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A MOUNTAIN OPERATION IN THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR (1944)

Date: 29 Apr 47

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I INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my monograph is to describe a mountain operation in the China campaign. The characteristics of mountain warfare differ much from other types of combat, being limited by the terrain, greatly influenced by the weather and restricted by communications. All these factors greatly affect the concentration and the movement and operations of the troops engaged. In history there are many examples of mountain warfare dating from the Italian campaigns of World War II back to the fourth century campaigns of the Three Kingdoms in China.

In any future war we shall have to fight in mountainous terrain again. In this type of warfare the soldier must fight two enemies -- one, his human opponents; the other being the rugged terrain and unusual weather conditions. Thus we must realize the vital importance of training and equipment for mountain combat in any future war.

In the winter of 1944, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to put into practice the principles of mountain combat, applying these from the text books to the field. Our enemy, the Japanese, intended to break down our resistance finally by an attack along the mountainous boundary between KWANGSI and KWEICHOW provinces, hoping to penetrate and to advance to our wartime capital, CHUNGKING.

II GENERAL SITUATION

A. The Enemy Position

In the winter of 1943 the Japanese higher headquarters planned to sweep up the Chinese forces in southwest China and to destroy the air bases in that section which formed a serious threat to their forces as well as to the home islands.

In March 1944 they commenced a larger scale maneuver, using four infantry divisions from the YO-MANG (Yochow) and HANKOW areas, concentrated before February, two infantry divisions in the KWANGCHOW (Canton) Sector, concentrated before April, and one infantry division which landed on the south coast of KWANGTUNG, near Paikhai in May. Their main attack was from the north with a secondary attack from the south.

B. Our own Position

Due to the movements of the Japanese bringing different kinds of supplies into concentrations areas, and from other information, it seemed to us that the enemy possibly was inclined to attack towards the southwest.

Each factor in the situation and every possibility of resisting action had been carefully covered by the Chinese Army Headquarters. Our worst weakness was insufficient strength until reinforcements could arrive from the north. Our decision was finally reached, as follows:

1. To delay the enemy's advance as long as possible, avoiding a decisive engagement, but to resist stubbornly at each key point.
2. To withdraw our forces if necessary along the main communication lines and to adopt guerrilla tactics.
3. To gain time by sacrificing space if necessary, thus allowing for the concentration of our reinforcements from the north.

III SPECIAL SITUATION

A. The Enemy

1. The enemy started their movement on D-day (10 April 1944) capturing CHANGSHA, the capital of HU NAN Province on D + 20, thence continuing south up the Hsiang river valley.

2. The communication center HENGYANG, HUNAN Province, fell after 36 days of stubborn resistance, the enemy suffering heavy casualties and losses. On D + 60, after a short period to reorganize they again moved, in two columns, one directed west into KWANGSI Province and the other on south to KWANGTUNG Province.

3. On D + 120 KWEILIN, capital of KWANGSI Province was captured.

4. On D + 150 LIUCHOW was seized. Then the Japanese reorganized and resupplied their force for preparing a new offensive.

5. On D + 165 (25 Sep 44) one reinforced infantry division moved to the northwest along the boundary between KWANGSI and KWEICHOW Provinces, while a smaller force marched southward and met up with the column moving northward from the previously mentioned landing operation on the south KWANGTUNG coast.

B. Our Position.

Ever since D-day, on orders of our Higher Headquarters in the Southwest, our troops had dispersed the civilian population from along the enemy's communications lines, destroyed bridges, stations and buildings and burned all materials along the route which we could not move out, and which might possibly be utilized by the enemy.

At each important center we defended until forced to retire, after which we harassed the enemy's flanks and rear.

1. The 97th Corps.

On D + 150, the 97th Corps (two infantry divisions) assembled in the vicinity of NANTAN, KWANGSI Province, and received the following instructions.

"The 97th Corps will defend the area along the boundary between the two provinces in order to cover the movement of our rear forces and to oppose the enemy's advance."

2. The Enemy and Friendly Situation.

a. Friendly troops were still in contact with the enemy. Our frontal strength was weak, and we had to prepare flank movements.

b. The Air was inactive on both sides.

3. Terrain. Generally speaking the terrain was advantageous to us and limited the enemy's avenues of attack.

a. Road Nets: The roads were very poor, there being only one motor highway and one single-track railroad. The country roads could not be used for truck movements.

b. Terrain features: The mountains in general extend from south to north. We had good observation and fields of fire and held all the tactical high points. The terrain was so disadvantageous for the Japanese advance that we assumed that they must keep to the motor road.

c. NANTAN, the communications center, was in our hands.

d. The RED RIVER was not fordable, but all other small streams could be forded.

4. Others.

a. Morning nautical twilight commenced at 0500 and evening nautical twilight ended at 1800.

b. The weather: The weather was gradually becoming cold and the temperature varied greatly between day time and night, the maximum being 50° Fahrenheit, the minimum 20°.

5. Disposition.

The Commanding General 97th Corps, considering the enemy situation, mission and strength, and the terrain, had decided to defend, using the 196th Infantry Division on the West, the 166th Infantry Division (less one regiment) on the East, and holding one regiment plus the Corps troops as reserve in the town of NANTAN. We analyzed the possible lines of action open to the enemy as follows:

a. To conduct their main attack in the center with secondary attacks either to the East or West.

b. To conduct their main attack on the east flank with a secondary attack in the center.

c. To conduct their main attack on the west.

6. Situation Continued.

a. The enemy employed 4 Infantry battalions, attacking the center, with 2 Infantry battalions on the east flank, and one Infantry battalion on the west. They started the attack on K-day (11 Oct 44).

b. On K + 8 the communication center CHU-HU was captured by the enemy. The 97th Corps delayed the enemy's advances in successive positions.

c. From K + 8 to K + 17, positions on both our flanks were captured and finally the center, NANTAN, fell.

d. On K + 18, the 97th Corps began to withdraw.

e. Meanwhile our reinforcement had reached the TAOSHAN area and entrenched that position on K + 5. We induced the enemy to continue advancing, while we prepared our counteroffensive plan.

f. On K + 28, the enemy approached TAOSHAN. During the previous ten days our guerrilla troops were active along the Japanese communications lines, demolishing depots and destroying trucks. The weather was rainy and bad, and the enemy situation gradually became desperate.

g. On K + 30 the Chinese forces started their counter-offensive to destroy the enemy, who suffered severe losses and were forced to withdraw.

IV CONCLUSION

In making a study of this operation it should be noted that the 97th Corps was assigned a difficult mission, on too wide a front, with a poor road net, insufficient signal communications, and other shortages. Fortunately the morale was fair.

The points subject to criticism are:

1. The failure of reconnaissance: All the unit commanders had insufficient time to make reconnaissance, because, except in the center, the higher commanders could not use automobiles. On both flanks the country roads and lanes could only be used by horse cavalry patrols or foot patrols. Under these conditions, at least four days were necessary for reconnaissance but in fact only two days were allowed us.

2. The failure of signal communications: The signal communication system was incomplete and inadequate. We depended upon wire communications and on radiotelegraph, with hand generated dynamos, for the transmission. We had no better methods for signal communications during this operation, hence maintaining contact between the units was very difficult.

3. Insufficiency of Replacements: During the period K to K + 5 the 97th Corps suffered heavy losses and our strength was seriously reduced. Although on K + 6, hundreds of replacements arrived, they were not well trained and we had no time for retraining, consequently in the next few days these reinforcements caused confusion in the units to which they were assigned.

V LESSONS LEARNED FROM THIS OPERATION

A. The choice for the main attack in mountainous warfare must depend upon good communication lines for the convenience of troop movement and for resupply.

B. Adequacy of supplies both for the offense and defense are important. The combat command should have one week's supplies with them and sufficient ammunition following their units. This was evidenced when the Japanese troops finally approached TAOSHAN. Because their communication lines to the rear were cut, and they could not procure either food or shelter from the town, their victory only brought them hunger, and their morale was very poor. This finally resulted in their defeat.

- C. A mountain combat command should have special equipment and training. Self-sufficiency, mobility and flexibility are necessary characteristics.
- D. Security and Reconnaissance are particularly important.
- E. Competent and well-trained leaders are necessary to conduct the operation.
- F. Weather factors should be carefully considered beforehand.

Maj Lu Lu Ning

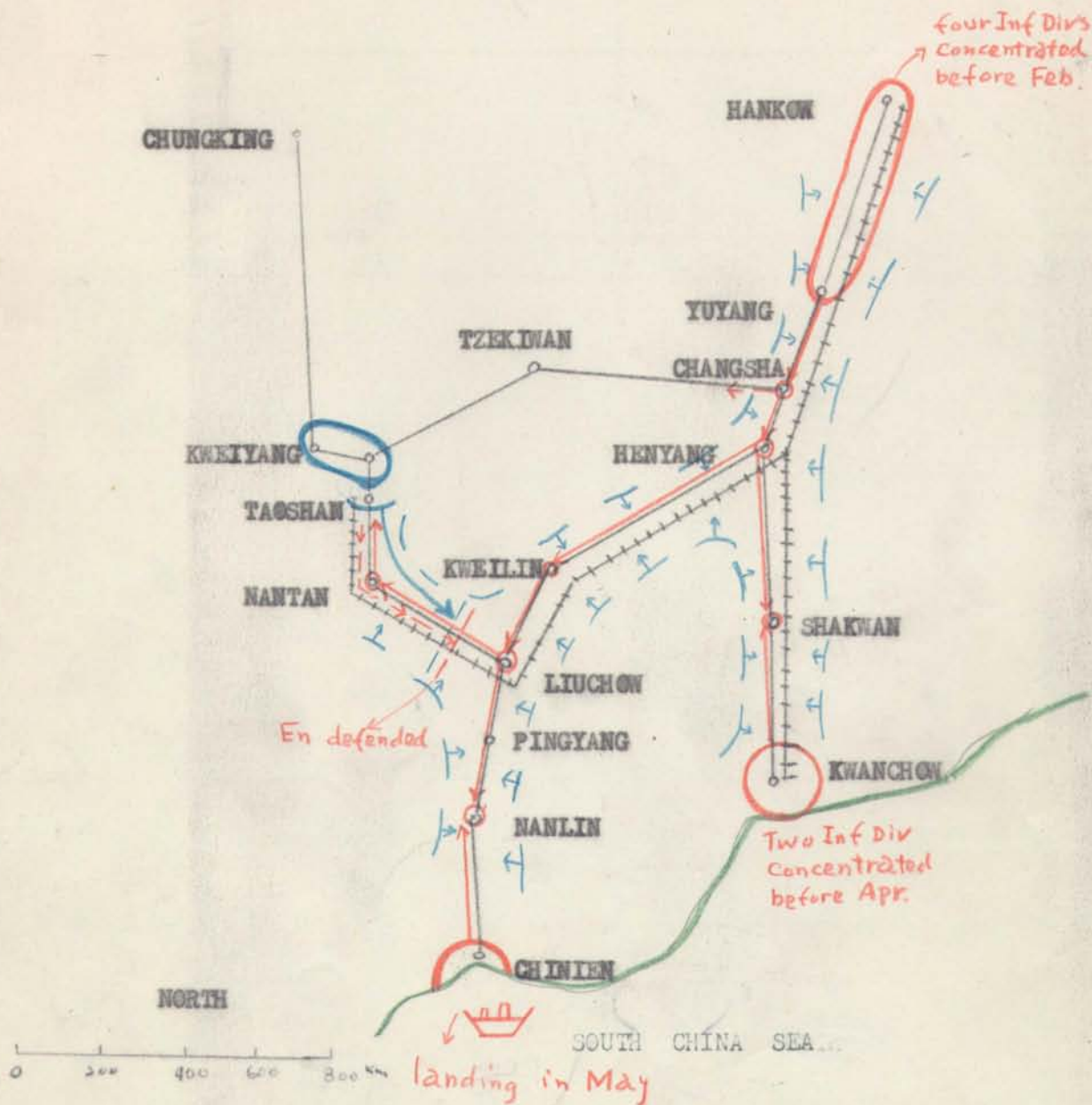
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SITUATION MAP I

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SITUATION MAP 2

