The prepared barge concentrations were laid, sinking at least one barge.

SEPTEMBER 20:

At 0900 the attack on western Sagekarasa was resumed. The western end of the island was reached with very light opposition. The barge activity the night before had been an evacuation.

SEPTEMBER 21:

A coordinated advance to the east was begun at 0830. The units on Bomboe Peninsula kept abreast of the units likewise moving along Sagekarasa Peninsula. After mopping up a few stragglers the Regiment contacted units of the 43rd Division thus reducing the last of enemy resistance on Arundel Island.

In reviewing the action on North Arundel it is well to remember that the 27th Infantry was considerably understrength in officers and men. The Regiment had been in the Solomons area for over eight months and had participated in the general attack on Guadalcanal which drove the Japanese into the sea at Kokumbona as well as the grueling pursuit of the enemy on New Georgia from Munda to Bairoko and Piro Plantation. In spite of all this, the Regiment, outnumbered at times, completely annihilated or drove off Arundel all of the 13th Japanese Imperial Infantry, "The Pride of South Japan."

From prisoners taken later on Kolombangara it was learned that the 13th Infantry had been given a mission of "holding out to the end" on Arundel. From the period 13 - 18 September the enemy reinforced and evacuated casualties from Sagekarasa each night.

During the Arundel operation at least 600 Japanese, including the Regimental Commander, his successor, and two Battalion Commanders, were killed. In addition to this the entire western end of Sagekarasa is littered with shallow Japanese graves, and for several days bodies of those who had desperately tried to swim to Kolombangara were seen floating near the island and peninsula. Estimate about 400 of the enemy were evacuated by barge to Kolombangara.

OCCUPATION OF KOLOMBANGARA ISLAND

SEPTEMBER 21 - OCTOBER 4:

Following the evacuation of the remainder of the Japanese forces from Arundel Island on September 21st the Regimental Combat Team (89th Field Artillery Battalion attached) now reverted to the control of the Commanding General, 25th Infantry Division, was assigned the mission of defending the north coast of Arundel Island and bombarding with artillery the enemy held airport of Vila, Kolombangara Island, 1200 yards across Blackett Strait.

On October 2nd, two reconnaissance patrols which had reconnoitered the south coast and the Vila - Hamberi trail respectively, returned having been gone since September 29th and reported that the enemy were evacuating from Kolombangara Island.

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OCTOBER 5:

On October 5th the Regimental Commander received an order from the Division Commander (See Operations Memo. #25 for details) to occupy for defense Vila airdrome.

OCTOBER 6:

The leading elements of the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry landed at Ringi Cove at 0800 and proceeded east to the airfield. By 1345 the entire Battalion had landed unopposed and at 1500 had established a perimeter defense around the airstrip, extending from Ringi Cove to Disappointment Cove. Large quantities of equipment were captured. (See Intel. Annex)

OCTOBER 7 - 12:

During the period October 7 - 12 numerous combat and reconnaissance patrols were dispatched to the west, northwest, and north. These patrols captured additional enemy equipment, killed several Nips, and captured two other stragglers. No large groups of enemy were encountered.

On October 9th a reconnaissance patrol attached to the Regiment from the 161st Infantry, which had circumvented the island of Kolombangara by native canoe in a counter clockwise direction and gone ashore at various prominent points, reported large quantities of abandoned equipment all along the coast, evidence of evacuation on the north and east shore, but no contact with the enemy.

On October 11th a similar patrol traveling by LCP, led by G-2, 25th Infantry Division which had circumvented the island in a clockwise direction returned and confirmed report of first reconnaissance patrol. From prisoners it was learned that the enemy garrison had been ordered to evacuate on October 2nd.

OCTOBER 12:

All reports indicated that there was no organized resistance remaining on Kolombangara and at 2400 the 1st Battalion was relieved from the defense of Vila by a Fiji Battalion.