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The 24th Infantry Division Artillery in
Southwest Pacific Operations, 1 Oct 41 -
15 Aug 45, by Lt Col C. Lang, FA. Command
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School of Combined Arms

Regular Course

1946-1947

The 24th Infantry Division Artillery
in Southwest Pacific Operations
1 Oct '41 to 15 Aug '45

(Personal Experience of an organic Field
Artillery Battalion Commander)

Type of Operations Described: Amphibious and Jungle warfare. 4

Lt. Col. Cornelis deW. W. Lang, F. A.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to give both a brief chronological history of the 24th Division Artillery and to point out certain engagements in which the artillery was involved and to give the lessons learned with an idea of possible prevention of similar errors in the future. I feel that the division artillery of the 24th division encountered some very unusual combat conditions and that these will prove of interest to many officers. Some of the things that I shall bring out are technical in nature but I feel that they are necessary for possible future division commanders to know in the hopes that the dispositions and tactical use of their commands will be such as to avoid such circumstances. I have an additional purpose in that I realize that the great majority of our officers served in the European Theatre and have little knowledge of what actually happened over in the Southwest Pacific except insofar as the big picture is concerned. I hope to be able to give these officers a more detailed view.

I shall run through the entire war experience of the 24th Division in a chronological manner covering only briefly the actual campaigns in which they were engaged and cover in more detail, as necessary, those actual combat engagements which will illustrate the lessons that I wish to bring out.

As a means of comparison between operations in the Pacific Theatre and the European Theatre I would like to point out that at no time during my fifty months in the Pacific did I ever see more than four or five battalions of artillery in addition to the organic battalions in support of one division. This, I think will give you an idea of the scale of the campaigns in which the division was involved, at least as far as artillery support is concerned.

For further background orientation, it is interesting to note that the 24th, along with the 25th Division was organized in Oct 1941 from the old Hawaiian Division, which was one of the old square type divisions, consisting of four infantry regiments and an artillery brigade of three regiments, one medium and two light. The two light regiments were equipped with the old British three inch howitzers which were very limited in their capabilities. Each battery was equipped with eight of these guns on the basis of four for beach defense and four for regular infantry support. The maximum effective range of these guns was only seven thousand yards, in comparison to the ten

thousand yard effective range of the present 105mm Howitzer.

The reorganization of Oct 1941 resulted in understrength units throughout the two new divisions. For example the new 63rd F. A. Bn., of which I was a member, consisted of approximately twelve (12) officers and two hundred and fifty (250) men in comparison with an authorized strength of 29 officers and 450 men at that time. These strengths were in effect on the morning of Dec 7th when the Japs attacked.

Before launching into the body of this narrative I would like to indicate the units of the 24th Division. The three infantry regiments were the 19th, 21st and 34th and the artillery battalions were the 13th, 52nd and 63rd light battalions and the 11th medium battalion. The Infantry Regimental Combat Team organizations were the 19th Inf - 13th F. A. Bn., the 21st Inf - 52nd F. A. Bn., and the 34th Inf - 63rd F. A. Bn.

THE 24TH INF DIVISION ARTILLERY IN HAWAII FROM 1 OCT '41 to 5 AUG '43

The island of OAHU in Hawaii is the second largest of the Hawaiian group. It is highly cultivated except for the mountain ranges of which there are two, the WAIANAE range which runs from the north to the south shore on the western side of the island and the KOOLAU range which runs from the north to the south shore on the eastern side of the island. Between these two ranges lies the central plain, containing the important installations of the island. This plain, or plateau rises gradually from the north and south to a high point just about the center of the island and the entire flat area is cut by deep ravines with steep slopes on both sides. The higher areas are cultivated with pineapple and the lower regions where water is more available, is cultivated with sugar cane. For the most part the island is without tree cover except for the two mountain ranges and they are heavily forested and these forests are characterized by very heavy undergrowth, equalling anything later seen for jungle conditions. For the most part the road net is excellent except for the mountains which are cut by a few trails passable only to foot or pack troops.

The overall defensive plan for the island of Oahu called for the 24th Inf Division to defend the north sector of the island. The coast line in the assigned sector amounted to roughly seventy miles of defense perimeter. The dispositions of the division for this defensive role are as shown on the attached sketch. The artillery units of the division artillery were disposed as indicated with coverages as shown. All of these defensive positions had been occupied many times prior to the Jap attack on the morning of 7 Dec and in fact the artillery battalions had occupied their positions during the week prior to the attack.

(sketch on following page)



OAHU
HAWAII

At the time of the attack, the troops in the islands were on a sabotage alert which did not involve the artillery units on the island but did require the presence on the garrison of fifty percent of all infantry troops and the guarding of certain key installations around the island. When field positions were occupied on the morning of the attack according to a prearranged time schedule, 100 percent of artillery personnel were present for duty and roughly the same percentages applied to the infantry units. As a matter of interest only one casualty was suffered by the artillery units and that was a non-commissioned officer who was standing in the window of barracks and was hit by a machine gun bullet fired from a plane straffing the barracks quadrangle. As a matter of fact the casualties in the Schofield Barracks area were negligible except for the Wheeler Field area which is adjacent to the Post.

Although many scares were in evidence after the 7th, nothing ever actually happened to change the routine of occupation of defensive positions. Every effort was being made to improve positions and ability to repel any invader. The concept of the defense of the island envisaged that any enemy would be allowed to make landings on either the eastern shore or the western shore in the mistaken belief that any enemy would be unable to penetrate the mountain ranges into the vital interior of the island. The defensive dispositions on our half of the island were so devised, as you can see from the chart, as to contain any enemy landing in the pockets on the eastern and western shores of the island.

From an artilleryman's point of view the most important occurrence was the arrival of the new 105mm howitzers for the entire light artillery of the division in late January '42. This enabled the battery positions to be moved out to cover more of the beach and land approaches to the vital areas and also enabled the infantry to spread out with continued field artillery fire support.

The period from 7 Dec to 5 Aug was spent in improving the defensive positions and taking time out of positions to engage in many and varied maneuvers around the island. The most important of these were the assumed landings in either the 24th or the 25th sectors of the island and the reinforcement of the attacked division by elements of the other division. Also

there was built up during this period the invaluable relationship between the infantry and the supporting artillery, mainly by means of frequent combat team maneuvers in defense sectors.

There are only two things which I would like to point out as lessons learned during this period of the division's experiences. The first of these is the importance of weather to the artillery especially in the situation encountered in the defense of the island of Oahu. As you can see from the sketch the right limits of the coverage of the artillery fire was on the other side of the Koolau mountains and at the extreme range of the artillery batteries assigned this sector. Attempts were made to use weather data for firing which was obtained from the center of the division sector and all test firings indicated that the ballistic corrections obtained from this data was incorrect and frequently caused an error greatly in excess of that expected from firing straight from the map. As a result, requests were made for additional weather coverage on the eastern or windward side of the island but these requests were not fulfilled. The natural result was that the artillery support in the area of the right limit of fire was not accurate and in the event of an enemy attack might well have resulted in unnecessary casualties to our own infantry, and due to the fault of no individual or piece of materiel. I point this out in the hope that full cognizance will be given to the vital need of accurate weather data for long range artillery fire support particularly unobserved. I am sure that this need will be met but in the event that it is not present every effort must be made to obtain it.

The other lesson from the period of defense of the island concerns ammunition powder lots. Many of you, no doubt, have heard this brought up before, but to me it is such an important item that it bears repeating by me here. Technically speaking, powder lots of different lot numbers have different ballistic qualities, meaning that they will fire in a different place if fired with the same elevation and deflection. If ammunition is on hand which represents few lot numbers it is not too much of a job to determine these firing qualities, but when the number of lots is large it is practically impossible to determine these qualities. My experience throughout the Pacific operations, not only during the defense of Oahu, was that it was expected that ammunition would be received which represented many lot numbers and in varied quantities. Every effort must be made in any future war to control the supply

and handling of artillery ammunition to the extent that as far as is humanly possible lot numbers will be kept intact and issued to artillery units as single lot numbers or at least in large quantities of very few lot numbers. The importance of this single item, I feel has been indicated by complaints from all theatres of operations during the last war.

The division was alerted for movement, destination unknown, on 15 July, 1943 and within three weeks had been relieved in position by an incoming division and was in staging area making final preparations for embarkation by the last week of July. In the three months prior to embarkation and before receipt of warning orders by the division, the combat teams of the division engaged separately in amphibious exercises on the western shore of the island, at WAIANAE. These exercises were very limited in scope but were a fine foundation for further training which was to come at a later date and at least gave all elements of the division the fundamental knowledge of the intricacies of amphibious operations.

AUSTRALIA FROM AUG '43 TO 23 FEB '44

The division loaded on transports and sailed in two serials starting on the 5th of August. The destination of the division was Australia, where we were to continue with training and final preparations for entry into combat. The division was in Australia for six months and during this period engaged in extensive training of all sorts. The highlights of this period were a school for amphibious operations conducted for all senior officers of the division at Camp Gan Gan, Newcastle and lasting for about three weeks. This was followed by very thorough and extensive amphibious training for each of the regimental combat teams in turn at Bribie Island Caboolture, and including all elements of the division at one time or another. Each unit of the division spent approximately three weeks in this training.

During the stay in Australia the division artillery first encountered the AGF tests. Although not required by higher headquarters all units of the division artillery took the battery and battalion tests under control of division artillery and they proved to be of great benefit to training. One of the most productive developments during the stay in Australia was the further cementing of the combat team spirit built up within each of the three combat teams of the division. Many combat team exercises were held and in addition the infantry and the artillery of respective combat teams got together for social and recreational activities.

Early in February the division was again alerted for movement and the destination this time was Goodenough Island in the D'Entrecasteaux Group, just north of the eastern tip of New Guinea.

GOODENOUGH ISLAND FROM 25 FEB 1944 to 19 APR 1944

Goodenough island proved to be the staging area for the division's initial combat appearance. Soon after the division's arrival on the island detailed plans were initiated for the landings at Hansa Bay on the north coast of New Guinea, which soon proved to be a cover plan for the real operation which was to take the division to Hollandia in the Netherlands East Indies on the north shore of the western half of New Guinea. This operation was to be a wide envelopment of Japanese installations in New Guinea and was based on thorough intelligence and a clever bit of counter intelligence which I would like to relate at this time because of its interest.

This information is second hand although I feel quite true nonetheless. It seems that the SWPA command, when preparing for the Hollandia operation had intelligence information to the effect that the Japanese had some 14,000 troops many of whom were replacements, in and around Hollandia. In an effort to deceive the Japs as to the actual intentions of US forces, a cover plan, as I mentioned previously, was drawn up for an attack against Hansa Bay, some two or three hundred miles east of Hollandia on the northern shore of New Guinea. Complete and authentic plans were carried in an American plane and thrown overboard in a life raft with enough authentic equipment to make it look like the real thing. Apparently and fortunately a Jap patrol boat picked up the ruse and within a couple of weeks intelligence reports indicated that the Japs had moved a large force from Hollandia eastward to Hansa Bay. When the division landed it was found that there were less than a thousand effective Japs left in the area. Information gathered since the operation indicated that the Japs had fallen for the ruse and had in fact moved out of Hollandia within ten days prior to our landing there.

The two months on Goodenough island were spent primarily in getting the division up to strength both as to men and materiel. In addition intensive exercises in the field were held to bring all units up to final fighting pitch. The assault echelons made practice landings in a full-dress rehearsal on the north shore of New Guinea at a point opposite Goodenough Island during the week prior to embarkation.

The division sailed from Goodenough on 20 April headed for a rendezvous near the Admiralties, with the 41st Division for the landing at Hollandia.

as part of I Corps, commanded by General Eichelberger.

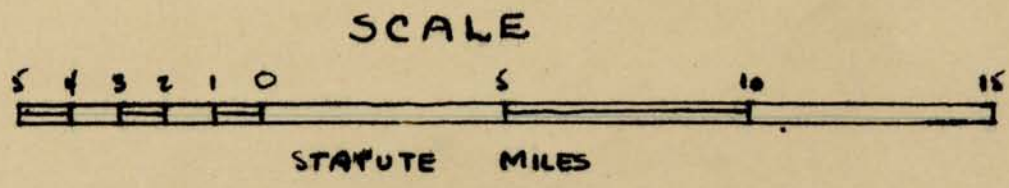
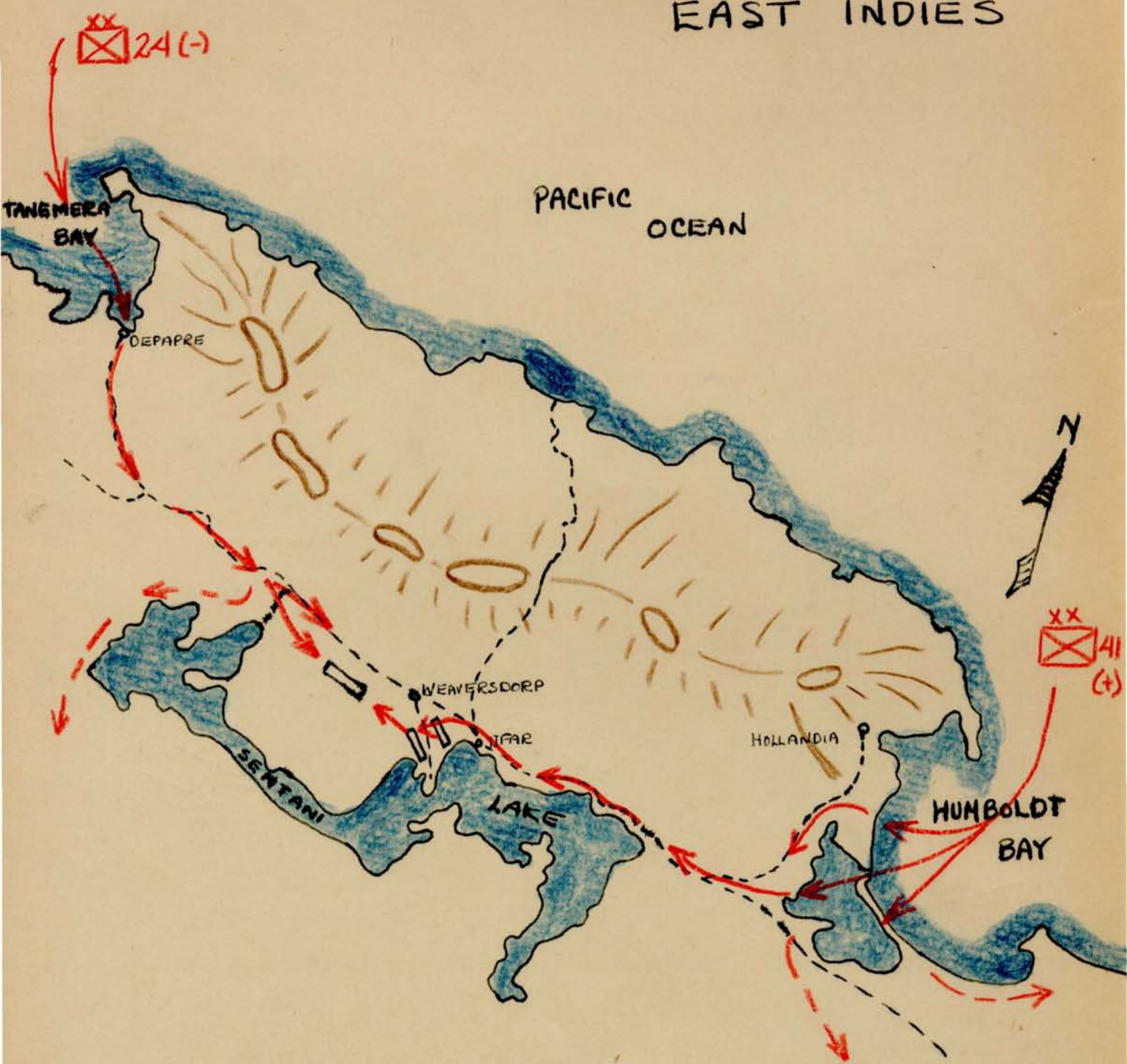
HOLLANDIA, NEW GUINEA FROM 22 APR 1944 TO 13 OCT 1944

The Hollandia area of Netherlands New Guinea is characterized by rugged mountains, poor roads, many fast flowing streams which are really never very deep except during flash floods, a large lake in the objective area and generally very pleasant weather, especially during the season in which the landings were made. Very little of the incident countryside is cultivated and in the most part the fighting was confined to the roads and the areas immediately adjacent thereto. Except for the hilly areas the ground off the roads was impassable to tracked vehicles although during the extremely dry weather tracked vehicles could be taken off the roads with little trouble.

The plan for the Hollandia operation (see accompanying sketch) called for the 41st Division to land in the Humboldt Bay area and advance north-westward to capture the airfields on the north of Lake Sentani. At the same time the 24th Infantry Division was to land in the Tannamera Bay area and advance southeastward to assist the 41st division in the capture of the three airfields. The 34th RCT of the 24th Division was to remain afloat as Corps reserve, with the first priority of landing in the Humboldt Bay area to assist the 41st division whose job was thought to be the harder of the two. The landings came off as scheduled at daylight on the morning of 22 April. The Japanese garrison, or what was left of it, immediately began their withdrawal and made only token resistance to the advance of American units. The 41st division had pretty easy going from the standpoint of terrain except that the road net was entirely inadequate and they were forced to remain on the one road in their advance to the airfields. The 24th division on the other hand had terrain difficulties from the start and the intelligence of the beach landing area was entirely inadequate and the result was a complete mess in the meagre beach area. After much difficulty and much engineer effort they were able to extricate themselves and continue the advance to the airfields. The 34th RCT was landed on D plus two behind the 41st division because of the congestion on the Tannamera beach.

The two divisions reached the airfields within two days of each other and immediately began to mop up the few remaining Japs in the area. Casualties suffered on the part of the American forces were negligible and as I recall there were in the neighborhood of one thousand Japs killed and no

HOLLANDIA, NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES



prisoners to speak of. The operation proved to be so much easier than was expected that SWPA decided to take the 41st division out of Hollandia and immediately make the landings on Wakde and Biak which had not been on the schedule until a couple of months in the future. The 24th division did not engage in either of these two operations except insofar as they sent the 34th Infantry Regiment up to Biak to help in cracking a nut which proved to be harder than was anticipated. After mopping up operations had been completed the division spent the remainder of the six months on Hollandia in routine duties and further training for future operations which we had been told were forthcoming in the near future.

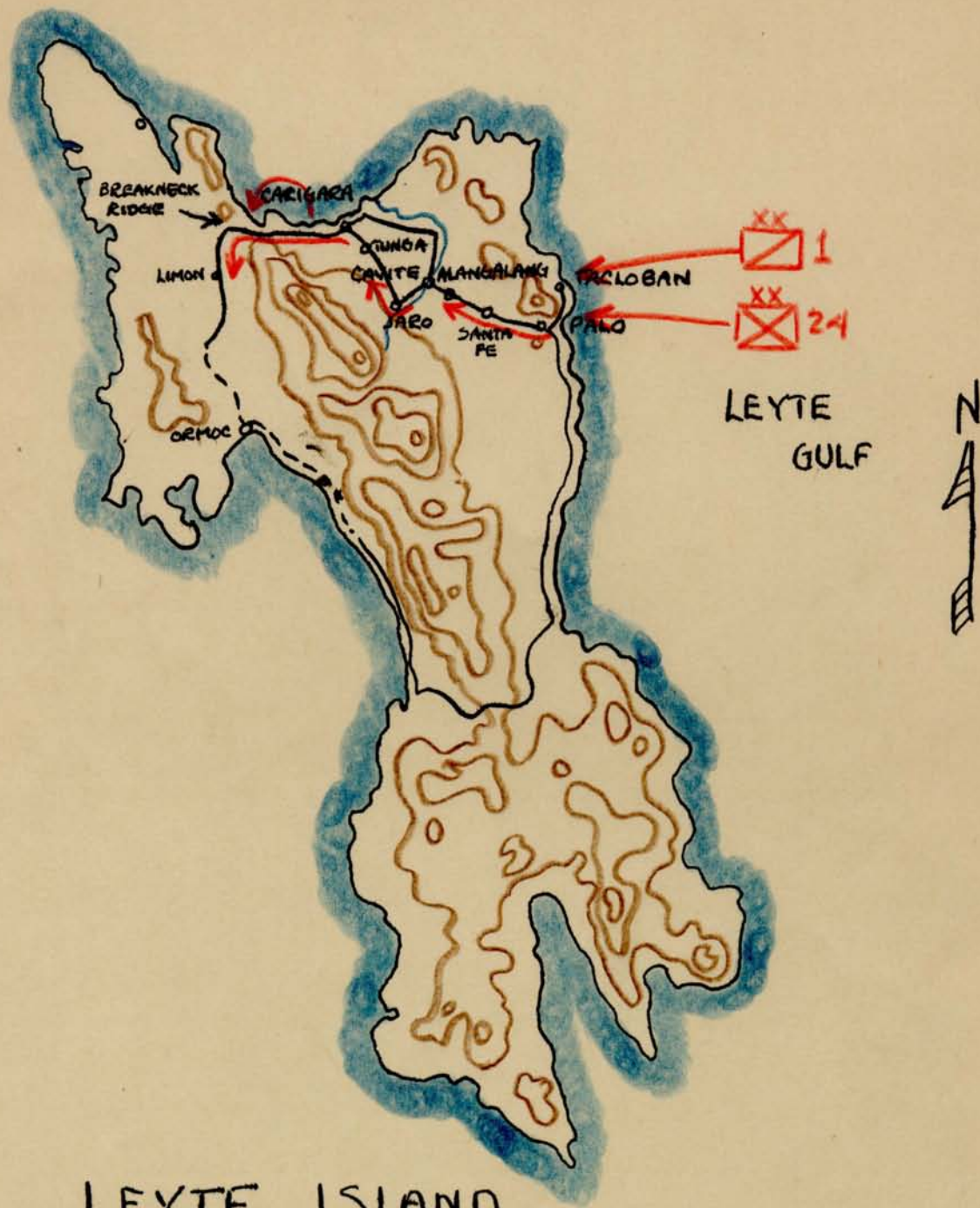
There were no particular lessons to be learned from the Hollandia operation, at least as far as the artillery was concerned. It served the purpose of giving the division their baptism in fire although this was light and therefore fortunate in that there were not many casualties. I think that I am right in saying that the majority of the casualties were from our own small arms fire at night and not from enemy action. Further experience in overcoming the obstacles of difficult terrain were gained and this proved of great value in the campaigns to come.

After the first of September the division staff began preparations for another amphibious operation. This was to be the Leyte landing which had been moved up by a couple of months as a result of the Quebec Conference. The entire period from the middle of September to the first week of October was spent in the final preparations and detailed planning on the part of the smaller units for the next and biggest show that the division was to take part in in the entire Pacific operations. For these purposes the units of the division constructed elaborate sand tables, papier mache models of landing beaches and aerial mosaics of all descriptions.

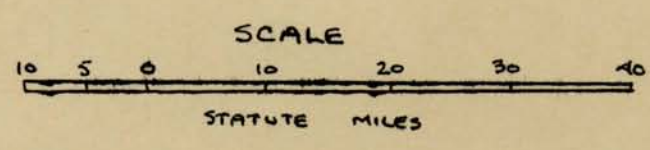
LEYTE ISLAND, PHILIPPINES FROM 20 OCT '44 to 31 JAN '45

The island of Leyte is primarily agricultural and in the flat areas, particularly in the coastal regions is covered with rice paddies. These paddies are for the most part inundated during the growing season which was the season of our landings. As a result most of the terrain off the roads is impassable to tracked vehicles of any weight most of the year and is generally restricted to the use of light vehicles most of the time. The roads are generally fairly good although few of them are paved and all are relatively narrow, although affording ample width for initial division traffic. All of them required further engineer effort for maximum efficiency. The mountains and hillsides which have not been cultivated are for the most part jungled and very difficult of passage. Trails through these areas are few and far between and all operations away from the main road net are difficult from every angle. The island is traversed by many streams and a few rivers but none of these presented a major obstacle. Bridges for the most part required considerable reinforcement before they could take all of the division loads. The main mountainous areas are the ranges running north and south on the eastern side of the island and the one about in the west center of the island.

(Sketch of Leyte Island on following page)



LEYTE ISLAND
PHILIPPINE ISLANDS



The overall plan for the Leyte landings to recapture the Philippine Islands from the Japanese involved the landing of two Corps under the command of General Kruger's Sixth Army. The two Corps were the XXIV and the X, each with two divisions in the initial assault. The divisions assigned to the X Corps were the 1st Cavalry on the right and the 24th Infantry division on the left. The tactical plan for the 24th division called for the 19th and 34th infantry regiments to land abreast with the 34th on the right. The 21st infantry was to make a diversionary landing on the south tip of the island to secure the straits in that area and to destroy the Japanese garrison there.

The division landed with regiments abreast and regiments in column of battalions at 1000 hours on the morning of 20 Oct. The landings were made in the middle of the morning because the Navy did not want to enter Leyte Bay in the night since there were many mines in the area and they could not have been swept properly. Consequently the initial entrance into the Bay itself was made at daylight and the mines were removed and the Navy bombardment of the shore defenses was begun.

The initial landing encountered stiff resistance from the start and enemy heavy weapons and artillery pieces emplaced on the beach caused considerable havoc in our landing waves. A number of LST's and smaller landing craft were knocked out, causing many casualties and the loss of much equipment. In addition, there developed an underwater reef about one hundred yards off shore which prevented the LST's and all others except the smallest landing craft from coming right up to the beach. The result was that only a small amount of the intended artillery and heavy vehicles were able to get ashore until the second and third day. Further difficulties to the breaking out of the beachhead were the lack of sufficient exit roads and the existence of a deep rice paddy immediately behind the landing beach and extending the entire width of the division landing zone. The one exit road, determinedly held by the Japs for the first two days held up the development of the division for full fighting efficiency for three days and it wasn't until the fourth day that the division was able to get rolling with full support from all of its organic artillery and supporting weapons.

After breaking out of the beachhead area and capturing the hills immed-

ately behind the beach the division broke out into the open and began the drive for the north coast of the island. The objective of the division was to seize the town of Carigara and take up a defensive position to prevent the Japs from making a counterlanding in that area. The advance of the division was steady and fairly rapid in view of the terrain difficulties and the stubborn resistance of the enemy. He chose to hold strongly in about six delaying positions before the division reached the north coast of the island. These six delaying positions were at MALIRONG, SANTA FE, ALANGALANG, CAVITE RIVER, JARO, SOLEGAD AND finally at CARIGARA.

It turned out later that the Japanese were attempting reingorcing landings on the west coast of the island at ORMOC and the mission of the Japs in the interior of the island was to prevent our advance from getting farther than JARO before the reinforcements could get into the valley on the other side of the mountains from ORMOC. Our quick storming of the positions at JARO and the determined attack launched at that point enabled the division to break out of this area and proceed on to CARIGARA. This in effect had a strong influence on the final defeat of the Japanese on the island of Leyte.

In spite of heavy losses inflicted by our air attacks on their convoys, the enemy was able to land reinforcements in some strength in the ORMOC area and these troops, including the famous 1st Imperial Division of the famed Quantung Army, marched north and attempted to break out of the ORMOC valley into the central plain before we could get there to block their debouchment. It proved to be a close race and when the division reached the CARIGARA area instead of stopping and taking up a defensive position as was originally planned, the division was given the mission of continuing up the coast to the northwest and then securing the high ground in the vicinity of LIMON to stop the advance of Jap reinforcements and start the drive down the ORMOC valley to destroy all enemy forces there. In an attempt to speed this operation up a little bit the division sent one infantry battalion on an envelopment by landing craft but the landings behind enemy lines met with superior forces and bitter terrain and were forced to withdraw within a few hours after having made the landing. It so happened that the artillery fire which was laid down to cover the withdrawal of this battalion caught the head of the column of the 1st Imperial Division as it came out of the hills onto the coastal plain and inflicted such damage that the Japs decided to

withdraw to Breakneck Ridge and attempt a stand at that point. The division continued the advance against stiffening resistance and about the middle of the last week in November was involved in heavy fighting to drive the Japs off of Breakneck Ridge. After about a week of this fighting the division was relieved by the 32nd Infantry Division which had landed about D plus 25 and was back in the rear as Army reserve. The division withdrew almost all infantry troops into rest areas and left the artillery in position to continue the support of the 32nd division until they were out of the range of all battalions. All infantry was withdrawn with the exception of two battalions which were way out on enveloping missions and were in positions overlooking the valley road and were harassing the Jap lines of communication well to their rear. It was not until the 32nd division had driven the Japs from Breakneck Ridge and had gotten well into the valley that these two battalions were relieved and allowed to move back into rest areas.

It was at this time that the division started its break-up into many different pieces for various operations. The 19th RCT was given to the Western Visayan Task force for the purpose of making the landings on Mindoro Island to secure the straits between that island and Luzon in preparation for the Luzon landings. A little later the 34th RCT and the 11th FA Bn. were attached to the 38th infantry division to make the landings on the island of Luzon just north of Bataan in order to cut off Bataan peninsula. Mindoro having been taken, the division (minus) on the first of February 1945 was alerted for the move to Mindoro to begin the reassembly for further operations.

From an artillery standpoint the Leyte operation presented many unusual situations. In the first place after the break out from the initial beach-head the advance of the division was, for the most part, on the front of a single battalion and yet the entire division artillery was in support of this one battalion. The advance was made up the main road from the south to the north coast of the island and this was the only road for the use of the entire division and all artillery support which amounted to two battalions of Corps artillery, an 8" howitzer battalion and a battalion of 155 guns. The finding of sufficient artillery positions for all this artillery was a problem that resulted in practically hub to hub positions. Fortunately for us the Jap artillery was anything but good and he rarely if ever fired counterbattery.

Instead of artillery fire as counterbattery the Jap used suicide squads to attempt to destroy our artillery by making night attacks on the artillery perimeters and attempting to destroy the weapons and personnel. These attacks came frequently and we soon learned that almost nothing in the operation was more important than a strong perimeter to repel these attacks. Of course at first the men were trigger happy and the firing when these attacks came was something to marvel at. When they had settled down a bit and learned what it was all about they met these attacks with calmness and little firing. They soon learned that the best way to counter them was to lie low in their foxholes and dispatch the Japs with bayonets, machetes and jungle knives. Grenades were also used to great advantage, but they were never thrown within the perimeter. It came to be common procedure that anyone moving around within the perimeter, when an attack was on, was taken to be a Jap and he was shot on the spot and questions asked later.

I mentioned that the advance of the division was on a one battalion front and yet still supported by the fire of all of the organic artillery. For some reason which I don't profess to know, the division artillery headquarters did not seem to exercise complete control through their fire direction center in the event that the fire of more than one artillery battalion was needed. As a result the forward observers of the direct support battalion were required to coordinate the fires of three or four and sometimes more battalions and this proved to be very impracticable and the result was that all forward observers, representing the four battalions, were firing simultaneously and frequently with little result that was effective, but with much waste of ammunition. The lesson to be learned from this is that the artillery of the division, plus all supporting artillery from Corps must be controlled from one headquarters, particularly when the attack of the division is on a one battalion front.

Another lesson learned from this operation stemmed from an occurrence just south of Carigara and during the advance on that town. Intelligence reports, in the most part from friendly natives who always exaggerated, indicated that there were in the neighborhood of two thousand Japs in and around Carigara and along the road in strong defensive positions between our front lines and Carigara. The only artillery battalion which was within supporting distance of the front lines on the evening of the night prior to the

final attack to take Carigara was the 63rd F. A. Bn. in direct support of the 34th Infantry. The other three artillery battalions of the division had gotten out of range and had not displaced forward prior to dark. These battalions were brought up to positions during the hours of darkness and without any preparatory registration or checking of data began a half hour preparation to support the attack on Carigara. The results of this preparation, I must say, were fortunate. Rounds were landing in and around the front lines and behind the point when it began the march down the road. There was to have been a rolling barrage which was to advance at the rate of four hundred yards every ten minutes and move twelve hundred yards down the road as the infantry advanced. As a matter of fact the infantry had to wait for the barrage to move on out of the way so that they could get started. It later was proved that there wasn't a single Jap in the area except for possibly a few rear guard personnel and there was no stand made on the part of the Japs, the march or advance into the town being simply a matter of walking the distance. The point I wish to make is that it was extremely poor judgement to fire a massed division artillery preparation in view of the doubtful ability of the three battalions that went into position during the night to have data accurate enough to deliver effective and safe fire. In addition, it was poor judgement to waste all of that ammunition on a position which did not exist and might well have been determined as not existing by the use of patrols.

There is no question but that the division artillery commander was at fault for the conditions I have just mentioned. Attempts on the part of individual battalion commanders to suggest lines of action to alleviate these and other similar conditions were met with stubborn resistance and no corrective action was ever taken.

MINDORO ISLAND, PHILIPPINES FROM 11 FEB '45 TO 14 APR '45

The division less the 19th and 34th RCT's and the 11th F. A. Bn., departed from Leyte on LST's during the second week of February and sailed for the island of Mindoro to start reassembling and staging for the next operation, that on Mindanao, which was soon to come.

Soon after the division's arrival on the island additional small scale missions were assigned to clean up the islands in the vicinity of the straits between Mindoro and Luzon. Small infantry units were sent out to capture the islands of LUBANG, VERDI, MARINDUQUE, SIMARA, ROMBLON and to mop up the remaining Japs on Mindoro.

(Sketch of Mindoro Island and vicinity on following page)

The initial phase in the recapture of Mindanao saw the 41st Division landing and securing Zamboanga in February and then crossing the straits and occupying the small islands south of that area. This left the way clear for the X Corps to land on the western shore of the southern part of Mindanao and attack the Japanese Davao defenses from the rear.

While all of these operations were going on the 24th division was getting back together again on Mindoro and was engaging in further training to rehabilitate after the Leyte show and to integrate the new replacements which had finally arrived. The division was completely reassembled by the middle of March and the division staff was already starting the detailed planning for the Mindanao operation.

No tactical lessons were learned while the artillery was on Mindoro but it was found that great effort was necessary to keep the morale of the

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8160

SAN
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AREA

MARINDUQUE
I

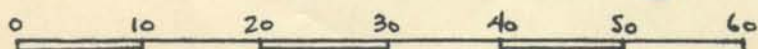
BANTON
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SCALE - STATUTE MILES

troops at a high pitch after the rigors of the Leyte operation. Every effort was made to secure USO shows and to conduct recreational and athletic activities and for the most part the men were kept busy with training and recreation and the morale of the entire division was high when they embarked for the Mindanao operation.

One important development from an artillery point of view took place while on Mindoro. The artillery was told that they were to use the new VT fuse in the next operation and so for the purpose of familiarizing ourselves with this new ammunition a small quantity was issued for test purposes and for training the artillery units in its use. With an ample representation of infantry personnel for purposes of orientation, firings of this ammunition were made and were thoroughly successful. We were ready and anxious to use it against the Japs.

Final detailed planning for the Mindanao landings was completed about the second week of April and the division prepared to load on transports and LST's for the trip. The division loaded on the 12th of April and sailed on the morning of the 14th.

MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES FROM 17 APR 1945 TO 15 AUG 1945

The island of Mindanao is much like the island of Leyte except that in the area of operations of the 24th division there were many abaca plantations instead of the usual rice paddies. This island is also very rugged and covered with jungle growths. As a result, here too the operations were for the most part restricted to the existing road net. The prominent mountain range of the island, that played a part in the division operations was the range that extends north and south between Davao Gulf and the Sayre Highway in the center of the island. This range was heavily forested and was crossed only by very small and few trails. Much of the island of Mindanao is still unexplored and probably will remain so for some time to come.

(Sketch of Mindanao Island on the following page)

The 41st division having secured the sea lanes to the western shore of the main peninsula of Mindanao, the elements of X Corps, consisting of the 24th Division, to be followed in five days by the 31st Division, sailed around the tip of Zamboanga for the landings at Malabang and Parang. The initial plans called for the division to land two RCT's in the Malabang area, then to drive overland to capture the town of Parang, then south to the Cotabato River and then start the drive across the island to Digos and then north to Davao.

Two days prior to the scheduled landing of the division, guerilla troops under the command of Col. Fertig of the US Army, captured the Malabang airfield and drove the Japs to the south. This information reached the division commander while the division was still afloat and he immediately decided to

SOUTHERN MINDANAO



change the plans and have the division assault echelons land at the town of Parang instead. These landings came off as scheduled and it was found that what Japs had been in the area had withdrawn prior to our landing and the landing was completely unopposed. By this I mean that there was no organized resistance. There were quite a few scattered Japs in the area and these were promptly dispatched.

A secure beachhead having been established in the Parang area the division then started the advance against difficult terrain and over very poor roads across the island. No Japanese resistance to speak of was encountered until the division had reached the other side of the island and came within a few miles of Digos. The initial advance across the island was made on a front of two regiments with the 19th infantry on foot advancing up the main road and the 34th infantry in landing craft advancing up the Cotabato River with elements of the Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment assisting them. The two regiments made a junction at Ft. Pikit and then the advance was on a one battalion front with the regiments taking turns in the van with about a week's turn each. As I mentioned, the first resistance was when the division van reached a point about five miles from the west shore of Davao Gulf and here they met very stiff resistance. Up to this time the division had covered about one hundred miles of very difficult terrain, all on foot and with all of the many bridges either blown out or burned by the retreating Japs.

Before proceeding further I would like to mention two important things. The first is that the Japs had always expected the american attack to come in the Davao Gulf area and apparently did not feel that there was a possible chance of our coming across the island from the west. As a result, all of their defensive installations, of which there were many and very strong, were facing to the east to repel an attack on the western shores of Davao Gulf from the sea. This gave the division the advantage of attacking the Digos defenses from the rear and all of the defenses to the north towards Davao, from the flank. The second thing that I would like to mention is the fact that this area of the Philippines had for a long time been populated by the Japanese and they had here the largest abaca plantations in the world. In addition it was an important Naval base and a large number of the troops in the area were navy troops. These troops for the most part were better equipped

and were physically better than the average army soldier and they fought with a determination that we had not met heretofore.

Two weeks after the initial landings the division had driven the enemy from the Digos area and had commenced the drive to the north again with only one battalion in the lead. After much hard fighting and stiffening resistance the division finally reached the Davao River just south of the town of Davao on the evening of 2 May. Elements of the 19th infantry regiment crossed the river in LCT's the following morning and entered the town of Davao seventeen days and 147 weary miles after the initial landings.

In the meantime the 31st infantry Division had landed in the Parang area and had started their drive up the Sayre highway in the center of the island to cut the island in two. When they reached a point about half way up to the north shore an RCT from the Americal Division was landed on the north coast and drove south in an effort to make a juncture with the 31st. It was the overall plan, realizing that the Japs would take to the hills in the center of the island, to get them in between the 31st and the 24th divisions and destroy them piecemeal.

After the capture of Davao the division split up into three separate little operations involving each of the three RCT's in turn. The 19th RCT was given the mission of continuing north from Davao and making contact with the guerilla forces that had continually held the head of the Davao Gulf. This was soon accomplished and the regiment then came back down the gulf coast and began the drive inland in an effort to destroy all of the retreating Japs. At the same time the 21st and 34th side by side had begun the drive inland from the Davao area up the slope of the mountains and this proved to be quite a job because the front was really too much for two regiments and the Japs invariably would retreat from a position, move to the side and reoccupy a position from which they had already been driven. By the first week of June the division had driven some six to eight miles inland and on a three regiment front was steadily advancing but with stubborn resistance on the part of the Japs.

I left the division at this time and am not familiar with the details of the remainder of the operation but do know that by the time that the surrender was declared the division was still thoroughly occupied and had

driven the Japs another ten miles into the hills and was busily wiping up what pockets of resistance they could locate. At the time of the surrender the division estimated that they had accounted for approximately ten thousand Japs and when they were able to talk to the Jap commanders they learned that the actual number of Jap killed amounted to something over twenty thousand. It is interesting to note that the Japs declared that the VT fuze was accountable for quite a fraction of this number. They of course did not know what it was but I recall at one time that a prisoner related that all of the officers of his company had been killed by what he called time fire and he expressed great amazement that we were able to fire time fire so accurately at night without observation.

No particular lessons were learned from the Mindanao operation except that those which had been previously learned were of great value. This campaign saw much greater use on the part of the Japs of the suicide squads which attacked artillery perimeters during the night and as I can recall it was a rare night when not at least two of the battery perimeters were attacked. We suffered no losses in materiel during any of these attacks but we did lose one Liaison plane and suffered quite a few casualties, though all of them were wounded and none killed.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

In conclusion I would like to recapitulate the lessons learned by the artillery in operations in the southwest pacific. First of all, in order to be able to deliver accurate fire it is paramount that the artillery have available the latest and best weather data that is possible. This weather data must be the data applicable to the area in which the artillery is firing and must not be from a remote station particularly when this station is separated by a mountain range from the artillery positions.

Secondly, every effort must be made to secure for the artillery ammunition in lots of one number or if this is impracticable it must be in large quantities of very few lot numbers. It is a rule in the artillery that no complete problem be fired with more than one lot number and any continuous firing must also be of the same lot number. This is a problem for the logistics and local supply people but it must receive command recognition.

The third is that perimeter defense, when fighting the Japanese or any similar type army in the jungle, is vital to security against their type of counterbattery. These defense perimeters must be tied together and thoroughly integrated and all personnel within the perimeter thoroughly instructed as to their duties and actions.

Lastly, before firing any large artillery concentration it is mandatory that the units firing must be thoroughly registered and able without any question of doubt to deliver accurate fire and these fires should never be delivered in large quantity and with short supply when the intelligence of enemy installations or defensive positions or concentrations is not at least reasonably certain. It was too frequently the practice in the theatre for the artillery to perform the patrol action by fire when the infantry could just as well have found out whether there were sufficient enemy in the area to warrant the expenditure of ammunition which was so difficult to supply.

