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THE OPERATIONS OF THE MACHINE GUN PLATOON, COMPANY "B" FIRST  
BATTALION, TWENTY-NINTH REGIMENT (SIXTH MARINE DIVISION), AT  
OKINAWA, RYUKYUS ISLANDS, 1-18 APRIL, 1945. (RYUKYUS CAMPAIGN)  
(PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE MACHINE GUN PLATOON LEADER)

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE MACHINE GUN PLATOON, COMPANY "B",  
FIRST BATTALION, TWENTY-NINTH REGIMENT (SIXTH MARINE  
DIVISION), AT OKINAWA, RYUKYUS ISLANDS, 1-18 APRIL, 1945.  
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GUN PLATOON LEADER)

INTRODUCTION

The war in the Pacific Theater, from the first victory on Guadalcanal until the battle for the Philippine Islands, had progressed favorably for the United States troops engaged therein. The huge squeeze movement, which started in the Solomon Islands, had resulted in slowly but surely pushing the Japanese off the various island groups. These, the Japs had, for the main part, occupied by force of conquest. By March, the squeeze had embraced all the major groups excepting the Ryukyus, Formosa, and the Japanese Islands themselves.

In view of this fact, it was then decided, by higher headquarters, that the time was ripe to start another campaign utilizing the joint and combined forces of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. Unknown to those who ultimately <sup>WERE</sup> <sup>TO BE</sup> <sup>IN</sup> <sup>THE</sup> <sup>LINE</sup> <sup>OF</sup> <sup>THE</sup> <sup>ATTACK</sup> fought this decision (at least the major percentage of them) Okinawa-Shima in the Ryukyus Group, just south of the main islands of Japan, was selected as the target. (1)

The Tenth Army was the unit selected for this operation. The Third Amphibious Corps was the Marine Corps component of the <sup>TENTH ARMY</sup> parent unit, it being made up of the First, Second, and Sixth, Marine Divisions, Pioneer, Engineer, Artillery and other supporting units. Some twelve-hundred ships of the Navy and Coast Guard, "the largest war fleet that ever sailed" (2), was to support the landing of the Tenth Army.

Consisting of the Fourth, Twenty-Second, Twenty-Ninth Regiments, and supporting arms and services, the Sixth Marine Division was formed on the Island of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, in September 1944. (3) Both the 4th and 22nd Regiments were combat experienced and the First Battalion of the 29th had distinguished itself in the bitter fighting on Saipan, where it was attached as a

(1) A-2, p. 378; (2) A-1, p. 45; (3) A-1, p. 1.

part of the First Provisional Marine Brigade. The Battalion was engaged in the fierce fighting for the strategic landmark, Mount Tapotohau, which was taken only after heavy losses to those engaged in its capture. (3) The two other battalions of the 29th, were hand picked, well trained, and spirited personnel.

It was amidst the settings of the first victories of World War II that the staging area was set for the continuance of the relentless attack on the Japanese Empire. There too, the Sixth Marine Division trained, worked, studied, and finally became the well coordinated fighting machine which was to assault the Japs on the island of Okinawa, in the Ryukyus group. But, it was not until the troops were well aboard their ships and the Sixth had sailed from "The Canal", on March 15, 1945, that all hands were informed that the destination was to be Okinawa. The utmost secrecy had surrounded the entire training period so as to obtain the maximum surprise effect. Many of the men had speculated on the new target. Some suggested Formosa, others thought the northern Philippines, while the more pessimistic ventured the suggestion that the main islands of Japan might be the new operational area. (4)

So, on March 15, 1945, embarked aboard all types of modern, combat, sea-craft, the Division sailed from Guadalcanal. The 29th Marine Regiment was combat loaded aboard APA's ( Assault Personnel Transports ), while the other excess supplies to be used for the continuous support were stowed aboard AKA's ( Assault Cargo Ships ). (5)

Although each of the units of the First Battalion had trained diligently, and as thoroughly, as the rest of the regiment; and <sup>were</sup> ~~were~~ in the pink of condition, there was no relaxing of training. This training did not, of course include the type of work the men had performed in the staging area, but was rather the informative type. Men were briefed as to what they could expect in this, the first conquest of a Japanese populated and inhabited land. The Intelligence reports which were relayed on to the men, gave the approximate number of natives as some 400,000, some excellent maps were handed out for

(3) A-4, p. 4; (4) A-8, Map "A"; (5) A-4, p. 5 & A-8.

the study of the types of terrain that could be expected. (6) The men were told that there were poisonous snakes on this next landing-step, among which was the deadly Habu. All hands shuddered at the report that leprosy was prevalent, and that nearly all of the natives were infected with a type of diarrhea or one of many other kinds of diseases. (7) Considerable interest was aroused in the report that the natives were an old civilization, but extremely primitive in their way of life. Such reports as the fact that the heaviest resistance of the entire Pacific campaign was expected, because of the close proximity to the main Islands of Japan, was received with stern faces and tight lips. As a result of this last bit of news, all hands and the ship's cook, were prepared for the worst and knew in their hearts that this resistance would last from LOVE-DAY until the last Jap was dead. (8)

Too many of the intelligence reports were quite hazy, but were received with considerable eagerness. All of the men knew that there was a grave lack of current information available and it was not unusual for the various platoon leaders to be confronted with the question, "Any new dope, to-day?".

At last word was received by the Battalion commander, that LOVE-DAY was scheduled to be Easter Sunday, April 1st, 1945. (9) A tenseness, octopus-like in its embracement, gripped all hands. This, being broken only by the semi-humorous remark, "It's April Fool's Day, too. Wonder if we'll get a big foolin'." (10) Weapons were checked and re-checked. All other gear was carefully looked after, to make sure it was in the right place for instant use. Each member of the combat team was as high spirited, yet grim, as a high spirited Purebred <sup>what?</sup> just before its first race.

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION - *Continued*

The Third Amphibious Corps and the Twenty-Fourth Army Corps were to attack abreast, on the west coast of the Island, directly opposite the two vital airfields, Yontan and Kadena. They were to seize and hold these points

(6) A-6; (7) A-6 & A-1 p. 40; (8) A-8; (9) A-1, p. 45, A-2, p. 383 & A-4, p. 5 & A-8; (10) A-8, & A-6.

against all enemy resistance. The Third Amphibious Corps, consisting of the First and Sixth Marine Divisions ( the Second Division was in Army reserve) (11) was assigned the mission of taking and holding Yontan Airfield. The Sixth Division, on the north side of the sector of attack, was assigned Green Beaches, one and two, and Red Beaches, one , two, and three. The attack was to be made with the Fourth and Twenty-Second Regiments abreast, and the Twenty-Ninth in Corps reserve. The 4th on Red Beaches and the Twenty-Second on Green. H-Hour, LOVE-DAY, was to be 0830. (12)

Each member of the Machine Gun Platoon of Company "B", First Battalion, received the final attack with the stoicism which is prevalent in the average machine gunner.

With the receipt of the final attack order, there was also the issuance of the Battalion debarkation order. To explain in part; this is the order of attack as it refers to the individual units leaving the mother ship prior to landing on the beach, so arranged that no complete fighting unit is in any one small boat. There may be, for instance, one platoon of riflemen and a section of machine gunners assigned to one type of landing craft. (13)

Practice formations were held to insure that each man on the ship knew exactly what boat he was to embark in, what time he was to come up to the top-side and on which side of the ship he was to take his place. Everything except the actual embarking was practiced. This had been practiced time and time again, while in the staging area. This drill, prior to an actual landing, makes for a maximum of efficiency, with a minimum of confusion. That latter detail is one of the prime factors to be considered in an amphibious operation. An excess of confusion and disorganization can definitely affect the proper, smooth, coordination of the fighting team as it prepares for its final action. One slip in the loading of the smallest vessel can unduly and unnecessarily heighten the anxiety of the personnel

(11) A-3, pp. 366, 367, 369; Map "C"; (12) A-1, p. 44; (13) A-6.

making the assault.(14)

The Company Commander, Company "B", charged the machine gun platoon leader with the responsibility of assigning the various sections of his platoon, so that a maximum of support was equally distributed throughout the Company. A general plan was suggested by the machine gun platoon leader and subsequently presented to the Company Commander, for the suggested employment of the "guns" and the distribution of the various crews.

The first section, under control of Sgt. Cunningham, was to embark, with their heavy machine guns, with the first platoon, in boat number twenty six. The second section, with Corporal Bloomstrand in control, was assigned to the second platoon. While the third section was in support of the third platoon, with Corporal Greenstein in control. The Gunnery Sergeant of the machine gun platoon, Gunnery Sergeant Bagwell, along with two runners would accompany the Company Commander in his boat. The machine gun platoon leader was told that he would be with the second platoon in their vessel. (15)

Now that all arrangements were made and the personnel thoroughly briefed, we were ready for the operation.

#### THE ATTACK

At Love minus three hours, 0530, all hands were awake and listening to the battle as it got underway. To several of the new <sup>e</sup>men it was quite a thrilling experience to hear the naval gunfire as it lambasted the beach. Several of the earlier risers saw the distant hills of Okinawa fade into obscurity as the five, eight, fourteen and sixteen inch rifles of the navy, blasted away at the supposed strongholds of the enemy on the rapidly disappearing beaches east of the ship.(16)

High in the sky, an occasional glimpse could be had of the Marine Fighter Wing, as it dropped bombs throughout the sector of attack,

A surprising number of the men aboard, marines that is, ate a hearty  
(14) A-6; (15) A-6; (16) A-1, p. 45.



breakfast of steak and eggs with all the trimmings, while the preliminary strike was progressing. Even as late as H minus thirty minutes, some of the personnel, who were later to make the landing, were so unconcerned about the whole affair that they were playing a few last games of "Acey-Ducy" and cribbage. Perhaps it was a false air of braggadocio, who knows? Maybe it was only to hide their true feelings of nervous anxiety.(17)

Finally, at 0830, in the misty, smoke filled distance, one could discern the activity of small boats leaving the parent ship, sailing a short distance, and then start the seemingly endless circling which predeces the final jumping off for the beach. Then a long, but staggered line of these boats headed for their assigned beach areas. Men along the life lines were quiet, thoughtful, and wondering what the near future held for those in the first wave. All hands tensely waited for the first reports to come to the ship.

Then came the astounding and unbelievable news. "Little or no enemy resistance on all beaches, are proceeding inland toward Yontan Airfield."

At approximately 1000, or H plus two hours, word was received that the 22nd Marine Regiment, on the left flank of the Division sector had requested that the 29th Regiment be released from Corps reserve and landed to protect their left flank area later known as Zampa Misaki Peninsula. So, at 1230 the First Battalion, 29th (not the entire Regiment) was released from Corps and were landed at approximately 1500 on Love Day.(18)

WAS THERE  
A PLAN TO  
ACCOMPLISH  
THIS MISSION  
IF SO IT SHOULD  
HAVE BEEN  
GIVEN.

#### ACTION BEGINS FOR MACHINE GUN PLATOON

Thus began the action of the Machine Gun Platoon, Company "B", First Bn., 29th Regiment.

Upon hitting the beach under x low hanging smoke clouds, it was observed that our own friendly tanks were maneuvering back and forth over the distant low hills and farm lands. Many airplanes could be seen in the  
(17) A-1, p. 45; & A-8; (18) A-1, p.47, A-4, p. 5, A-7 p. 13; A-1, p. 14, A-2, p. 15, A-3, p. 16, A-4, p. 17, A-5, p. 18, A-6, p. 19, A-7, p. 20, A-8, p. 21, A-9, p. 22, A-10, p. 23, A-11, p. 24, A-12, p. 25, A-13, p. 26, A-14, p. 27, A-15, p. 28, A-16, p. 29, A-17, p. 30, A-18, p. 31, A-19, p. 32, A-20, p. 33, A-21, p. 34, A-22, p. 35, A-23, p. 36, A-24, p. 37, A-25, p. 38, A-26, p. 39, A-27, p. 40, A-28, p. 41, A-29, p. 42, A-30, p. 43, A-31, p. 44, A-32, p. 45, A-33, p. 46, A-34, p. 47, A-35, p. 48, A-36, p. 49, A-37, p. 50, A-38, p. 51, A-39, p. 52, A-40, p. 53, A-41, p. 54, A-42, p. 55, A-43, p. 56, A-44, p. 57, A-45, p. 58, A-46, p. 59, A-47, p. 60, A-48, p. 61, A-49, p. 62, A-50, p. 63, A-51, p. 64, A-52, p. 65, A-53, p. 66, A-54, p. 67, A-55, p. 68, A-56, p. 69, A-57, p. 70, A-58, p. 71, A-59, p. 72, A-60, p. 73, A-61, p. 74, A-62, p. 75, A-63, p. 76, A-64, p. 77, A-65, p. 78, A-66, p. 79, A-67, p. 80, A-68, p. 81, A-69, p. 82, A-70, p. 83, A-71, p. 84, A-72, p. 85, A-73, p. 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vicinity of Yontan and they were apparently engaged in blasting the enemy from strong held positions.

Black billowing clouds of smoke were heaviest over the airfield which had been overrun by H plus one hour, while the 22nd on the right had captured their objective by H plus two hours, this being Castle Hill, and was actually the objective for Love plus two days.(19) Without wasting one minute of the remaining daylight hours, the First Battalion rapidly reor-

ganized, on the beach, and proceeded rapidly to the left flank of the 22nd Marines sector of action. Company "A" on the left, "B" on the right, and "Charlie" company in battalion reserve.

The First Platoon, "B" Company, with the first machine gun section attached, occupied the right sector of the company front, the Second Platoon was assigned the left, and had the second section of machine guns attached. The third machine gun section was in Company reserve with the third platoon, and the sixty mortars brought up the rear of the company.(20)

Moving rapidly, for a D-(Love) Day speed, the Company pushed north toward the extremity of Zampa Misaki Peninsula.(21)

An order had been received, earlier, to drop and pile in a common dump, all excess items of equipment such as gas masks, extra rations, and the heavy machine guns. It was thought that the heavies would be employed in the initial landing in the event that the operation went bad for the invading troops, thus they had been landed with the company. However, the lights followed closely and soon took the place of the heavier weapons in the rapid movement to follow.(22)

The movement up the peninsula was uneventful with very few enemy encountered in the battalion area of advance. These scattered few were quickly killed, and the company set up its defense for the night.(23) It was decided

by the Company Commander that he would utilize the heavy machine guns which

(19) A-1, p. 47; (20) A-8; (21) A-1, p. 54, A-7 p. 13; (22) A-8; (23) A-8, A-1, p. 54.

had followed the company in the jeep trailer. Accompanying the Company Commander on his reconnaissance of the area to be defended on this, the first night ashore, the machine gun platoon leader discovered that the main direction of possible assault of the position would come from the south east, if at all. The company having been organized into a perimeter defense, he then employed the guns on the flanks of the area, to adequately cover the low rolling ground to the south-east. All twelve guns in the platoon were used. Six heavies and six lights. Since there were not adequate personnel to man all of the guns the crews were of necessity cut down, there being a gunner, an assistant, and two ammunition supply personnel assigned to each.

However, by dawn of the 2nd day, it was apparent that these elaborate plans had been futile in that there were no enemy in the immediate area. The heavy guns were re-loaded into the trailer and the company made plans to continue, with the battalion and <sup>?</sup>rejoin the 22nd Marines inland.

Information was received on the morning of the 2nd of April, that during the night and morning both the 4th and 22nd Marines had met with resistance, suffering quite a few casualties and the advance of the division had been materially held up.(24)

Upon moving out from the area occupied during the night of the 1st, it was noticed that the terrain became rougher as progress was made toward the left flank of the 22nd Marines area of attack. This section extended inland from the small village of <sup>DOMAR? (MAP E)</sup> Naka Domar for a distance of about a mile and a half. The <sup>?</sup>area assigned to the First Battalion, 29th Marines, was in an extremely mountainous, sparsely vegetated, deeply ravined section of the terrain.(25)

Reaching the assigned sector of defense in the late afternoon of April 2nd, another reconnaissance was made by the Company Commander accompanied by the mortar section leader and the machine gun platoon leader. The area  
(24) A-1, pp. 51, 53; (25) Map "B", A-8.

SECTOR OF  
DEFENSE  
OR  
ZONE OF  
ATTACK

WHILE 1+3 REMAINED?

to be defended was on the forward slope of quite a high hill, and well up on the side of this hill. A roadway wound about the base of the hill and climbed rather steeply up between two hill masses, the other being toward the north of the position. It was not only an avenue of approach, for the Japs from the north-east, but was also the route used by the company in reaching the area. Battalion headquarters was established well up toward the crest of the hill, with Able and Charlie companies making up the remainder of the perimeter of defense for the night

The first platoon was deployed on the right of the company area, the second on left, with the third in reserve, in the general vicinity of the company command post. The heavy guns had been brought up, and because of the restricted area to be covered it was suggested by the machine gun platoon leader that only they be used, with the lights left with the third platoon at the CP in the event that they might be needed later. It was further suggested that the heavies be employed so that the right and left flanks of the company were defended and the third section set up in the interval between the two platoons covering sectors both right and left forward of the company, perimeter, front. Each of the sections was assigned a sector which made it possible for them to adequately cover the roadway, the reverse slope of the hill to the front. The dead spaces filled by the automatic rifles of the two line platoons. By 1700 the guns were well dug in, in position defilade, camouflaged, and alternate positions planned and dug. Word was passed to all hands to keep to their fox holes after night had fallen. The day's pass word was relayed to everyone, and as usual it was one employing the use of as many of letter "I" as possible. This letter being difficult for the Japs to pronounce. (26)

At 1900 it was dark, all men were in their fox holes, the machine gun platoon leader was stationed in his foxhole, near the right flank of the company area a few yards from the first section. This position was selected

(26) A-6.

because of the likelihood of an attack coming from that direction. Normally, his position was at the company CP. Until approximately 2300, all was quiet but from then on there was considerable excitement. A whispered report was given to the platoon leader, by his runner, that the section leader of the first section had heard a sound familiar to that of men walking, to the right front area. Keeping as close to the ground as the seemingly high silhouette of the body will permit, the platoon leader proceeded, on his stomach, to the vicinity of the left gun of the first section. When he was within five feet of the position of the gun, the loud burst of a hand grenade, exploding to his front caused him to remain as motionless and as close to the ground as he could get. Shortly after this, a short burst of machine gun fire was directed in the direction of the grenade burst. Rising quickly to his feet, the platoon leader rushed to the nearest gun whispering to the crew in a stage whisper to hold their fire. This, of course, after having identified himself in a rapid manner. After a brief inquiry as to the situation, the platoon leader was informed that persons were heard moving on the road toward the machine gun position. No further movement was heard. Both gunners of the section were cautioned to hold their fire until they were certain of their targets or unless the riflemen opened up on clearly, recognizable enemy. The platoon leader then went to a slightly defiladed area between the guns and lay down. About an hour and a half later, he was awakened by considerable noise and confusion. Shortly afterward, several hand grenades exploded in rapid succession, and there was heard the firing of Automatic rifles, M 1's, and carbines. No machine gun fire was noticed at this time. Returning to the vicinity of the left gun he inquired as to what was happening. The gunner, Corporal Bloomstrand (27) told him that there was something going on in the foxholes of the other weapon of the section, some ten or fifteen yards away. After telling the men to hold fire, the platoon leader proceeded over to the other gun's position. When nearly to the foxholes he heard low voices, a few groans, and some

(27) A-5.

activity. Approaching with much caution, he whispered the pass word and shortly received an answer. He then got close enough to faintly see what was going on, in the very dark night. He talked to the gunner, who informed him that several Japs had sneaked up to the emplacement and attempted to overrun their position. Several of them had been killed, he thought, and were lying just outside the foxholes. They had been killed with carbines and pistols, he added. Upon asking where Sergeant Cunningham (Sergeant William F. Cunningham)<sup>(28)</sup> was, the platoon leader was told that the Japs had killed him. This had occurred when the Sergeant was attempting to reach the gun's position and direct possible fire at the enemy. The machine gun platoon of Company "B", lost one of its finest non-commissioned officers, and in doing so, suffered its first casualty of this campaign.<sup>(29)</sup> That was the only casualty of the night, with six of the enemy being killed.

Shortly after the morning meal, on April third, word was received that the company was to continue its move toward the north, on the west side of Ishi-Kawa Isthmus.<sup>(30)</sup> The Battalion was to move a distance of about a thousand yards and set up another defensive position. The assigned mission was to clean out the enemy in the rugged area, if he could be contacted. From the information received, it was apparent that the resistance consisted of small isolated bands of leftovers. The major portion of the Jap forces having moved to the south and to the north.<sup>(31)</sup> However, before the move could be carried out, contradictory orders were received.

It seems that intelligence had received information that the Japs were going to attempt to land paratroopers on Yontan Airfield, on the night of April third.<sup>(32)</sup> No one in the First Battalion, 29th Regiment worried much about it since they were of the opinion that sufficient troops had been landed in the days since the initial landing to handle them. So the company prepared to move out as scheduled.

(28) A-5; (29) A-5; (30) A-4, pp. 5-6; (31) A-3, p.361; (32) A-7, p. 13, A-8.

Just before 0900, Captain Lyle E. Specht, Commanding Officer of Company "B", sent down word, to hold up preparations to move, and told all hands to take it easy. He added that as far as he knew the company would stay in position that night, again..

The remainder of the day was spent improving the positions, cleaning the guns, and resting. Several reconnaissance groups were sent out short distances to search for and try to contact the enemy, but reports came back that none were seen.

At about 1730, the machine gun platoon leader checked all gun positions reminded the crews of several points concerning the final protective line, and went to his foxhole where he prepared for the nights' waiting.

At 2000, all hands were aroused from their foxholes, and told to be ready to move out in half an hour.

By 2020, the machine gun platoon was mustered on the road with light machine guns awaiting orders from the platoon leader. They received orders to march at rapid speed, with as few stops as possible to Yontan Airfield, set up a defensive area and stand by to defend it against enemy parachute units. (33)

Promptly at 2030, Company "B", directly behind a guide furnished by rear echelon headquarters, moved out with the first rifle platoon leading, followed by company headquarters, the second rifle platoon, machine platoon, mortar section, and the third rifle platoon bringing up the rear. Battalion headquarters followed Company "B", with Able and Charlie Companies, respectively in the column.

To further amplify the rapidity of that march, the Battalion arrived intact, at Yontan Airfield at approximately 2200. The distance covered being about four miles.

When approximately a hundred yards from the airfield it was noticed that there was considerable activity going on throughout the area. Be-

(33) A-7, p. 13; A-8.

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cause of the extreme darkness, nothing of these activities could be seen. No lights of any kind were permitted, and the units were forced to design their respective defense areas in as nearly total blackness as can be imagined. Many attempts were made to dig in, but the asphalt of the landing strip made this impossible. As an alternative the men dug up parts of the field and constructed foxholes above the ground.

Shortly after being assigned an area for the defense, and putting the machine guns in their places, the machine gun platoon leader was informed by the Company Commander, that tanks were going to be moving up into the main lines and to have guides ready to lead them around the already started foxholes. This accomplished within the next twenty minutes without serious mishap to any of the personnel in the area. At 2330 all activity ceased in the area, and the troops settled down for the night. (34)

It was with considerable surprise, that the men of Company "B" greeted day-break, on the 4th of April. As far as the eye could see, it seemed, troops on foot, and many tanks were occupying the area. The First Armored Amphibian Battalion, had also been ordered to Yontan, to supplement the First Battalion, 29th Regiment, in the nights' defense. (35)

Also on this morning the men received the happy surprise that prior to returning to the defensive area occupied on the third, they were to receive hot coffee and soup, and would be transported via trucks to the Love plus three lines.

143 [unclear]  
Upon returning to the battalion occupied area at 1130, 4 April, the previous days plans to continue the advance to the front were put into action. Since small elements of the Battalion headquarters unit, Charlie company, and a platoon from Able company, had been left to hold the position against attack. Upon disembarking from the trucks, information had been disseminated that the night of three April had been quiet with no enemy activity reported.

(34) A-8; (35) A-7, p. 13.



1107  
CLARK

Shortly after 1200 the Company was formed on the road and prepared to move out for the defensive area planned for that night. Reaching the area at 1700, the same type of defense was set up as for the previous day, and the unit spent an uneventful night.

On the following day the Company moved at 0730 and at noon received the word that the remainder of the 29th Regiment had been landed and moved up to the Love plus four lines, and that the First Battalion would rejoin them on the afternoon of 5 April.

Thus the drive up Ishikawa Isthmus continued with the 22nd Regiment on the left followed by the 29th, and the 4th on the right of the Division sector. (36)

By 1700 on 5 April the advance had reached a line extending from Atsutabaru on the west coast of the Peninsula, to Kin on the east. (37) A defensive position was established and again the troops dug in. Company "B" was located well on the right of the regimental sector, high up in the rough terrain. Again on this night, the machine gun platoon suffered casualties, as well as the remainder of the Company. (38)

Preceded by the explosion of hand grenades and the fires of small arms, an attack made by a small band of Japs, was repelled. No machine gun fires were laid down because of the clear thinking of the gunners in estimating the size of the attacking force. However, several hand-to-hand fights were reported the following day as well as one in which the machine gun platoon leader became engaged. The attack came at approximately midnight, all hands being alerted by the listening posts throwing their grenades. It was on the right flank of the company area, the enemy being about twenty in strength.

The first knowledge the machine gun platoon leader had that there were actually enemy forces near his foxhole was when a Jap smelling like they do, leaped into the foxhole. He had a knife in his hand, but was small  
(36) A-1, p. 55; (37) Map "C"; (38) A-5

which was indicated by his weight as he closed with the platoon leader. As had been his habit, all during training and since being in this operation the platoon leader had stuck his hunting knife, usually strapped to his right leg, in the bank on the side of his foxhole, within easy reach. He quickly had it in his hand and prepared for the worst. The fight did not last long, since the platoon leader outweighed the enemy nearly thirty pounds and ended by the platoon leader slitting the enemy's throat. He then rolled the body out of the hole and waited for further attack. None came, so he crept out of the foxhole, and crawled toward the nearest gun position to lend assistance. By the time he had identified himself, the action had ceased and the enemy dispatched. Nothing could be done for the wounded on that night because of the intense darkness. The following morning it was discovered that Corporal Greenstein had received a saber cut on the forehead which was superficial, Private Charles W. Smith had his right ear badly chewed in close fighting, and several men, including the machine gun platoon leader needed new articles of clothing, which had been ripped and out, by the Japs.

The enemy were counted at ten dead and three so badly wounded that they died early the following morning. Three men in the first rifle platoon were killed and two others wounded. No other casualties were reported for the Company. New clothing was issued, and the Company prepared to move out at 0830 on 6 April.

The First Battalion had been relieved of the inland responsibility, and was put in regimental reserve. Progress was much easier, throughout the entire sector, as the Regiment moved up the north-south roadway, on the west coast of the Isthmus, reaching the small hamlet of Chuda on the evening of the 6th. Since the 22nd Regiment had preceded the 29th and cleaned out all resistance enroute, it was <sup>not</sup> necessary to set up defensive positions,

but a night watch was set in each company's area as a security measure.

On 8 April, The 29th Regiment was committed to the task of cleaning out Motobu Peninsular. It was no longer in Division reserve, <sup>(MINDS BLEN?)</sup> as it had been from its landing on Love plus one until 8 April. The 22nd continued up the northern end of the island, to wipe out enemy resistance in that area, and the 4th was held in reserve to assist where ever needed.(39)

Motobu Peninsula is approximately ten miles long and eight miles wide at its widest point. It extends at right angles from the main island in a north-westerly direction. The highest point on the peninsula, Mount Yaetake, extends upward, amidst a large hill mass to the altitude of nearly fifteen hundred feet, and is located in the south central portion of Motobu.(40) The avenue of approach to this strong point was up deep ravines, until nearly to the crest of this highest point. Since the enemy had the entire area set up in defensive perimeter of Mount Yaetake, they were virtually looking down the throats of the attacking forces until the mountain was captured on 18 April.(41)

#### THE ATTACK ON MOTOBU

On April 9th, 1945, the attack up Motobu Peninsula was started. The First Battalion, 29th Regiment, was to proceed up the Nago Itom, Toguchi <sup>(map D)</sup> road cleaning out all enemy contacted in their zone of action. The Second Battalion was ordered to proceed directly north, and to capture and neutralize the small town of Unten, which was a midget submarine base. The Third Battalion was ordered to proceed along the roadway on the southern edge of the Peninsular. They were to neutralize and pass through the small towns of Suga, Sakinotobu, Hamasaki and to hold up at Toguchi. This action would give our forces the southern half of the Peninsula, and an avenue of communication and supply(42)

(39) A-4, p. 6; (40) Map "D", A-1, p. 59; A-3 p. 372, A-2, p. 390;

(41) A-2, p. 394, A-3, p. 373. (42) A-2, p. 391, A-1, p. 61.

The first few hours of the drive were uneventful for the First Battalion Company "B" leading with elements of Able Company on the flanks, and Charlie Company in reserve moved out along the road. The machine gun platoon was held intact, with the mortars, behind Company Headquarters. Light guns were carried, because of the expected march.(43)

As progress was made, it was quite noticeable that the terrain was rising rapidly above that in the vicinity of the L plus 8 line. The roadway was unimproved and flanked on either side by high hills. It had many curves and it was noted that it moved generally up a natural corridor. At 1200 a halt was called to eat the noon-day meal, and at 1300 the march was continued.

Shortly after 1400 the First rifle platoon of Company "B" reported that there were enemy troops in a small canyon which was at right angles and south of the road. Word of this was sent to Battalion. A halt was called, and the First Platoon, with a section of machine guns moved out to intercept the enemy.

This force turned out to be five Japs and they were quickly killed, except for two who escaped up into the mountains. No other resistance was met that day and the march ended just before the town of Itom was reached.

A defensive position was set up, on the available high ground. No outguards were established, and no patrols were sent out. No one knew exactly where the enemy was concentrated, but it was suspected that he occupied the highest ground.

This proved true, when at 1700, considerable machine gun and some mortar gun fire was received by Company "B" in their bivouac area. The fire continued until 1800. All hands were in foxholes, but several casualties were suffered. The Battalion Commander then, established outguards, which were stationed at the obvious avenues of approach and on the high ground to the right and left.

(43) A-8.

After the attack it was necessary for the machine gun platoon leader to shift the gun positions so as to adequately cover the terrain to the front and flanks as well as two obvious avenues of approach which were trails coming into the position from the ground on the north.

Later that night, three enemy, apparently out on patrol, were killed by machine gun fire as they were coming down one of the trails. The fire of the guns immediately brought down another hail of enemy fire. <sup>1st platoon</sup> This lesson was quickly taken to heart and until a "Banzai" attack later on, was not violated.

Rain began to fall at about 0330 on the 10th and by 0700 all hands were thoroughly soaked, cold and quite miserable. Small, well obscured fires were permitted for heating coffee and K rations which had been issued the previous night. Visibility was poor, and the men expected to remain in position all day. However the order to prepare to move out was received at 0800 and by 0830 the troops were on the move.

With Baker company in the lead, closely followed by Able company Battalion Headquarters and Charlie company, the march was continued. The dirt road was now a muddy, slippery, near river. Many times men fell and were helped by buddies to regain footing. Progress was extremely slow the remainder of the morning. At 1300 the enemy struck.

The leading elements of Baker company had just traversed an open field which had a small stream running through it. A cement bridge, crude in structure spared the water. Just as the First rifle platoon had crossed this bridge heavy mortar and machine gun fire was rained on them, seemingly only from the front. (44)

All hands took cover, wherever it was available. Word was sent to Able Company Commander to proceed to the right and attempt an encirclement of the enemy's <sup>left</sup> flank. By passing to the right of Baker company, they proceeded toward a small valley to the right of the road. As they reached  
(44) A-1, p. 62.

the general base of their hill it was noted that an increase of mortar fire was delivered by the enemy forces. Soon after this, a runner from Able company came sloughing his way to the company commander of Baker company with the request that the machine guns of Baker company be moved up to the left flank and fire on enemy positions. This action was started with the machine gun platoon leader, leading the platoon. Because of the fire received movement was made up the small creek, in knee deep icy water. Just as a bend in the creek was reached heavy mortar fire fell right across the line of march. It seemed to cover the entire area to front. Halting his platoon, the machine gun platoon leader sent a runner back to report the situation to the Company Commander.

Prior to the arrival of the runner at Company headquarters, another runner arrived with the message that all troops were to pull back out of this area and proceed back to the bivouac area of the previous night.

This order proved to be difficult to carry out. The mortar barrages and concentrations became heavier, Nambu machine guns, and automatic rifles of <sup>7</sup>longer calibre had now entered the firing plan of the Japs. (45)

The retreat was started and the units moved back down the road. As they reached the entrance to the valley an increase in enemy machine gun fire was received from south of the road. Leading elements were pinned down. <sup>3</sup>Makes a hasty estimate of the situation.

The machine gun platoon leader of Baker company, set up one gun on the near side of the fields of fire of the enemy guns. He was asked whether or not he could bring overhead fire to bear on suspected enemy positions, up the ravine, which were holding up our movement. By going up on to the side of the mountain on the left, circling around and then back to the road, the machine gun platoon leader was able to emplace two guns in such positions that they provided overhead fire for <sup>the</sup>retreating troops.

(45) A-1, p. 62, A-8.

Under these protective fires, "A" and "B" Companies and Battalion Headquarters were able to continue down the road, to return to bivouac area. It was not until the following day that it was discovered that one platoon of Able Company, had gone into the hills to the south, became separated from the Battalion, and did not get back until 0330 on the morning of 11 April.

Several casualties were sustained in the Battalion, but no machine gunners were hurt. Many weapons were lost, including one 81 mortar. It was a disheveled outfit that reached the bivouac area that evening.

Reorganization was conducted and the supply officer furnished the required weapons.

A patrol was sent out the next morning to regain the 81 mortar. This was accomplished and no enemy fire was received.

From 11-14 April, the Battalion remained in the general vicinity of the L plus 10 line. <sup>(map 12)</sup> Time was spent making patrols in a circumference of a thousand yards around this area. Company "B", at this time, was bivouaced on top of a hill some eight hundred yards from Battalion, having reached it by a series of daily movements. Several patrols, with attached machine gun sections were sent out. Few enemy were contacted, but the consolidated reports of these patrols set the enemys' position as on a high hill mass in the south known as Mount Yaetake.

#### THE ASSAULT ON MOUNT YAETAKE

During this patrolling period, fire was received daily, from the enemy, at about 0600 and 1730. The men came to expect it and were thoroughly entrenched during these hours. Every effort was made to keep in defiladed areas on the north side of every small hill or rise in the ground, even though it seemed that oftentimes fire was received from the north.

On 14 April we received word that an attack on Mount Yastake would begin. The Second Battalion had joined the First, and were to assist in the assault. Information was received that the Fourth Regiment had proceeded to an area between the towns of Sakimoto and Toguchi, and with the Third Battalion, 29th Regiment were <sup>AGAINST TOGUCHI ON MT YASTAKE</sup> to assault from the south. (46) We learned too, that Colonel Whaling had relieved Colonel Bleasdale as the 29th Regimental Commander.

By noon, on 14 April the attack was under way. Companies "A" and "B" were attacking up adjacent corridors, along trails cut by the Japs. Flank patrols were out and the ridge between the units was adequately covered. "C" Company was Battalion reserve.

The 80 millimeter mortars were set up to deliver long range fires on the hill masses to the front. We learned that there would be air support on call, and that the 105 and 155 Division Artillery guns would deliver concentrations, on call from the Battalion Commander. (47)

Due to the precipitousness of the ridges on either side of the route of advance, movement was very slow. The machine guns were to be held intact and used only for the defense, due to the limited ranges, and lack of fields of fire.

From 14 to 17 April the advance continued. Each night a defense was set up and the highest terrain available was utilized. Sporadic enemy fire was received constantly throughout this period, becoming heavier in the evenings and early morning hours. At frequent intervals enemy personnel were observed in the high, comparatively treeless, area to the front. It was at these long range, often appearing, targets that machine gun fire was frequently directed. Casualties on the enemy, were inflicted daily, as evidenced by observation through binoculars during firing periods, and also by the unburied enemy dead, as each hill mass was overrun by our forces.

(46) A-1, p. 63; A-4, p. 6; (47) A-8.



Our own forces were not immune to enemy fire, as was indicated by the fact that the machine gun platoon had been depleted from fifty six to thirty two, during the period 1-17 April.

Due to the inaccessibility of the terrain, to <sup>motor</sup> ~~motto~~ transport, daily treks had to be made back to the Battalion supply dump, to obtain food and ammunition. This procedure was carried on, until 16 April, when an air drop of food water and ammunition was made. All of the parachutes were recovered, even though the enemy chose that moment to open fire. However, following the drop, Marine fighter pilots and medium bombers, came in. They strafed and bombed the enemy positions and several Napalm bombs were dropped, which not only sent the enemy into their holes, but screened the mountain from observation for hours. These aircraft also released many rockets at the prepared caves which could be seen all over Mount Yaetake.

The caves had been in evidence for days, as binoculars had been used to direct both mortars and long range machine gun fire, at the enemy stronghold.

On 18 April, 1945 having secured the area leading up to ~~and~~ the hill mass just south east of Mount Yaetake, the Battalion Commander prepared to ~~go~~ <sup>on the hill mass</sup> (ordinate) an all out attack with units of the 4th Regiment on the south and west, and the Second Battalion on the north.

The attack was launched at 0830, following a heavy artillery barrage and then an air strike. Company's "A" And "B" were abreast, as usual, and Company "C" in reserve firing overhead machine gun and 60 mortar fire. The machine guns of Company "B" left on the hill mass south east of Mount Yaetake were on the flanks of Company "B" and had the mission of firing overhead covering fire for the advancing troops. Their fire was coordinated with that of "A" Company's machine guns, firing a similar mission. If all went well, the two machine gun units were to displace forward as their fire

was mashed by the advancing troops.

By 0845 the valley between the two hill masses had been reached by the rifle platoons. It was at this time that the enemy opened up with everything they had. The machine gun platoon leader gave the command to open fire, and a few minutes later there was a blinding flash, a loud roar and the machine gun platoon leader fell wounded, on the head neck and on other parts of the upper body. The blow on the head, by flying fragments of an exploding mortar shell, knocked him unconscious. Some hours later, he regained consciousness in the Battalion aid center and was afterward evacuated to the Division hospital located at Nago.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In summing up these operations of the small unit working in conjunction with larger units, I am firmly convinced that wars are a series of small unit victories combined, eventually together, to make the overall victory complete. Each individual is held responsible for fighting his best and maintaining every inch of ground he stands on. Even though a unit may be forced to withdraw, this can be accomplished with the thought that the ground will be recovered tomorrow. It was never observed that there was any excessive waste of life during this period, other than the average incurred and suffered in all wars. No particularly outstanding achievements were accomplished other than the fact that against the terrific odds of the enemy continually occupying higher ground, the units made rapid progress. I noted, throughout this period, that all men maintained the fire discipline which had been taught in training, except in a few isolated cases. Our supplies followed us closely even to the air-drop in the high ground, and we were never without small arms ammunition.

By way of criticism, it was noted that there had been insufficient training in retrograde movements. It is certainly with distaste, that the Marine

views this angle of combat tactics, but such situations as that confronting the First Battalion Commander, will continually arise. To be prepared for these contingencies is to be able to fight the next day.

116-47  
I also noticed, that, during this period, there was a minimum of night patrolling carried out. This, I believe, was a mistake in that the enemy's positions could have been located prior to daylight movement and thus preclude the possibility of excessive losses. Since it had earlier been determined that the bulk of the enemy forces were concentrated in the hill masses, it was evident that he might send out some observation patrols to keep contact with our forces. Had we sent out counter patrols, the defeat of the enemy may have resulted sooner and with less loss of life incurred.

There was insufficient information as to the terrain available for general dissemination to the troops. Perhaps it was unobtainable, but the terrain on Okinawa was so much different from that of the training area, Guadalcanal, that much of the training was wasted. A better selection would have been the Island of Oahu, in the Hawaiian group, whose terrain features are greatly similar to that of Okinawa.

#### LESSONS

Some of the lessons learned, by me, in this operation are listed below:

2. 1. A tight, individual unit, perimeter defense, tied in with a series of other similar defenses of adjacent units, is the only practicable type which can be employed in rough rugged, mountainous terrain.
2. Machine guns, when employed in this type of terrain, can best be used to fire long-range, overhead fire, and to interdict possible avenues of approach to the unit area.
3. It is essential that patrols, especially night patrols, be employed when fighting in mountainous terrain.
4. Unless the enemy launches an attack, it best not to fire machine guns

at night, because of the fact that the flanks of our own positions are thus disclosed.

5. After observing the enemy's movements it was brought forcibly home, that the safest place for troops to move is not on the skyline, but the slopes of the hills.

6. It was learned that any plan must be flexible, this was shown by the rapid advance of all units on Love-Day, which resulted in the early release of the 29th Regiment from Corps reserve.

7. It was learned that an accurate estimate of the situation is invaluable to the Commander, and without this ability his troops will suffer.

WORKING  
COULD BE  
IMPROVED