

COMBAT REPORT SECOND BATTALION 27TH INFANTRYCAMPAGN AGAINST THE JAPANESENEW GEORGIA, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS

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

The Second Battalion landed on two LCI's, one LST, and one APD at Milne Beach, Guadalcanal, on the morning of July 31, 1943 and departed for New Georgia in the afternoon of the same day. The Battalion strength was 25 officers and 591 enlisted men.

The trip to New Georgia being uneventful, the battalion disembarked personnel and all equipment on Sasavale Island on the morning of August 1st. During the disembarkation enemy planes bombed and strafed the ships and shoreline but no casualties or damage to equipment resulted. The battalion bivouaced for the night on Sasavale.

On the morning of August 2nd the entire battalion moved to New Georgia Island in assault boats landing at Liliana Beach from which it marched to the vicinity of the parachute drop, where the battalion formed a perimeter defense in conjunction with the other two battalions.

During August 3rd and 4th the Second Battalion with the exception of Company "G" remained in the vicinity of the parachute drop in Regimental reserve. Local patrolling in all directions from the bivouac area was effected twice daily. On August 4th Company "G" relieved Company "E" along the line of road blocks between the parachute drop and RJ-W.

On the morning of August 5th the battalion was relieved by the Reconnaissance Platoon, 37th Division, and was ordered to move West on Baxter Trail to the vicinity of RJ-W in order to be readily available to assist either the 1st or 3rd Battalions. On this date the 1st Battalion was engaging resistance on the Bairoko Trail north of RJ-W. The 3rd Battalion had met resistance on the Track Road (later called the Munda-Zieta Trail) north of RJ-J. The 2nd Battalion, less Company "G", left the parachute drop at 0900 by marching and arrived at its bivouac area four hundred yards West of RJ-W by 1430. Company "H" was held at RJ-W and assigned the mission of protecting the supply routes of 1st and 2nd Battalions.

The disposition of the battalion on August 6th remained the same as that of the previous afternoon. Lt. Colonel Evans assumed command of the battalion on this date.

On the morning of August 7th the battalion was informed of the following plan: The 1st Bn with the AT Company attached and with the 161st Infantry in reserve was to proceed North on the Munda-Bairoko Trail. The 3rd Bn with the Cannon Company attached and with the 2nd Bn in reserve was to proceed North on the Munda-Zieta Trail to Zieta Village.

As a result of this plan Company "G" and Company "H" rejoined the battalion which then marched West on the Baxter Trail to RJ-J, thence North to the Jap bivouac area between the Twin Hills which had been occupied the previous night by the 3rd Bn. The battalion, less Company "G", remained in this area during the night. Company "G", being attached to the 3rd Bn, continued North on the trail to the 3rd Bn CP. During the afternoon of August 7th orders were received and plans accordingly made for the 2nd Bn to pass through the 3rd Bn on the following day and to continue the advance toward Zieta.

On the morning of August 8th Company "G" passed through the advanced position of Company "E" where it was ordered to hold up until the remainder of the battalion cleared the 3rd Bn CP. This was accomplished by 1300. The entire battalion then continued North along the trail; Company "G" preceding the battalion by 400 yards was followed by "F", "E", "B", and "H" Companies. At about 1430 the leading scouts of Company "G" entered a deep ravine flanked on both sides by precipitous ridges paralleling the trail. At this point Company "G" suddenly came under intense fire. The company immediately deployed on either side of the trail but was unable to advance more than twenty or thirty yards. The Battalion Commander immediately initiated the following plan: Company "F" was to ascend the ridge to the left (west) of the trail and out-flank the enemy resistance. A patrol from Company "G" was to locate the enemy flank (left) with the view of employing Company "E" around this flank. Company "F" reached the top of the ridge to the West, but upon reaching a point directly to the left of Company "G" was stopped by enemy fire. The patrol from Company "G" succeeded in skirting what appeared to be the enemy left flank and advanced about 150 yards before it came under cross-fire of machine guns from drums to its right and left. From the report of this patrol it was evident that the resistance was disposed in depth along a ridge to the right-front of Company "G". At 1700 the attack was discontinued and an all-round defense prepared for the night.

On the morning of August 9th the following orders were issued by the Battalion Commander: Company "G" was to attack with one platoon on each side of the trail. Company "F" to attack on the left of Company "G". Company "E" to attack from the right flank of Company "G" with the mission of enveloping the enemy left flank by securing the ridge reported by the patrol of the previous day. The attack jumped off at 0930 but met with only limited success. The right platoon of Company "E" nearly gained the top to the ridge; the left platoon progressed a little over half way up the ridge but neither was able to gain complete control of the high ground. Company "G" advanced about 150 yards before being stopped by heavy machine gun fire. Company "F" was unable to advance little farther than Company "G". Contact between units and control of all units was very difficult because of the denseness of the jungle growth and the roughness of the terrain. When the attack bogged down, the Regimental Commander ordered a wide envelopment of the enemy right flank by the 2nd Bn, less Company "E" which was attached to the 3rd Bn. It was hoped that the battalion could thus by-pass the resistance and reach the trail in rear of the Japanese positions. Company "E" was withdrawn to the line of departure in order that artillery fire could be placed on the enemy positions in preparation for a coordinated attack by the 3rd Bn. As it was impossible to observe artillery fire from any location on this terrain, it was necessary to adjust all fire by sound. Adjusting in this manner naturally took considerably more time than normally, but considerable fire was successfully placed on the objective. During this firing, unfortunately, a defective round fell short and exploded in the Company "E" command post area killing six non-commissioned officers and wounding six other enlisted men. Captain Browning and his Executive Officer, Lt. Gamm, were knocked down by the explosion but miraculously escaped injury. Because the artillery adjustment was not completed until about 1530, it was decided that the 3rd Bn with Company "E" attached would attack the following morning.

I would like at this time to commend the entire 89th P.A. Bn for the excellent assistance they rendered the Regiment throughout the entire campaign. Even though operating under the most adverse conditions the forward observers, liaison officers, and Colonel Ferris, the commanding officer who was with our leading troops most of the time, always succeeded in laying down fire where we wanted it, when we wanted it, and in any quantity we desired. The 27th Infantry has a very high respect for the 89th Field Artillery.

In the meantime the remainder of the 2nd Bn started its enveloping maneuver at 1300, moving Southwest for several hundred yards then following a compass course across country. The order of march was, Companies "F", "G", "H", and "E". At 1430, the leading elements of Company "F" met considerable rifle fire. The leading platoon deployed and pushed forward to the top of a ridge perpendicular to their front, where they encountered a line of enemy

pill-boxes and fox holes. In the ensuing fire fight Company "F" destroyed two pill-boxes and knocked out several machine guns and killed a considerable number of the enemy. Fire from other machine guns from the left and higher up the ridge prevented a complete break-through of the enemy line. Company "G" was committed to the left of Company "F", but was unable to reach the positions on the high ground that had planned Company "F" down. As it was nearly dark by this time, Company "F" was withdrawn about 30 yards and the battalion, without diffing in, formed a perimeter of defense for the night. Had the opposition been met a few hours earlier there is little doubt but what the battalion would have successfully penetrated the enemy defenses and reduced this strong point. As it was, the Japanese still held the commanding ground, were well dug in, and had numerous supporting automatic weapons including heavy and light machine guns which were emplaced well constructed, log pill-boxes. Throughout the night Company "F" reported hearing considerable chopping and digging from the enemy lines.

On the morning of August 10th the battalion was ordered to withdraw two or three hundred yards so that artillery fire could be placed on the enemy strong-point. Throughout the remainder of the day the artillery adjusted and fired numerous concentrations in the area occupied by the enemy.

At 0730 on August 11th, following a thirty minute artillery preparation, the battalion again pushed forward, swinging farther to the left in an attempt to envelope the right of the resistance which had been previously met. Company "F" was leading followed by "G", "H", and "I" Companies. After advancing about 300 yards the leading elements of Company "F" suddenly met a heavy grenade barrage which was immediately followed by very heavy rifle and machine gun fire at close range. No sooner had the fire fight begun than the Japanese launched a counter-attack against the right flank of Company "F". The weapons platoon of Company "F" and all of Company "G" was immediately committed against this attack and succeeded in driving the enemy back. Company "H" was employed to protect the left flank of Company "F". Throughout the remainder of the morning and most of the afternoon the Bn repeatedly attacked the enemy resistance. Numerous casualties were inflicted on both sides. The replaced positions employing many automatic weapons, was sufficient to permit the enemy to repulse the battalion's repeated attacks. Surprisingly, a relatively quiet night was spent with the two front lines only a few yards apart. Around 0600 on the morning of August 12th the Japanese threw stones and rocks at our front line troops and considerable activity was audible in the rear of the Japanese lines. Anticipating an enemy counter-attack, our troops held their fire, but no attack developed.

Just before dawn, the battalion commander was again ordered to withdraw so that artillery could be used as soon after daylight as possible. Making a special effort not to engage the enemy, the battalion, accordingly, withdrew about 600 yards. Throughout the morning the artillery laid down intense concentrations on the entire area occupied by the enemy. Company "G" rejoined the battalion. In order to take advantage of the artillery fire, a coordinated attack of the 2nd and 3rd Bn was ordered. At noon the 3rd Bn attacked parallel to and on either side of the trail. The 2nd Bn, maintaining contact with the left flank of the 3rd Bn, attacked along the higher ground to the left of the trail. The artillery was not lifted until the safety of the attacking echelons made such action necessary. Upon reaching the area of previous enemy resistance, it was found that the Japanese had withdrawn, and an immediate pursuit was begun by the 3rd Bn. Assembling on the trail in the vicinity of the Zeta River, the 2nd Bn was placed in reserve and ordered to maintain contact with the 3rd Bn. Later in the afternoon the 3rd Bn again encountered organized resistance along the trail.

During the 13th, 14th, and 15th the 2nd Bn, less Company "E" which was again attached to the 3rd Bn, remained in reserve and furnished flank and rear protection for the 3rd Bn. On the 13th a patrol consisting of a platoon from H Company located and placed a block across a trail to the North and West of the resistance being encountered on the Zeta Trail. This trail was believed to lead from Zeta Village toward the West to the sea, and was apparently an

important Japanese supply and evacuation route as evidenced by the condition of the trail and dual communication lines laid along it. During the night the platoon killed all members of a seven-man carrying party. On the 14th this platoon was relieved by another from Company "H", led by Lt. Johnson. Shortly after midnight a party of Japanese estimated at 200 men established a bivouac a short distance from the trail block. At dawn of the 15th the enemy force broke camp and moved down the trail directly into the trail block. Taken completely by surprise the leading troops were literally "mowed down" by our machine guns. After the initial surprise, the enemy launched vigorous attacks against the block and completely encircled its all around defense. After five and a half hours of continuous fighting Lt. Johnson finding that his men had only a few rounds of ammunition and two handgrenades left and not knowing that reinforcements had been sent to his assistance because his communication lines had been cut, succeeded in breaking through the enemy lines and returning to the battalion. At the cost of two men killed and seven wounded this platoon killed 60 Japs (actual count at a later date) and wounded many others.

On the morning of August 15th the 2nd Bn, preceded by light tanks, passed through the 3rd Bn in an attack on the enemy defenses against which the 3rd Bn had been fighting for the previous three days. No resistance was encountered and by noon the battalion reached Zeta Village. Patrols were sent out from both battalions to locate the enemy. The only contact was made by the 3rd Bn along the trail west of the trail block described. The 2nd Bn contacted the 3rd Bn, 15th Infantry, which had been located for sometime on a hill overlooking Zeta Village.

On the following day, August 16th, the 2nd Bn relieved the Battalion of the 148th Inf. on Zeta Hill and continued patrolling to the North, East, and West. At this time a reconnaissance patrol reported the presence of enemy at Pira Plantation but none at Sunday Island. The Division Commander then directed that the 2nd and 3rd Bns, 27th Infantry, would continue to the North and West, capture Pira Plantation, and thereby deny the enemy the use of Diamond Narrows for either evacuation or supply. The Diamond Narrows is a narrow channel at the southern part of Kula Gulf which separates Arundel Island from New Georgia Proper.

On August 22nd, Lt. Koontz, the patrol leader who had previously reconnoitered the plantation, led the entire battalion through the swamp. This very tedious and difficult march to the edge of the plantation was completed late in the afternoon. On the following morning the battalion prepared to meet resistance, moved onto the plantation at a point opposite Cutter's Point. No opposition was encountered and by nightfall the entire plantation had been thoroughly searched and beach defense positions established defenses along the beach overlooking Kula Gulf.

This ended all active operations of the 2nd Bn on New Georgia Island. The strength at this time was 21 Officers and 420 Enlisted Men. Casualties throughout the campaign were:

Killed in Action:	1 Officer,	19 E. M.
Wounded in Action:	0 Officer,	38 E. M.

During the period of August 24th to Sept. 10th, the battalion continued to man beach defenses and patrol the surrounding area. Except for frequent night bombings by enemy planes, no other enemy activity was encountered. During the first few days both battalions were supplied by parachute drop until a system of supplying by water was established.

B. F. EVANS,
Lt. Col., 27th Inf.,
Commanding