

**COMBAT REPORT FIRST BATTALION 27TH INFANTRY**

**CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE JAPANESE**

**KOLOMBANGARA, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS**

(Period: Sept. 21 - Oct. 12, 1943)

Following the evacuation of the remaining Japanese force from Arundel Island, September 20 - 21, 1943, the First Battalion Twenty Seventh Infantry was assigned the mission of defending the peninsula. Kolombangara, the last Japanese stronghold in the Central Solomons, was 1400 yards across Blackett Strait.

From the beginning of the Arundel campaign, our supporting artillery and air corps had delivered heavy bombardments daily on the Vila Airport sector. The enemy returned light AA and artillery fire with little effect. A reconnaissance patrol from the Twenty Seventh Infantry landed at Runda Village, Kolombangara on September 29th with the mission of determining Japanese activity over the Hambri-Vila Trail. This patrol returned October 1st, having found large quantities of abandoned equipment, bivouac areas that had been recently evacuated, but saw no enemy activity. Several reports were to the effect that attempts had been made to evacuate troops by barges. Heavy artillery fire was received from the Vila sector on the nights of October 1st and 2nd. After those dates no artillery or AA fire was returned from Kolombangara. From the above information it was believed that the Japanese force had been withdrawn from the Vila airport sector and the remaining troops were on the north end of the island.

On October 6th, the Battalion Commander received a verbal order from the Regimental Commander that the First Battalion would:

- Establish a beachhead on Kolombangara Island extending generally from Ringi Cove to Disappointment Cove, and on the high ground north of the Vila River.
- Initiate reconnaissance up the east and west shores of Kolombangara and north of Vila into the interior by a combination of boat and land patrols.
- Corps artillery will be prepared to reinforce the fire of the 89th Field Artillery Battalion on call.

The Battalion Commander issued the order for all companies to prepare to move immediately. Headquarters Company and "D" Company were to cross the lagoon by motor boat and Japs "A" Company on the peninsula, where L.C.M.'s would come in to transport the Battalion to Kolombangara. The order of the move would be: "B", "A", "C", "Hq." and "D" Companies. The Battalion Executive Officer would be in charge of the move.

At 0800, an advance party consisting of the Regimental Commander, Battalion Commander, Company Commanders and two sergeants from each company, left for Vila to make a ground reconnaissance of the sector and assign defensive positions for each company. Company "A" would defend the area in and around Disappointment Cove extending to the north of Vila Airport (across Vila River). Company "B" would defend the southwest side of the airport, with Company "D" connecting Companies "A" and "B" and in position along the Vila River. Company "C" was in reserve and bivouaced with Headquarters Company at the south end of the airport and near the west dock. Anti-Tank Company moved two 37mm guns in position near the east pier. An observation post was established at Kuli Kuli Point and manned by the Regimental Reconnaissance section. Forward observers from the 89th Field Artillery Battalion were with the Battalion.

All companies had landed by 1345 and defensive positions were organized and occupied by 1500. The Battalion Commander with the Executive Officer made an inspection of all defensive positions. Radio communication was in with the Regiment and 89th Field Artillery.

A reconnaissance patrol from the 161st Infantry was attached to the 27th Infantry and was assigned the mission of patrolling the east side of Kolombangara, from Shansore Plantation to Banberi Harbor.

On October 7th, two platoons of Company "B", 82nd Chemical Mortar Battalion were attached to the First Battalion and would prepare positions to support the Battalion in defense of the sector. At 0700, a security patrol from Company "A" made a reconnaissance of the area north of "A" Company sector. A large motor park, three abandoned bivouac areas and large quantities of ammunition and supplies were found. The only sign of recent enemy activity was one Jap found in a dugout. The area showed signs of being evacuated seven to ten days. The patrol returned at 1145.

At 0900, a twenty-six man combat and reconnaissance patrol from Company "C" was sent on a mission to find Jack Hill. From the Jap motor park the patrol followed a well-defined corduroy trail and after advancing 650 yards passed through a bivouac area where large quantities of equipment and engineering tools were found. The patrol proceeded up the trail for 2000 yards and found what was thought to be Jack Hill. Here they found a hospital unit that had been evacuated recently. There were numerous small bivouac areas on each side of the trail and well-organized defensive positions at the base of the hill. The patrol returned at 1450.

At 0900, The Regimental Commander, Battalion Commander and Battalion Executive Officer made an inspection of defensive positions in the Vila sector.

A security patrol from Company "C" to the bivouac area east of the abandoned Japanese motor park took one prisoner. From the interrogation of the prisoner we learned the enemy garrison had been ordered to evacuate by October 2nd. Only those who were sick and unable to march to the point of embarkation were left behind. The prisoner was unarmed and eager to surrender.

An inventory of all equipment found in the Vila sector was made by Battalion S-2 section and a report turned in to Corps. A salvage crew from the 27th Division arrived to salvage all serviceable equipment in the sector.

On October 8th at 0830, an 18 man patrol from "C" Company was sent on a security and reconnaissance mission in the area of Disappointment Cove. The patrol found three large Jap bivouac areas, gun emplacements and organized defensive positions but no signs of recent enemy activity. Large quantities of rice, small arms ammunition and equipment were scattered throughout these areas. The patrol returned at 1515.

At 0900 Regimental O. P. at Kuli Kuli Point reported an explosion to the east of Ringi Cove. A patrol was sent out by Higgins boat to that sector to investigate. The patrol moved inland 300 yards and 500 yards to the west. An abandoned bivouac area was found but the patrol saw no signs of recent enemy activity. The explosion was thought to have been a floating mine set off by mine sweepers. The patrol returned at 1650.

The 161st Infantry's reconnaissance patrol to the east side of Kolombangara returned on October 9th, having spent four days in making a thorough reconnaissance of the assigned sector. Large bivouacs and considerable equipment were found abandoned in the vicinity of Banberi Harbor. From the appearance of campfires, barge centers and information furnished by the natives it was believed that the enemy had evacuated not later than October 4th. No sign of recent enemy activity was found.

At 0900, the Division Commander and Regimental Executive Officer arrived at Vila to inspect the defensive positions with the Battalion Commander. The Battalion Commander was notified that one battalion of Fiji troops would relieve the First Battalion on October 10th.

A security and reconnaissance patrol was sent to investigate the area at the south of Disappointment Cove. This patrol found two large bivouac areas and strongly organized defensive positions that showed signs of having been evacuated for some time. The patrol returned at 1700. No signs of recent enemy activity were observed.

During the morning of October 10th a Japanese prisoner was taken by a Company outpost. The prisoner stated that when the Japanese evacuated three of them were left behind because they were sick. The prisoner had his gun, but surrendered voluntarily.

The 25th Division's boat patrol to the west side of Kolombangara returned October 11th. They spent four days patrolling the west side and investigating all the main harbors and coves around the island. All the bivouac areas had been abandoned along with much equipment. Bani and Bani Coves seemed to have been the most used points of evacuation. The only sign of recent enemy activity was the one Jap found in the deserted bivouac.

From information gathered from prisoners, patrols and naval reports it was believed the island was free of enemy resistance with the possible exception of a few stragglers.

At 1000, the Fiji troops landed at the east dock and moved into position, relieving the Battalion. Our outpost were called in. The Battalion Commander conducted the Commanding Officer of the Fiji Battalion on a tour of the area and turned over to his staff all plans for the defense of the area.

JOSEPH F. RYNEKA,  
Lt. Col., 27th Inf.,  
Commanding