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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 27TH INFANTRY (26TH INFANTRY  
DIVISION) ON GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS  
10 JANUARY 1945 - 20 JANUARY 1945  
(GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Regimental S-2)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

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## THE OPERATIONS OF THE 27TH INFANTRY (26TH INFANTRY DIVISION) ON GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS 10 JANUARY 1943 - 26 JANUARY 1943 (GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN) (Personal Experience of a Regimental S-2)

### INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 27th Infantry, 26th US Division, on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, 10 January, 1943, to 26 January, 1943.

The Guadalcanal Campaign, opening on 7 August 1942 and ending 9 January, 1943, was of vital interest to the Allied Command and to the average citizen. The morale of the United States was at an extremely low ebb. Every event was eagerly studied to find some indication that the Japanese were being stopped.

The disaster of the United States at Pearl Harbor was a rude awakening to the nation. The success enjoyed by the Japanese on that fateful day completely destroyed our illusion that the superiority of the United States Navy was an infallible guarantee against war with Japan. Our military might was exposed. It brought to light the fact that the forces of our country and those of our allies had been on a continual decline for many years.

The Japanese, knowing that the Navies of the Allies were practically non-existent in the Pacific, ruthlessly rushed toward the conquest of foreign territories. The great naval base at Singapore was captured and converted by the Japanese to their own use. The Philippines, meagerly defended by a handful of antiquated planes and stubborn ground forces, finally succumbed after its heroic defenders temporarily slowed the enemy's progress.

Through other Pacific Islands, the enemy rushed with very little opposition. Their tides swarmed through Sumatra to New Guinea and the Northern Solomon Islands. In the North Pacific, they threatened Alaska by the occupation of the Islands of Kiska and Attu.

In Europe, the situation was almost as disheartening with the continual success of the Nazi War machines thrust deep into Russian Territory, while the British were desperately trying to stop the German advance at El Alamein.

The Solomon Islands offered the Japanese a series of naval and air bases from which they could attack our supply line to New Zealand and Australia. In addition, they would serve as forward bases with which to launch an assault against New Zealand and the continent of Australia. (1)

In January 1942, the Japanese began to exploit this route by the establishment of bases in the Northern Solomons. Air bases such as Bougainville, Kieta, Palsi, and Rekatta Bay were stepping stones to their objective. (2)

There were no allied forces available <sup>who were</sup> capable of stopping the enemy's advance. In the Solomons area, a squadron of RAAF Catalina reconnaissance flying boats based at Tulagi and a handful of native police, were insufficient to offer even token resistance. (3)

The first Coral Sea action marked the high tide of the Japanese conquest of the southern Pacific and the defeat of the Japanese in a great naval battle near Midway, 6 - 8 June 1942, did much toward establishing a balance of naval power.

However, the Japanese, without hesitation, began the occupation of Guadalcanal and Tulagi on 4 July 1942. They

(1) A-1, p. 1, 2; (2) B-1, p. 2; (3) D-1,

placed ashore a large number of soldiers and laborers who began immediate construction of an airfield on Guadalcanal. (4)

The realization that the Japanese must be stopped, focused attention on the Solomon Islands. Since these Islands had been used as a ladder for the approach to our supply lines, the same ladder could be used in rolling back the Japanese.

The decision to invade Guadalcanal was accelerated by several strategic developments:

- (1) The presence of Japanese constructing an airfield on Guadalcanal within striking distance of the New Hebrides and the desire to dislodge them before they became firmly established.
- (2) The recent successes in the Coral Sea and Midway Battles gave the Allies a limited, precarious initiative, demanding the earliest possible exploitation. (5)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The 1st Marine Division, reinforced, completed an amphibious landing on Guadalcanal and the Florida Islands on 7 August 1942. Their landing on Guadalcanal was practically unopposed while Tulagi and Guvutu in the Florida Islands were bitterly defended. (6)

The Japanese immediately began delivering their counterblows. The island of Guadalcanal and surrounding area became a bitterly contested battleground, with neither side having the desired knock-out punch to drive the other from the island. Great aerial and naval battles were observed from

(4) A-1, p. 1, 2; (5) A-1, p. 5; B-1, p. 1; (6) A-1 ?

ringside by the beleaguered Marines. The Marines had their own private wars with bitter fighting in small engagements such as Grassy Knoll, the Tenaru River, and 1st and 2d battles of the Mataniku River, as the Japs fanatically staged their mass Bansai charges. The position of the Marines on Guadalcanal was very precarious on several occasions as they struggled to defend the prized airfield. (7)

The tide of battle began to swing toward our side after the Japanese were defeated in several all-important naval engagements. With the newly acquired Henderson Field and air superiority in the local area, American reinforcements began arriving. The Americal Division and the 2d Marine Division began arriving on Guadalcanal. With the arrival of these units and the expected arrival of the 25th Division, the tired and depleted 1st Marine Division, which had made the original landing four months previously, prepared to depart.

Even though our forces enjoyed local air and naval superiority, the persistent Japanese still were attempting to reinforce their units on Guadalcanal by piecemeal methods. (8)

On 7 December 1942, Major General Vandegrift, Commanding General 1st Marine Division relinquished his command to Major General Alexander M. Patch whose command was to be known as the XIV Corps. (9)

Meanwhile, the 27th Infantry, a part of the newly activated 25th Division, was preparing for combat by intense training in the tropical beauty of the Hawaiian Islands. The Regiment had been stationed at Schofield Barracks on 7 December 1941 when the Japanese made their sneaking attack on Pearl Harbor and surrounding airfields. Each officer and soldier, after the

(7) H, I, K, L, M, N; (8) A-1, B, E, F; (9) C, p. 14

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humiliation of that attack, trained with extreme vigor prior to departure for the combat zone so that he would be physically fit and have perfected teamwork when the time came to settle that score on the battlefield. (10)

On 25 November 1942, the first units of the division departed from Honolulu Harbor for an unknown destination. Those first units debarked at Guadalcanal on 17 December 1942, the personnel being informed of their destination only a few days prior to landing. The last units of the division arrived on 4 January 1943.

Even before the division had completed ship-to-shore operations, XIV Corps directed that the 25th Division launch an offensive. (11)

"We wanted to launch the attack very quickly in order that this division, fresh from Hawaii, would not come down with sickness before the attack. We wanted at least one division which could maneuver and go through jungles, capable of tremendous physical effort, capable of the movement necessary to put over the attack." (12)

The island of Guadalcanal is approximately 90 miles long and 30 miles wide. Dense jungle covers the greater part of the island. (Map A) At the time of arrival of the 25th Division, American forces were in possession of only a small portion of the island; a strip along the north central coast some 20 miles long and extending approximately 5 miles inland. (13)

The disposition of American forces was with the main defensive positions to the west of Henderson Field. The 2d Marine Division occupied the western defenses from Point Cruz south to Hill 86 and extending east to the Matanikau River.

(10) personal knowledge. (11) G-1, p. 2, personal knowledge, (12) E-1, p. 19, statement of Brig Gen Robert L. Spraggins, (13) E-1, personal knowledge

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The 1st Battalion, 8d Marines was holding Hills 54, 55. The 132d Infantry and 132d Infantry of the Americal Division extended east and south from the Matanikau River. The Reconnaissance Squadron, Americal Division was in possession of Hill 56. The remainder of the division was occupying the perimeter defense surrounding the area containing the airfields and other vital installations. The 147th Infantry, a separate regiment not belonging to any division, was engaged in guarding certain fighter fields. (Map E) (14)

#### THE DIVISION PLAN OF ATTACK

The attack order as published by the XIV Corps directed that the 25th Division launch an offensive to the west, on 10 January 1942, after relieving the 132d Infantry on Mt. Austin, having as the right boundary, the northwest branch of the Matanikau River. The mission assigned the division by this order was:

- (1) To reduce the strong Japanese positions on Mt. Austin.
- (2) To envelope the enemy's south flank, and
- (3) To seize the corps objective approximately three thousand yards to the west. (15)

The enemy's main forces were known to be located west and south of Henderson Field, but reasonable estimates of his strength in the division's sector was unobtainable. However, information on their disposition was fairly accurate as established by aggressive patrolling. The enemy held the western part of Mt. Austin in force and had well organized positions in the Hill 52 and 53 area. They also had some artillery pieces in the vicinity of Hills X and Y.

(14) E-1, p. 22; (15) G-1, p. 4

The Division Commander, realizing the rough and broken terrain confronted the division, could not base his plan of maneuver on the enemy's disposition, but had to base it on the problems of supply, communication, and evacuation to be encountered.

The division commander's plan of maneuver assigned the 27th Infantry the task of seizing Hills 50, 51, 52, and 57. The 35th Infantry was directed to contain the strong enemy forces between Hills 31 and 57 with one battalion, while the remainder of the regiment executed a turning movement by way of the divide between the Lunga and the Matanikau. The 131st Infantry was to remain in division reserve in the vicinity of the lower forks of the Matanikau River. (16) (Map D)

#### THE REGIMENTAL PLAN OF ATTACK

Immediately after receiving the warning order and the approximate regimental zone of action, the Regimental Commander, Colonel William A. McCulloch, began his reconnaissance.

A study of the zone of action on an aerial photograph revealed that the combination of Hills 50, 51, 52, 53, and 57 appeared in the shape of a horse. Thereafter, that particular area was referred to as the "Gallop Horse". The long, narrow hill to the west of Hill 57 was named "The Snake". (Map C)

The terrain in the vicinity of the "Gallop Horse" was of peculiar nature. It was made up of hills with extremely steep slopes and the gorges between hills were covered with dense jungle growth. The Matanikau River, which has its main stream flowing north between Hills 50, 54, 55, and Hills 47, 49, and 60 is joined by a tributary flowing from the southwest between Hills 55, 56, 57 and Hill 58, thus practically making

(16) G-1, p. 6

an island of the zone of action. However, a bridge to the north of Hill 55 did exist which was supplying the 1st battalion, 2d Marines. That unit had started a jeep trail which was only a few hundred yards long up the steep slopes of Hill 55. An approach from the north to the regimental objective was not available due to the deep gorge along the southwest branch of the Matanikau unless an approach was made through the sector of the Marines utilizing their supply route.

The factor of supply was the deciding element in establishing battalion zones of action as it was believed that two assault battalions could not use the supply route over the bridge across the Matanikau to Hills 55, 54 and beyond. When presented with the difficulties to be encountered, the Marines gladly arranged for the use of the supply route through their sector. (17)

The regimental commander's general plan of action was nearly complete. To gain unity of command, the Reconnaissance Squadron of the Americal Division which was occupying Hill 56 was to be attached to the battalion crossing the ravine between Hills 56 and 57. The Squadron would establish blocks in the ravine north of Hill 56 to prevent the enemy's possible approach from the east.

Between the right boundary of the regiment (also the division boundary) and the left flank of the 2d Marines would be a gap of approximately 200 yards. A time consuming conference between commanders on the afternoon of 8 January concerning this gap could arrive at no decision in spite of the fact that the Marines were responsible for maintaining contact with the 25th Division by XIV Corps order. The timely arrival of Major General Alexander M. Patch, XIV Corps Com-

(17) G-1, p. 25 and personal knowledge

mander and Major General J. Lawton Collins, 25th Division Commander, resulted in a company of Marines being scheduled on the day of the attack to secure the line to the boundary insuring the safe passage of the 27th Infantry troops to that point. Based on available enemy information furnished by the Marines, the division commander promised the massing of the fires of the Division Artillery and possibly an air attack on the known enemy resistance in the ravine between Hill 56 and the hoof of the Horse's foreleg. (18)

Following the final settlement of the boundary dispute, the regimental commander's plan of action was complete. The 1st battalion, commanded by Lt. Colonel G. E. Jurney was to attack from the north from Hill 56 and seize the Horse's forelegs and Hill 57. The 3d battalion, commanded by Lt. Colonel G. E. Bush would pass through the 1st battalion, 2d Marines on Hills 55, 54 and seize Hills 50, 51, 52, and 53. The 2d battalion, commanded by Lt. Colonel H. V. Mitchell would remain in regimental reserve in the general vicinity of Hill 55. The Cannon Company was to be in general support of the regiment. The Anti-Tank Company was attached to the 3d battalion to hand carry food, water and ammunition.

On 9 January 1943, the entire regiment was in forward assembly areas. The 1st battalion was located in a ravine on the east slope of Hill 56; the 3d battalion was at the base of Hill 55; the 2d battalion remaining in bivouac near the beach to avoid too much confusion in the forward area but scheduled to make a short march early the next morning to a vicinity near Hill 55. The regimental command post was established on the east bank of the Matanikau River at the base of Hill 55. (19)

(18,19) G-1, p. 26 and personal knowledge

THE ATTACK ON THE GALLOPING HORSE

On 10 January 1945, the attack on the "Galloping Horse" began at 0650 by the massing of the fires of the Division Artillery plus one battalion of Marine Artillery on the known enemy positions in the ravine between Hills 56 and 57. The artillery concentration lifted at 0616. Navy dive bombers then began dropping "depth charges" on the same target.

Following the aerial bombardment, Company F, 2d Marines closed the gap between the division's right boundary and the 3d Marines without difficulty. The Marines were immediately followed by Company B, 27th Infantry, which established a block across the ravine without resistance as a result of the successful artillery and aerial bombardment. The Reconnaissance Squadron also occupied their block on schedule. (20)

At 0730, after Company B had reported being in position, the 1st battalion moved in a column of companies to attack Hill 57. The 1st battalion captured its objective at 1140 after only slight resistance from enemy automatic weapons. (21)

The crest of Hill 52, the intermediate objective of the 3d battalion, commanded the entire "Galloping Horse" area on three sides. The fourth side, or southeast side was almost a sheer cliff, heavily wooded, which could easily protect defenders from our fire. In addition to its grim appearance, the dominant thought in the minds of the 3d battalion was that the Marines had twice been repulsed in attacks on this hill, the second time with heavy losses.

Immediately following the artillery and aerial bombardment, the 3d battalion moved across the line of departure with Company I on the right and Company L on the left, attempting a double envelopment. A base of fire, including 37mm anti-tank guns, was established on Hill 54.

(20,21) G-1, p. 31 and personal knowledge

Company L on the left occupied Hill 51 without opposition, and leaving a platoon there to cover their flank and rear, moved toward Hill 52. After advancing to within 200 yards of the objective, the company was stopped by enemy machine gun fire.

Meanwhile, Company I on the right met resistance from the jungle on their right flank. The accurate fire of the snipers in the jungle kept a platoon occupied for the better part of the day. The company did advance to within 200 yards of the crest of Hill 52 before being stopped by superior enemy fire.

The battalion commander, having failed to knock out the resistance with his supporting weapons, committed his reserve, attempting a deeper envelopment of the enemy's left. (22)

In the meantime, an air mission was made available to the battalion commander. The squadron commander personally came to the battalion observation post to view the target area and determine exactly where the bombs were to be placed. While waiting for the air mission, intermittent artillery and mortar fire were placed on the target. Company K, before moving into position on the far right had to clear a small ridge of enemy to protect their rear.

At 1445 the planes appeared overhead. As planned, the artillery fired a smoke shell to mark the target but the round fell short near the battalion observation post, narrowly missing a group of men. Quick thinking on the part of the battalion commander and teamwork by the 81mm mortar platoon placed a smoke shell on the objective before the planes started into action. The six planes then each accurately dropped one "depth charge," two of which failed to explode, on the south

(22) G-1, p. 31 and personal knowledge

slope of Hill 52. Immediately following the strafing attack by the planes, a heavy artillery concentration was placed on the objective. Companies I and K then moved in rapidly to assault the objective with bayonets fixed. At 1625 Hill 52 was in the hands of the 3d Battalion.

Since no further action could be made that day, the regimental commander directed that all units established a cordon defense. Company E was moved to occupy Hill 50 and establish a block to the Matanikau River. Company F occupied Hill 51. During the night sporadic enemy artillery and mortar fire ~~was~~ received in the unit positions. (23)

The following day the 3d Battalion continued the attack. The plan was to move Company L along the right to Hill 57, join the 1st Battalion and then extend south across the jungle to the Horse's mouth. Company I was to attack to the southwest, seize a small ridge line between Hills 52 and 53 and then Company K would pass through and secure Hill 55.

The attack was scheduled for 0900 but by that time only a few gallons of water had been delivered by the carrying parties to Hill 52. However, following an artillery preparation, the companies moved out in the attack with most of the canteens in the Battalion completely empty.

Company L advanced as scheduled to the southeast slope of Hill 57. Here it began receiving fire from enemy rifle and automatic weapons from three directions. As they were not in view of the 1st Battalion and could not advance or withdraw, they dug in. Company I reached the base of the small ridge line between Hill 52 and 53 but began receiving fire from enemy automatic weapons. The lack of water soon began

(23) G-1, p. 34 - 35 and personal knowledge

to tell on the assault units. Exhaustion casualties began trickling back and forward movement ceased. (24)

"As the day wore on the men became more thirsty and exhausted and leaders were lacking in the push necessary to put the attack across. It was noted that as the going became harder, leadership became more important. When things did not run smoothly, a forceful leader was essential to pull out of the difficult position. In spite of the heat and exhaustion that day, the enemy positions could have been overcome if the leaders had shown the push and determination which they had the day before." (25)

About noon it was foreseen that the battalion would be unable to continue to the objective and it was withdrawn to their original positions on Hill 52. Company L also returned from Hill 57 after the enemy opposing them had withdrawn. That night a small enemy attack on the right flank of the 3d Battalion was repulsed. (26)

The 2d Battalion passed through the 3d Battalion at 0630 on the following morning, having approximately the same plan of attack as had the 3d Battalion. Company G on the right proceeded to occupy by 1800 their portion of the Battalion objective on Hill 57 with only medium resistance encountered in the jungle northwest of Hill 52.

Company F, meanwhile, maneuvered to the left and gained control of Eton Hill but could move no further due to the intense mortar and machine gun fire coming from Sims Ridge and the Horse's head. In order to keep the attack moving, Company E was committed on the left of Company F, but they were also stopped. Company F was then disengaged and maneuvered to the north to attack Sims Ridge from that direction.

(24) G-1, p. 35 and personal knowledge; (25) G-1, p. 36, and statement of Lt Col G. E. Bush; (26) G-1, p. 36 and personal knowledge



When Company F succeeded in securing approximately half of Sims Ridge, the battalion commander believed he could break the Japanese defenses by moving Company E to the north and attacking with both companies down the ridge line. While Company E was enroute, the base of fire was moved to Ertom Hill. Late in the afternoon a coordinated attack by the two companies failed to make progress. (87)

The next day, January 13th, the attack again proceeded during a tropical rainstorm. The Battalion Executive Officer, Captain Charles Davis, in attempting to find a way to eliminate the principal machine guns holding up the advance, finally obtained four men of Company F to assist him in an attempt against the opposition. Captain Davis and his volunteers wriggled on their stomachs to within 10 yards of the enemy machine guns. Two enemy grenades thrown at the party failed to explode. Captain Davis and his men hurled eight hand grenades into the enemy positions and then assaulted. Captain Davis' rifle jammed on the first shot, but he drew his pistol, and followed by the others, plunged into the middle of the enemy's position and wiped them out. Company F, seeing the actions of these heroic men silhouetted against the sky, leaped to their feet and moved along Sims Ridge, liquidating the surprised enemy. With the same spirit they moved on to capture the Horse's Head, Hill 55, leaving many enemy dead in their wake. The regimental objective was completely seized at 1200. Patrolling in the immediate area continued throughout the day to eliminate enemy individuals by-passed in the final assault. (88)

The period from January 14th to January 19th was spent in active and aggressive patrolling to the front and flanks.

(87) G-1, p. 38 and personal knowledge; (88) F-1, p. 52 and personal knowledge.

Offensive action could not be resumed until supply roads were completed.

On 19 January, the 1st battalion occupied the Snake's Head and Back which had been outposted since 17 January. The 3d battalion moved up to occupy the positions vacated by the 1st battalion.

Two combat patrols sent out on January 20th brought back a great deal of information which was very useful in future planning. One platoon-size combat patrol crossed to Hill 87 G and reported that it was clear of enemy but that it had required three difficult hours to reach that objective. The platoon was directed to remain there as an outpost. The other patrol accompanied by an artillery forward observer proceeded down the Snake's Back. Upon reaching the Snake's Tail, the platoon with one 80mm mortar squad attached discovered that they had been allowed to walk into a trap and were practically surrounded by the enemy. The platoon leader called for help while the artillery forward observer calmly proceeded to lay down a curtain of protective fires. The timely arrival of another platoon a short time later extricated the patrol from a serious predicament. (89)

#### THE CAPTURE OF KOKUMBONA

The resumption of the offensive to the west was planned for 22 January. It was anticipated that the enemy would hold Hill 87 in force since it was the dominating feature overlooking Kokumbona and the surrounding area. The general plan of the division commander placed the 1st Infantry on the left attacking Hills X, Y, Z, then pushing on to Hills 88, 89 while the 27th Infantry reduced Hill 87. (Map D)

(89) G-1, p. 52 and personal knowledge

The information supplied by the two patrols two days previously was the deciding element in the routes to be followed by the 27th Infantry. Since the route across to Hill 87 was known to be tortuous, the 1st battalion moved out at 0630 down the Snake's back in order of Companies C, B, A, supported by fire by Company D from the high ground in the Snake's back. The expected resistance on the Snake's trail developed but the company commander of Company C quickly knocked out the automatic weapons with 81mm mortar fire. After reaching the base of Hill 87 at 0610, killing a few enemy riflemen, the battalion fanned out with the three rifle companies abreast. The battalion swept up Hill 87 encountering no resistance and by 1100 had occupied Hills 87, 88, and 89. The 3d and 2d battalions in order closely followed the 1st battalion to protect the supply lines. (30)

General Collins, the Division Commander, upon learning of the rapid advance of the 27th Infantry, secured verbal authority from the XIV Corps to change the division zone of action and exploit the breakthrough. He traveled to Hill 89 and personally gave the order to Colonel McCulloch for the 27th Infantry to continue the advance to the northwest, outflank the enemy and capture Kokumbona. (31)

Although the units had already organized perimeter defenses and dug in, they proceeded on at 1400 with great enthusiasm. Supported by Companies B and D, the other two rifle companies of the 1st Battalion crossed the heavily wooded ravine between Hills 87 and 90, overrunning the resistance. As determined later from captured documents, the enemy encountered there were manning an artillery command post. After scaling the slopes of Hill 90 on all four,

(30) G-1, p. 49, 53; (31) G-1, p. 87

Companies A and C were directed to establish a perimeter defense and remain for the night.

To strengthen the position of the regiment prior to darkness, the 3d battalion was moved up and occupied Hills 89, 91 linking up with elements of the 1st battalion on Hill 90. The 2d battalion occupied Hill 87 after joining flanks with the 1st battalion on Hill 89. Elements of the 161st Infantry was securing the supply line to Hill 87. (32)

The plan of operations for the 23d of January was to capture the enemy's supply base at Kokumbona and cut off the escape route of the enemy who were opposing the 6th Marines advancing to the west. To do this the 1st battalion, with Company E attached, was to capture Kokumbona while the 3d battalion established a block along Hills 98 and 99 to the sea. The 2d battalion less Company E was to follow the 1st battalion and protect the regiment's rear and south flank.

On 23 January, just as the continuation of the attack started, all the supporting artillery and machine guns in the Marine sector opened up. However, their fire was not all landing on the enemy but ~~over~~ were plunging into Hills 90 and 91. The regimental commander urgently telephoned the division commander to get these fires under proper control. After a short period the fires were under control; but not until a few casualties were suffered by the 27th Infantry. It was later determined that the information concerning the location of the 27th Infantry had not been properly disseminated to the Marines.

Following that interruption, the regiment moved on to the objectives for that day. The 3d battalion, after clearing enemy resistance from the deep ravine between Hills 89

(32) G-1, p. 50 and personal knowledge

and 90, pushed on to Hill 99 W and the sea, thus blocking the enemy's escape from the east.

Meanwhile, the 1st battalion was delayed in moving out as a host of snipers had infiltrated into the gorge between Hills 89 and 90. These snipers were mopped up in short order. The battalion moved in two columns via Hills 98, 99 and after a short skirmish, captured the Japanese main supply base at Kokumbona at 1500. The 2d battalion, less Company E, moved to Hill 90 and joined forces with the 3d battalion protecting the south flank of the regiment. Later in the afternoon Company F was directed to occupy Hill 100. This they succeeded in doing only after overcoming stiff resistance. (33)

At this point, it might be well to note what effects the swift capture of Kokumbona had upon the Japanese. During that night, Company I which was occupying the block to the sea, killed at least fifty enemy who blundered into their crossfire. The manner of their approach, which was very noisy and lacked alertness, revealed that they were completely unaware that American troops were in possession of their rear area. (34)

During the 24th and 25th of January, the 27th Infantry advanced to the Poha River encountering sporadic resistance and capturing great quantities of enemy artillery, ammunition and other supplies in addition to a few dazed members of the Japanese Imperial Army.

As the regiment prepared to continue the drive toward Cape Esperance, an enemy naval force was reported speeding toward Guadalcanal bringing with it the possibility of a Japanese amphibious attack in force upon any of the American positions. In the face of this threat, the 25th Division

(33) G-1, p. 50 and personal knowledge; (34) G-1, p. 59 and personal knowledge

was withdrawn and placed in corps reserve. The 27th Infantry was relieved by the 8th Marines and the 182d Infantry, Americal Division. (35)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

In making a study of the operations of the 27th Infantry, it is my opinion that the 3d battalion gambled too much on their ability to succeed without supplying water to the men prior to the attack on 11 January. The 3d battalion should not have been committed until water in sufficient quantities had been distributed. The regimental commander and battalion commanders were fully aware that the factors of supply and evacuation were the crux of the entire operation, but personnel engaged in handling supplies lacked proper supervision in expediting priority items. In investigating the reasons why the water was not delivered on time to the 3d battalion, a glance at the general supply picture is necessary. First of all, the regiment carried out this operation with the meager sum of eight  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton trucks and two  $8\frac{1}{2}$  ton trucks which was less than twenty percent of the authorized number. Engineer equipment was not available and the majority of roads or trails, maintained by hand, were passable to  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton trucks only. For this reason, the anti-tank company was designated to hand carry supplies for the 3d battalion. The regiment was also initially assigned 75 native carriers but these were unsatisfactory for carrying to front line units as they refused to proceed after hearing rifle and machine gun fire.

The hand carrying of supplies over 1000 yards under a scorching sun and over torturous terrain was exhausting to even the strongest. The average individual could undergo

(35) G-1, p. 51 and personal knowledge

only about four trips per day. It was not anticipated that such a large volume of water would be necessary to quench the thirst of front line units. Lack of proper supervision of the carrying parties resulted in rear units obtaining water which was intended for the 3d battalion. The failure to properly supply the battalion no doubt delayed the seizure of the regimental objective several days more than necessary. In addition, the unsuccessful attempt on 11 January probably allowed the few enemy remnants who escaped from Hill 52 to reinforce those forces in the vicinity of Hill 55.

It is believed that the 1st battalion from Hill 57 could have assisted the 3d battalion in their attack toward the Horse's head. The 1st battalion could plainly see the enemy on the reverse slope of Sims Ridge, and at one time, the 1st battalion commander begged to be allowed to fire, but the uncertainty to the location of all troops of the 3d battalion made that support not feasible. Actually, the Japanese and American troops were on opposite slopes of Sims Ridge and were engaged in exchanging grenades. Had not Captain Davis' party succeeded, the 1st battalion might have been called upon for fire support after considerable coordination.

The success of the rapid movement of the 27th Infantry over Hill 57 and the capture of Kokumbona was principally due to the ability of commanders to refrain from becoming involved in skirmishes with small enemy groups. Enemy elements to the flank, even though in the regimental zone of action, were ignored so that Kokumbona could be reached as rapidly as possible.

To sum up the results of the entire operation: The 27th Infantry, by destroying a great many enemy, seizing the "Gallop Horse", and finally capturing Kokumbona

in a bold, swift manner dealt the fatal blow to the Japanese forces on Guadalcanal. They lost their artillery pieces which had always been menacing American troops, supply routes to the south and east which lead to the regions of the Matani-Kau River, Mt. Austin, and Henderson Field, their main radio station, and sizeable dumps of ammunition of all types. In addition, a large number of Japanese were trapped between the 27th Infantry at Kokumbona and the Marines advancing from the east.

The Marines had constantly recognized from the beginning of their occupation that Kokumbona was a key point and plans to capture it were always being considered.

#### LESSONS

1. Supply of water to front line units in jungle fighting must be continuous and given a high priority.
2. Upon reaching an objective, the ground must be immediately organized. The tendency is to discuss in groups battle incidents, and collect souvenirs.
3. Enemy in ravines can be pocketed and by-passed successfully to be mopped up at leisure.
4. Firing at night in the jungle at noises or imaginary targets wastes ammunition, gives away your position, and creates false alarms for adjacent troops.
5. There should be no movement at night by friendly troops in front line units while in contact with the enemy. Therefore, shoot anything that moves.
6. Any type patrol sent out in the jungle should be strong enough to fight its way out of any situation.
7. Stay off trails. These are invariably under observation and are used as fire lanes by the Japanese.