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# OPERATIONS OF THE 2d BN AND 3d BN, 65th REGT (22d CHINESE DIV.) IN THE BATTLE FOR TARO, 29 DEC 1943 - 30 JAN 1944 (INDIA - BURMA CAMPAIGN)

(Personal experience of an American Liaison Officer)

Type of operation described: SEPARATE REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY


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B. Thunder Over China, White and Jacoby, 1946.

C. Burma Surgeon Returns, Gordon Seagrave, 1946.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Ref A - p 143
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7. Ref A - p 154
8. Ref A - p 188
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10. Ref A - p 191
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OPERATIONS OF THE 2d BN AND 3d BN, 65th REGT (22d CHINESE DIV.)
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## INTRODUCTION

In 1942 the Japanese had overrun Burma and completely routed the Allied Armies there, including the native Burman Army, the British Forces, and the Chinese Expeditionary Force. It is necessary to go back to that point for a complete understanding of the significance of the small unit victory, which is the subject of this monograph.

With the complete collapse of organized resistance in Burma, Maj Gen Joseph W. Stilwell with his staff had walked out to India, followed by the remnants of the 38th Chinese Division. Another Chinese division, the 22d, had been ordered over a different route of retreat to India and had been caught in the Ft. Hertz sector of north Burma (see Map A) by the monsoon, so that when the 900 survivors of this division reached India they were in a pitiful condition of collapse, both physically and mentally.[1]

It was then that Gen Stilwell, at Dinjan, Assam, uttered his famous saying, which for realistic outspokenness probably had no equal in World War II. It has been variously quoted, but in substance he said, "We got the hell licked out of us. It was humiliating as hell. We ought to find out why it happened and return."[2]

The survivors of these two divisions were to be the nucleus around which Stilwell built his successful return, and some of these same pitiful troops were to taste the heady draughts of the first successful Chinese counter-offensive at Taro.

The remnants of this same 22d Division, consisting of the 64th, 65th, and 66th Regiments, were the cadre around which the new 65th Regiment was built with replacements from China. The training and resupplying phase, under the direction of the U. S. Army, took place at Ramgarh in central India and lasted for over a year until Gen Stilwell felt that now he was

ready to return.[3]

The 22d Division was moved to the general vicinity of Ledo in northern Assam (see Map A) which was the railhead terminus of the recently began Ledo Road, and which is the point at which our story begins.

SITUATION

Let us now trace the "big picture" and general situation at this time. It must be realized that the one big mission of the U. S. war in Burma was to keep China in the war. Realizing this fact, that the entire war was fought for that political reason, helps to clarify the often confusing situation in the China-India-Burma theater. To this end, Gen Stilwell wanted to reopen a land route of supply to China. However, he had a personal score to settle with the Japanese in Burma, so that mission was never entirely out of his mind.[4]

Gen Stilwell planned a road from Ledo across Burma to connect with the old Burma Road to China, and he had the Engineers to build it; but first the Japanese had to be blasted from the trace and the threat of Japanese interference removed during the construction phase and the maintenance and operation phases to follow.[5]

To this end, the Combined Chiefs of Staff had approved the operation to be put into effect by the Capital Plan. This plan gave Gen Stilwell a reinforced regiment, the 5307th Composite Unit, known as Merrill's Marauders, now in training in central India and which would be ready by March 1944; two Chinese Divisions, the 38th and 22d, ready now; three Chinese Divisions yet to come; five British Brigades organized into Long Range Penetration Groups and one British Division, yet to be named. These were the forces to be used to reopen the road to China.[6]

In Oct 1943 the road had progressed to Tagap, beyond which the Japanese had never bothered to penetrate.[7] So from their base at Tagap (see Map A) the 38th Division pushed off to clear north Burma, 26 Oct 1943. Against scattered resistance, which was afforded by very small patrols, they managed to push a short distance past Shingbwiyang until they ran into the first organized resistance in November. There they

followed the typical Chinese pattern and bogged down. Against any resistance at all they dug in and refused to move further.[8] It is noteworthy to notice that the 3d Bn, 112th Regiment, had been sent on a separate mission to secure the right flank and was now well dug in at Tara Ga (see Map A). Of this battalion we shall see more later.

That is the situation then on Christmas Day 1943.[9] The 65th Regt was in a training area just 19 miles from Ledo on the road to China to whence they had come from Ramgarh. Here under the direction of the Division officers and with the help of the American liaison officers the unit was carrying on final field training. But even now the unit was not quite complete. One company from the 2d Bn, reinforced by one section of machine guns, was on outpost duty at Hpachet Hi. With them was an American liaison officer and an American sergeant.

Maj Gen Liao Yao-Hsing (the Division commander) held a big Christmas party in honor of the American liaison officers, since this was a big American holiday. All field grade officers of the division were present, so the momentous announcement was made that one regiment was to be committed on a separate mission.

Listening to the excited chattering of the 65th Regiment officers, who were noisily hoping that their regiment would be the one chosen, it was hard to believe that this was the Regiment which had been so hopelessly beaten only a little over a year before. That year of good food, good clothing, superb weapons, and adequate training had actually made them eager for combat. This was an eagerness entirely new to a Chinese unit. One of the biggest factors in their desire to fight was the splendid esprit-de-corps. They knew that the 38th Division (supposedly the better division) had bogged down and failed. They wanted to show the world (and themselves) that the 22d Division was better,that they would defeat the Japanese and that they would succeed in any mission assigned to them.

On 27 Dec the 65th Regt was alerted on a warning order to move by trucks to Shingbwiyang starting 29 Dec. This was the first news that had

been received that the Ledo Road had been completed as far as Shingbwiyang, an epic achievement in itself, the history of which needs to be told.

On 29 Dec Regimental Headquarters units and the 1st Battalion moved out followed by the 2d and 3d Battalions on 30 Dec. With this regiment went their three American liaison officers and two American sergeants.

ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT

Here was the organization of the 65th Regt as they moved to battle (see Chart B). It was organized along triangular lines with three Battalions: a Supply company (which served as a pool of porters and carrying parties); an Antitank Company (armed with 8 towed 37mm AT Guns); a Headquarters and Headquarters Company; and a Medical Company.

Each battalion had a headquarters section, three rifle companies, a machine gun company, an antitank platoon (armed with 2.36" rocket launchers), and an 81mm mortar platoon.

The soldiers wore cotton khaki uniforms furnished by the British, which were similar to the Indian Army issue. These were long trousers and long-sleeved shirts. In addition, they had short-sleeved shirts and knee-length shorts of the same material. For footgear the Chinese wore British hob-nailed boots and wrap-around leggings and carried a pair of low canvas sneakers. A sweater, ground-sheet, British web-equipment and a British helmet completed the soldier's basic equipment.

For arms this regiment had Model 1917 U. S. Rifles, Bren Guns, U. S. Heavy .30 caliber Machine Guns, Thompson Sub-Machine Guns, 60mm Mortars, 81mm Mortars, Boyes Antitank Rifles (for which no ammunition was ever received), 2.36" Rocket Launchers (ammunition for which was received much later), 37mm Antitank Guns, and Hand Grenades.

For communication within the regiment and to higher Headquarters there were four V-100 radios (an American set made expressly for Chinese lend-lease which in general characteristics corresponded most nearly to SCR-284). There were also ten SCR-195 radios and thirty EE-8 field telephones.

The Regiment also had some organic transportation, 1/4 ton 4X4 trucks for commanders and towing AT guns, and some 2½ ton 6X6 trucks for supply. However these vehicles were not used at all during this operation, so the numbers are not important.

It might be well to describe the function of the American liaison officers attached to this regiment because of two reasons for the success of the Chinese. These officers are said to be one.[10] The other reason was that Stilwell's authority to command his Chinese troops had been established beyond question by Generalissimo Chiang Kai Chek.[11]

These officers had their own American radio teams in direct contact with Stilwell's headquarters and they sent daily coded reports on the situation based on their own observations. These liaison officers had no command authority over the Chinese (only Stilwell had that), but because they handled supply requirements they, in effect, became regimental and battalion executive officers. They had the power to veto Chinese requisitions, which put them in the position of exerting a strong influence on the actual commanders.

Although these liaison officers had supply and advice to the Chinese leaders as their primary official functions, their greatest value lay in being able to furnish Stilwell with accurate information on Chinese and Japanese dispositions, and information on what the Chinese were doing as differentiated from what the Chinese said they were doing. Often there was a vast difference. They were Stilwell's eyes and ears as well as voice in the smaller units. In addition they had to be prophets, because often they had to predict Chinese intentions, which were frequently at variance with Chinese statements.[12]

To each Bn there were attached thirty 2½ ton American 6X6 trucks for this move, because the Chinese units had so little organic transportation. These trucks came from Chinese or American truck companies, and the 2d Battalion with which the author traveled had 18 trucks from an American QM Truck Company and 12 from a Chinese Truck Company. The official

mileage from Ledo to Shingbwiyang is 107 miles and a record of an early Jeep trip over this road recalls that it took 30 hours.[13]

NARRATION

The motor movement was a normal Chinese move, which means that there was no planning whatever. The 2d Battalion simply filled up the trucks, the battalion commander started off in his 1/4 ton and they played follow the leader. With no planning the loading in itself was something to see, so the column which was supposed to leave at 0800 pulled out at 1000. The road was good as far as Hangsau Pass, which was the lowest pass in the entire chain of mountains between India and Burma. From that point on, there were frequent wash-outs and several stretches of one-way road. With no prior preparations there was no traffic control at these places, which meant frequent delays. The halts were in no way scheduled so when the battalion commander became weary the column stopped. However he had his orders that he would bivouac at Tagap that evening, so the column drove on to Tagap arriving about one o'clock in the morning.

After breakfast in the morning the battalion moved out again and encountered the same conditions on the road as had prevailed the previous day. Finally the bivouac area adjacent to the air strip at Shingbwiyang was reached at 1900, but the milling ground in the new area meant that it was the New Year before the troops were bedded for the night.

There was something prophetic about the beginning of this New Year because it started with an attack order issued by the Division commander to the 65th Regimental commander, and for the first time the regiment knew where they were going and their mission.

It was mentioned above that the 3d Bn 112th Regiment had been sent to secure the right flank. They had failed miserably and were now "holed-up" at Tara Ga encircled by what they described as a "superior force". The mission of the 65th Regiment was to relieve this unit, to destroy whatever Japanese were at this location, and to proceed on orders to carry out the original mission of protecting the right flank of the trace of the Ledo Road.

Since there were no roads at all in their area of future operations the regimental commander wisely ordered all vehicles and drivers to remain as a rear base at Shingbwiyang and to keep the towed 37mm AT guns with them. The personnel of the AT Company were very valuable later as carrying parties.

While the Chinese were issuing their orders and equipping for a jungle march, the American liaison officers were drawing and orienting their American radio teams and receiving their instructions on air recognition and air dropping procedures.

These radio teams consisted of five American enlisted men, two operators, two cryptographers, and one repairman. They were equipped with one SCR 284 and the usual spare parts kit. These men were Signal Corps trained, so they were excellent technicians but totally unprepared for the rigors of jungle combat. However, the author's team gradually became acclimated and were later recognized as one of the best jungle operating teams and were awarded the grades to which they were entitled in the form of at least two grade promotions for each man. However, that is getting ahead of the story because at this time they were all privates.

They had themselves and their radio, but no one had concerned themselves about how they were to carry the radio and their personal packs, which makes a formidable load in garrison and which would be impossible in the jungle. Finally six men were obtained from Division service troops to help the section man-carry their radio, spare parts, and accessories.

It was planned that this was to be a temporary measure to be replaced by battalion personnel. However, no one told this to the battalion commander and naturally he was loath to furnish any of his troops for this porter duty. This problem was not solved until several weeks later when the liaison officer's personal influence secured three men from the battalion commander when he finally was shown the importance of this American radio.

In addition there was an American sergeant to serve as the battalion liaison officer's assistant, but since he came down with malaria within

ten days and was never replaced, he will not be mentioned again.

On 2 January the regiment moved out from Shingbwiyang in column of battalions, two men abreast on an old trail and guided by two native Kachin guides. The order of march was 2d Bn, 3d Bn, Regimental headquarters, and 1st Bn (see Map A).

Three days later after determining that the guides had no conception of where they were headed, many false starts, much back-tracking, and cutting of new trails the regiment arrived at the river at 15 r. Here preparations were made to receive air-dropped supplies on the river beach, to set up a ferry across the river, and to leave the 2d Bn as a security force at this drop site.

At that time the author was transferred with his radio team from the 2d battalion to the 3d battalion;and on 7 January the 1st battalion, regimental headquarters and the 3rd battalion moved out in that order with the 47th Portable Surgical Hospital assigned to work with and follow this force. The formation was as before with the additional protection of one platoon about 200 yards in front to serve as security.

The regimental commander was following the trace of an old trail, long unused, in order to attempt to surprise whatever Japs might be in the vicinity of Taro. So much cutting and pioneer work was necessary and the going was slow.

On 9 January some evidence of Jap patrolling was found near the river and this patrol undoubtedly alerted the force near Taro of the regiment's presence, but they underestimated the strength (this fact was learned from a Japanese diary captured later).

On 10 January a second drop field was set up on the beach near 20 r, and drops were received on the 11th, 12th, and 13th.

On 14 January the first battalion moved out followed by regimental headquarters and the 3d battalion on 15 January. A Kachin scout from the V force (an intelligence agency of OSS operating in this area) met the regiment and alerted them to a Jap force moving north from Taro to meet the Chinese force.

On 17 January the 1st Battalion was fired on by riflemen, machine guns, and mortars, and the fight was on. This was near a small river and the Japs had chosen well. Later it was learned this stream was the Patzi Hka, but right now it was a small barrier with the Japs on high ground on the other side, the large Chindwin River on the right and high ground to the left, so the approach was canalized along the trail and the Japs were astride that trail.

The Chinese reaction here was the familiar one which the American officers had come to expect. Immediately the 1st Battalion deployed across the trail, and the 3d Battalion filled in the back of a perimeter defense with regimental headquarters in the middle. Then the Chinese started to dig in with might and main, when it was fairly apparent from the volume and type of enemy fire that they were opposed by a force estimated at the time as a reinforced company (later it was learned that it was actually a battalion considerably understrength).

There was sporadic firing and some attempts at infiltration by the Japanese that night but little action by the Chinese, so in the morning the liaison officers, after a huddle, approached the regimental commander to tactfully "suggest" an attack. However, he said nothing to commit himself and retired to his CP, but little did the Americans know about the plan he was hatching.

The same discouraging conditions prevailed that afternoon when the regimental commander suddenly called a conference to announce that he had ordered his 2d Battalion to move forward with all haste to join the other two battalions. This was also the first announcement that the wandering company from outpost duty at Hpachet Hi had rejoined its battalion, so very soon the regiment would be complete.

Now the commander unveiled his tactical masterpiece, the plan by which he expected to annihilate this Japanese force and gain great prestige. The 1st Battalion was to hold on the front while the 2d Battalion made an envelopment around the left to pin the enemy against the river.

LESSON NUMBER 1

Unexpected tactics are often decisive.

This was a sound tactical plan, orthodox and workable, though difficult; but coming from a Chinese commander it was literally a bombshell. It was so unexpected that the subordinates had a great many questions concerning its feasibility. To say that these tactics were unexpected is one of the greater understatements of this author's life. And that these tactics were to prove decisive was conclusively demonstrated later.

Now there was little to do except to set up a drop-field to receive additional mortar ammunition which the commander had requested and wait for the 2d Battalion to arrive. With the usual picture of sporadic firing and little action the Japanese were lured into the belief which the American officers had first held, that this was the usual Chinese action where they dug in to defend at the first sign of resistance.

LESSON NUMBER 2

Never underestimate your enemy.

The 2d Battalion arrived from the rear late on 20 January, and preparations were begun to drive the above lesson home to the Japanese commander. However well he learned it is of no consequence because he died here before he could demonstrate his mastery of it.

After orders had been issued and extra ammunition, particularly 81mm mortar shells, had been received and distributed, the 2d Battalion began cutting a trail in rear and wide to the left for their envelopment. This was on 22 January.

Shortly after they left, the 3d Battalion received orders to carry out their part of the master plan, and on 23 January from their positions they started a move to the left of the 2d Battalion to ambush all trails and to cut all possible escape routes which led from this area to the east toward the Japanese main positions along the road from Myitkyina north.

LESSON NUMBER 3

When an encirclement is made, it must be complete and all escape routes must be cut.

The 3d Battalion was moving to cut the escape routes and the 2d Battalion

insured that the encirclement was complete. To accomplish their mission the 3d Battalion moved along the left flank dropping off platoon and squad detachments at each trail, stream, and draw to ambush and cut these possible escape routes. Then the remainder of the battalion was to serve as a visiting patrol and supply party to these small groups.

When the ambushes were set and all complete, the author moved across to the regimental headquarters in the rear of the 1st Battalion and thence to the 2d Battalion to better observe the Chinese in their first aggressive offensive.

It was now 25 January and the regiment even had artillery support. At an enormous cost in human effort and labor, one battery of 75mm pack howitzers had been brought in from division artillery at Shingbwiyang. They had come part way on their pack animals, but they had to be manhandled into a firing position on a hill to support the attack.

Now on 25 January all units were in position (see sketch) and the mortar and artillery opened fire adjusting by forward observers on the Japanese, who had chosen to sit and wait.

From a Japanese diary captured later it was learned one of their patrols had picked up this encircling force the day before, but whether they felt that now it was too late to do anything about their earlier costly complacency, or whether they felt they could beat off this attack whose strength they still underestimated, or whether they had been ordered to hold at all costs, will forever remain another Japanese inscrutable mystery.

The 2d Battalion had not only come in from the left, they had detached an encircling force from the main encirclement to come in from the rear and now these two forces made contact with each other and finally with the 1st Battalion, so that the encirclement (using the Chindwin River as the right side) was indeed complete. The 2d Battalion was dug in and adding its mortar fires. Some machine guns were sighted to cover the river. It had been correctly surmised that the Japanese might be tempted to try to escape by swimming this swift torrent, and these guns did catch the first few that tried it that night so that it was never attempted again.

The mortars continued to fire and the riflemen and machine gunners from their dug-in positions took their toll of charging Japanese attempting to break out of the ring.

That night at dusk each battalion was ordered to send scouts or patrols into the Japanese position to see how many enemy were left. They reported many casualties, but still some enemy remained, so with intermittent fire during the night the Chinese continued to take their toll.

This procedure of heavy mortar and artillery fire (with resulting tree bursts), the repulse of charging Japanese, and dusk investigations of the Japanese positions, was continued on 26 and 27 January.

LESSON NUMBER 4

Ammunition is cheaper than men.

The regimental commander had requested and received ample ammunition; whereas, he had been promised no replacements. Indeed it had been intimated that he would receive none. The application of the simple lesson above then was the natural result of the combination of these two factors.

On 28 January so little resistance was left that now an assault could be risked. When the assault was ordered and the troops moved in they quickly finished off the few hungry or wounded Japanese left there. By American count there were 323 dead Japanese in the areawhile the Chinese had eight men killed or missing and total casualties numbered between 70 and 80.

In the meantime what had the 3d Battalion accomplished with its ambushes. The author rejoined them and discovered 38 more dead Japanese, who had been killed in three separate ambushes.

The captured diary, which has been referred to before, was taken from the body of the executive officer of this enemy battalion, who was killed a few weeks later in an attempted delaying action against the 3d Battalion. According to his count only 70 or 80 Japanese escaped by infiltration or over difficult terrain from the Taro area.

The operation was over and the regimental commander knew he would be ordered to continue to the east or to the south, so he left the 3d Battalion out as security to the east, and they were prepared to lead out in

that direction while the 1st Battalion was sent south to Taro to mop up any stray Japanese there and to relieve the 3d Battalion, 112th Regiment, who were still dug in as mentioned before. Incidentally this relief was accomplished by a platoon. Now the 1st Battalion was prepared to lead the way to the south.

LESSON NUMBER 5

Planning must be continuous.

This planning paid dividends because when orders were received on 30 January they were to send one battalion to Lankin to the south, one battalion east to Yawnbang Ga, and one battalion north to assist the 64th Regiment. The 1st Battalion, 3d Battalion, and 2d Battalion were already in position to start on these missions.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. In this operation unity of command rare to a Chinese unit was obtained. Instead of the usual picture of a division commander responsible to several leaders, this division commander was responsible only to General Stilwell. Undoubtedly, this was the big factor in the overall success of this campaign.

2. Esprit-de-corps is a by-product of good morale and self-confidence. This confidence in turn comes from adequate equipment and knowledge of employment gained in thorough training.

3. Weapons without the ammunition for them are worse than useless because carrying these extra weapons is wasteful of manpower.

4. Wire communications if well maintained are the most dependable means of communication in a slow-moving situation like this, but more radios to maintain small-unit contact would facilitate control.

5. Prior planning and reconnaissance before a motor movement will make for a more efficient movement.

6. Traffic control arrangements not only make motor movements easier but they are more saving of available road nets.

7. Quartering parties to precede the main body at each bivouac are indispensable for an orderly movement into bivouac areas.

8. Physical conditioning is very important to withstand the rigors of jungle combat.

9. River beaches or sandbars are excellent air-drop sites in the jungle, because no clearing is necessary and there is usually a level approach run.

10. In jungle combat the only usual method of mortar fire adjustment is by forward observers.

11. An adequate and timely resupply of ammunition is important, but and adequate and steady stream of replacements is equally necessary.

LESSONS

1. Unexpected tactics are often decisive.

2. Never underestimate your enemy.

3. When an encirclement is made, it must be complete and all escape routes must be cut.

4. Ammunition is cheaper than men.

5. Planning must be continuous.