

COMBAT REPORT SECOND BATTALION 27TH INFANTRY

CAMPAIN AGAINST THE JAPANESE

ARUNDAL, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS

(Period: Sept. 10 - 21, 1943)

At 0900 on the morning of September 10, 1943 the battalion received the order to prepare to move the battalion immediately with combat equipment from its rest camp on Ondongo Island. At 1545 the battalion embarked in two LCT barges from the causeway on Ondongo Island and arrived at Russell Point, Arundel Island at 1730 and bivouaced for the night.

The strength of the battalion at this time was 432 men and 21 officers or approximately one third of the authorized strength. Morale of the troops was good.

Beginning at 1020 of September 11, 1943 the battalion was shuttled in personnel carriers boats from Russell Point to East Boeboa coordinates - (5747 - 6911), on Arundel Island. The order of departure for this move was Companies "G", "E", "H", "F" and Hq. Co., 2nd Battalion in that order. This move was completed by 1600. Immediately after landing at East Boeboa Company "G" and Company "E" were ordered to pass through the block held across the peninsula by Company "H", 16th Infantry and advance 350 yards to the East to secure favorable positions to place a block across the peninsula. With Company "G" on the left and Company "E" on the right the move was completed without opposition, and the remainder of the battalion was brought up and a cordon defense was set up for the night.

The battalion was assigned the mission of attacking to the East up the peninsula to make contact with units of the 172nd Infantry, and destroy or drive into the sea the Japanese forces estimated to be approximately two hundred and fifty men defending the north end of Arundel Island. Units of the 172nd Infantry were holding a block through coordinates (64.4 - 68.7).

The battalion attack order for September 12 was issued in the late afternoon of September 11th. The plan of attack was to have Company "G" on the left with its left flank on the sea, and Company "E" on the right with its right flank secured on the sea, advancing in a line of squad columns with physical contact between squads. Company "F" was to be in reserve and follow along the center of the peninsula approximately three hundred yards behind the assault companies. Company "H" and Hq. Co. were to follow Company "E" by bounds.

The attack jumped off at 0730 on September 12th as scheduled from position shown on overlay. The advance proceeded favorably with no Japanese opposition encountered. By 1030 the assault companies were passing through a Jap bivouac area 200 yards east of grid 61, which was estimated to have sheltered 200 Japs. This bivouac area had been vacated not more than twenty four hours and had a well defined trail running North and South with a marked barge landing on the North shore. In the vicinity of the 62nd grid slight resistance was met and quickly overcome by Company "G". At 1350 the assault companies crossed the 62nd grid and passed through second Jap bivouac, where a freshly killed Jap was found on an improvised stretcher. This bivouac area was also recently vacated and contained fox holes and bomb shelters as well as numerous lean-tos. It also had a well defined trail running North and South across the peninsula as well as a trail running to the East. From this time on resistance was met at regular intervals of from 200 to 300 yards, which consisted of at least one automatic weapon protected by several riflemen, and was obviously a rear guard action delaying our advance until prepared positions could be occupied. This resistance was reduced successively and the advance continued until 1600, when Companies "G" and "E" were halted and the remainder of the battalion was brought up and a cordon defense was set up for the night. An estimated 3000 yards had been covered during the advance of the day. We suffered four casualties during this advance.

During the afternoon of September 12th it had been necessary to attach one platoon from Company "F" to Company "E" to adequately cover the frontage which was gradually widening. The attack was to be continued at 0730 on September 13th with the same general plan of attack, but the platoon of Company "F" attached to Company "E" on the 12th was now attached to Company "G", as it had become apparent that the main strength of the Jap forces was deployed on the north side of the peninsula.

The attack of September 13th jumped off at 0730 and advanced several hundred yards without opposition. At 0930 Company "E" reported American 130 communication wire along the east-west trail. Repeated efforts were made to contact the 172nd Infantry over this wire, as it was believed that they had laid the wire on a previous advance into this area. We were unsuccessful due to numerous breaks as a result of artillery fire and Jap action. At 1030 the first resistance was met after an advance of approximately 350 yards. The advance was continued against increasing opposition until Company "G" met strong resistance, and were pinned down by heavy fire from both heavy and light machine gun as well as numerous riflemen. Company "E" on the right and met only light resistance, and at 1315 were ordered to continue the advance swinging to the left in an attempt to flank the resistance. Company "E" advanced in a northeasterly direction and succeeded in reaching the crest of the high ground. They were stopped there by heavy fire. At 1400 Company "G" and the attached platoon from Company "F" supported by fire across its front by Company "E" again attacked to their front. After a very short advance they were again pinned down, and the battalion with Company "E" attached formed a cordon defense and dug in for the night. Our troops had suffered eight casualties during the action of the day.

Repeated attempts had been made by all available means on September 13th to contact, and find the exact location of the 172nd Infantry, but with no success. On September 14th the battalion was ordered to hold its position, and send a patrol out to establish contact with the 172nd Infantry. At 0730 a patrol from Company "H" was sent out with instructions to by-pass the resistance to our front, and establish telephone communication with the 172nd Infantry. By 1100 this had been accomplished without opposition. It was found that the unit consisted of a very depleted composite battalion numbering approximately two hundred and fifty men who were suffering from a shortage of rations and fatigue. This unit was now attached to the 27th Infantry and were ordered by it to attack immediately on an azimuth of 290 degrees and make contact with the right flank of the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry. This attack began at 1300 but encountered strong resistance immediately. It soon became apparent that if the two units were to join forces on this day the resistance would have to be by-passed. An order to effect this was issued, and the patrol from Company "H" succeeded in leading the units of the 172nd Infantry into the perimeter of defense of the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry at 1730 meeting only slight resistance enroute.

During the day and night of September 14th there were several heavy fire fights as the opposing forces felt each other out and each attempted to improve their positions. We suffered several casualties in this action in addition to eleven casualties from a short artillery round.

Company "L" was released from attachment to 2nd Battalion at 0800 September 15th and returned to 3rd Battalion.

During the morning of September 15th the lines were strengthened with units of 172nd Infantry. The Jap positions were heavily shelled by artillery, 81mm mortar and 4.2 Chemical Mortar almost continuously. A frontal attack order was issued to begin at 1130, but was unsuccessful and the Japs counterattacked in force and made a small penetration in the center of our lines. They were quickly thrown back by our troops. In this action both sides suffered heavy casualties.

On September 16th the Jap positions were again heavily shelled by artillery and mortar fire. There was intermittent automatic and rifle fire by opposing forces all during the day. At 1300 the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry with Anti-Tank Company attached, arrived as reinforcements, and went into position behind the lines of the right flank units preparatory to an attack at 0730 September 17th. At 1630 six light tanks entered the defense perimeter during a rain, and this fortunately covered the noise of their motors, and gave us the advantage of surprise in their use for the attack of the following morning.

The plan of attack for September 17th was to have the tanks spearhead the attack. They were to advance in waves of three so that the second three tanks protected the first three, and move by bounds on an azimuth of 60 degrees. They were to be followed closely by Company "C" and Company "B", 27th Infantry. With Company "C" on the left and Company "B" on the right they were to pass through the lines of Company "E" and Company "F" as soon as the tanks had reduced the resistance to the immediate front, and advance to the sea on an azimuth of 60 degrees pinching off the Jap center of resistance. The mortar platoons of Company "E" and Company "F" were to furnish a base of fire. The machine guns of Company "E" were attached to the assault companies. Company "A" and Anti-Tank Company were to be in reserve and were to be in echelon to the right rear to protect the right flank (position of units and direction of attack shown on attached overlay). The tanks passed through the lines of the 2nd Battalion at 0740 and engaged the Japs in a terrific fire fight that lasted until 0930 when they were forced to return to refuel and get more ammunition. The tanks were firing 37mm H. E. and casheer from point blank range, with their fire being controlled and directed by radio from the 2nd Battalion C. P. The Battalion, in turn, had telephone communication with the Company Commanders in the front lines, who had located many of the enemy machine gun positions. At first the tanks drew heavy fire from small arms weapons, but this fire decreased steadily as the tanks reduced one position after another. At 1100 the tanks again passed through the lines of Company "E" and Company "F" and were followed by Company "C" and Company "B". This time no resistance was encountered and, the assault companies advanced until they hit the sea, then reorganized and pushed on to the East in pursuit of the enemy. They succeeded in advancing approximately three hundred and fifty yards before encountering heavy resistance at a second well organized position. It was late afternoon before this resistance was met and it became necessary to dig in and prepare defenses for the night before the attacks could be continued.

The tank attack had apparently caught the Japs by surprise and inflicted heavy casualties. At least fifteen freshly killed bodies were found in addition to numerous shallow hastily covered graves. We had three men wounded during the days action.

At 0700 on September 18, 1943, Anti-Tank Company was released from attachment to 1st Battalion and attached to the 3rd Battalion for action on Sagerkara.

At 0830 the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry launched a limited objective attack to improve their position. The attack was led by two light tanks and was to be made through Company "C" and Company "B" sectors, which was on the left flank of the line. The attack started off well and several enemy positions were destroyed very quickly. After a short gain the two tanks came under Jap Anti-Tank fire. One tank caught fire and burned and the second was disabled. All of the tank's crew members escaped without injury. The Japs encouraged by this success counter-attacked and were thrown back with heavy losses.

At 1300 Company "A" and Company "B" were withdrawn from the lines for action off Sagerkara and replaced by the remnants of Companies "L", "K", "I", "H", and "G". Troops of the 172nd Infantry. There was no further action during the day.

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During the morning of September 19th several additional tanks were brought up to bring the total available for action to eleven. After an extensive reconnaissance of the front line terrain by the battalion and tank commanders an attack was scheduled for 1300. The plan of attack was to have the eleven tanks move in behind our right flank companies (Company "A" & "H", 172nd Inf.) in line, then pass through the lines and advance in bounds of approximately fifteen yards every five minutes. This plan was dependent on the tremendous fire power of the eleven tanks abreast to destroy any anti-tank weapons in their line of advance and make a break in the Jap lines. If this could be accomplished the Jap right flank would have to give way or be surrounded. Company "C", 172nd Inf. and Company "E", 172nd Inf. on the left flank was to hold their position initially while Companies "I" & "A", 172nd Infantry and Companies "H", "F", & "G", 27th Infantry, followed the tanks as they advanced. At approximately 1245 while the tanks were maneuvering into position the Japs dropped one round of 81mm mortar H. E. and five pounds of smoke inside our perimeter, causing several casualties.

There was some delay in getting the tanks into position due to the difficulty of control in the jungle growth, but at 1320 they moved past our front line troops, and with their overwhelming fire power crashed the Jap positions. The assault companies followed the tanks closely and received no fire after the tanks had cleared the area to their immediate front. The Jap positions were completely overrun and his will to resist broken in this engagement. The advance was continued until we had reached favorable ground just opposite the east end of Sagerkara (an advance of 450 yards) without further opposition. A 37mm anti-tank gun and a considerable amount of ammunition was captured. We suffered no casualties in this assault while inflicting at least twenty on the Japs.

During the night of September 19th, 20th, the Japs heavily shelled the east end of Sagerkara with light and medium artillery from Kolombengara Island. Several rounds hit near our lines but no casualties were suffered. Much barge activity was heard to the East of our position during the night.

Two patrols were sent out on September 20th at 0800 while the remainder of the battalion held its position. A combat patrol consisting of one officer and thirty men was sent to the southeast along the trail down which the Japs had retreated to locate the Japs or make contact with units of the 172nd Infantry along grid 66. This patrol travelled approximately 2200 yards before running into a Jap block just east of grid 67. The strength of the Jap block was estimated as fifty men with at least five automatic weapons. After a brief fire fight in which the patrol located the flanks of the Jap position, it withdrew and returned. Two casualties were suffered. The second patrol consisting of one officer and twelve men was sent 500 yards to the south to reconnoiter a trail running in that direction. The trail led to an old Jap bivouac area that contained many Jap graves. It had not been used for at least a week, and no fresh sign of Jap activity was noted.

On September 21st a coordinated attack by the 3rd and 2nd Battalions was ordered with Companies "A" and "B" of the 1st Battalion attached to the 3rd Battalion, and Companies "C" and "D" attached to the 2nd Battalion. The plan of attack was to have the 2nd Battalion, with attached units of 1st Battalion and 172nd Infantry, keep abreast of the 3rd Battalion as it crossed the channel between Sagerkara Island and advanced down the peninsula on Arundel Island. The advance of the battalions was to be coordinated and controlled by Regiment.

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The plan of attack for the 2nd Battalion was to have Companies "E" & "F" start the attack at 0830 advancing abreast down the east-west trail, with Company "E" on the left and Company "F" on the right, advancing in line of squad columns. The remainder of the unit was to follow Companies "E" and "F" at 0900 in the order of Companies "G", "H", Hq. 1st Bn, Hq. 2nd Bn, 27th Infantry followed by the units of the 172nd Infantry and Companies "D" & "C", 27th Infantry. No opposition was met and by 1100 Companies "E" and "F" had advanced 1600 yards. At this point they were halted to allow the 3rd Battalion time to come abreast on the peninsula. At 1300 the advance was resumed and by 1345 the advance companies had passed the position of the sap block of the previous day. At 1400 the advance was again halted, while patrols were sent to the east and northeast to contact units of the 172nd Infantry, and 169th Infantry. By 1600 contact had been established with the 169th, 172nd Infantry and the 3rd Battalion, 27th Infantry, thus reducing the last organized resistance on Arundel Island.

In ten days of the bitterest fighting that this battalion has participated in we had lost five men killed in action and twenty five men wounded, which is fairly high considering the depleted strength of the companies. During the same period of time the Japs had lost an estimated two hundred and twenty five killed in addition to many more wounded.

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