

needs
reading

Also sent a letter to Mom with
Ohlinger.

Friday - May 1st '42

Back in Dinjan after quite an eventful
trip.

Left here Tuesday A.M. (April 28th) and took
a load of .50 calibre ammunition to Loi wing
for the A.V.G. Just as we finished unloading
the stuff the doctor drove up to the plane
and told us to hurry our take-off as
a Jap attack was expected. But the
warning came too late for us. (Col. Haines,
Hubbard, and Stoecker, who arrived ahead
of us took off as we landed - so managed
to clear the airport before the Japs arrived.)
We could hear the Jap bombers - but
couldn't see them.

I wanted to hop in the plane and
take off but Col. Olds (whom Col. Haines had
left in his rushed departure) said it
was too late - so we all ran madly for
cover. That is - in search of cover!

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we dashed through the mud of the rice-paddies until we could see the Jap formation almost overhead. Guess we only ran for perhaps one minute - but it was a hard run - I put might heart into it - but was passed by some of the A.V.G. - by Col. Olds - and by dozens of Chinese - I must be a slow poke! I saw a hole in an embankment ahead - but several beat me to it - so I ran back twenty or thirty paces to sort of a shelf on the up-slope. The shelf didn't offer much protection from any bomb dropped in the rice-paddy - but at least I was safe from those dropped on the higher ground by ~~the~~ my airplane and the rest of the airport. Fortunately - the Jap bombardiers were good. Their aim was pretty accurate. Nearly all the bombs landed on the high ground of the airport. We could hear some of 'em on the way down. There - wham! - the ground really trembled!

One 300 pounder (or thereabouts) hit

within 10 feet of my airplane - and within 10 feet of 5000 odd pounds of ammunition I had just unloaded. ~~The~~ The runway was muddy - and the only damage to the plane was a demolished left elevator and horizontal stabilizer! Had the runway been hard surface the airplane would have been totally demolished. Some luck!

Those bombers, incidentally, flew a perfect formation. About 15,000 feet high - twenty seven of 'em - ~~was~~ in a V of V's. Dam good bombing - though they accomplished nothing. My airplane was the only one damaged as all P-40s were in the air busy shooting down the "Zero" fighters intended to escort the bomber formation. The A.V.G. pilots shot down at least 13 confirmed - and didn't lose a single plane in combat. Not even a bullet hole in any P-40 in the scrap with the whole flock of Zeros! The only A.V.G. casualties

were Paul Greene - who landed okay out of gas and later flew his ship out - "P.T." Smith - who washed out a landing gear - and one P-40 full of bullet holes when the pilot made a single handed attack on the formation of 27 bombers! The P-40 still flies - and the pilot is uninjured!

The Japs killed eight Chinese and damaged my ^{ships} tail assembly - at the cost of at least thirteen of their own best pursuit planes - possibly two of their bombers - and many, many, bombs - plus a devil of a lot of gasoline. ~~They~~ The whole attack accomplished less than is warranted by the expenditure of one bomb - yet the cost to themselves was terrific!

The night of the attack the Japs ^{officially} were reported to have advanced at least 25 miles north of Tashio - which was part of that day's gain by ground forces. That meant that they must ~~we~~ have been within

ASSISTANT
CHAPLAIN STAFF
MHS
MC244
1-14

Targu Westfield
I/162

603 Sapphire Street
Redondo Beach, CA 90277
March 14, 1982

Dear Hargis,

I've given a lot of thought to your letter of 26 Feb. and perhaps some of the memories from that long-ago time will be of use to you. I hope so. I'm happy to learn that you've contacted Chaplain Youngs and hope he will help you fill in some of the missing pieces in your Salamaua story. As for the value of my old memories I'm no longer so sure, now that you tell me that Malison J. Aldige was killed later in the mountains. For almost 40 years I've kept the vivid memory of his body being brought back to the Bn. aid station at Nassau Bay on the first day of fighting, June 30. Was it someone else I saw? I must have known who he was then as I knew most of the medics. I've never forgotten the look of grief on Doc Ingresano's face (and I hope I remember his name correctly!) as he tenderly ran his hand through the poor dead boy's hair. I've written to Chester Clark about this and hope he will remember the scene - if he was present at that moment, of course. He was generally at the Bn. Hq. aid station. As I told Chester, it really doesn't matter much one way or another, but that was one of my most vivid memories of those first days of combat and if it's inaccurate then perhaps most of the old memories are.

A story of my life as a Chaplain's assistant would be dull reading I'm afraid. I don't know that I was truly able to assist the Chaplain very much during the Salamaua campaign except to be near him much of the time. We were and are good friends and were particularly close companions up on Mt. Tambu, sharing the protection of a couple of shelter-halves. Was I supposed to be his bodyguard? He never said so but he did manage to scrounge a very old 45 automatic pistol for me to tote in addition to my M-1! You ask how I got the job and I must say that I got it at Ft. Lewis the day the range officer reported to Chaplain Youngs that I was high scorer on the pistol range - and he knew that I could play the piano or organ for his services! Without my field organ to play and without any equipment for religious services or clerical duties it seems in retrospect that my duties were negligible. I was just there!

I can recall very few times that we could get a group together for a service. The first I recall with any certainty was up on Bitoi Ridge for a group around the rear Hq. We were stuck up near the top of Mt. Tambu long enough to have had some services and were later for some time at Tambu Bay and must have had some there, but I must confess that I draw a blank. Can't remember a thing about them. Probably the most useful thing I did at that time was to carry rations up to Mt. Tambu from Tambu Bay, which I did

a couple of times! Didn't I tell you my story would be dull reading? I was never involved in any combat then or in any later campaigns. Never saw a Jap except a dead one.

You were wondering about Ch. Youngs denomination. He is or was a minister of the Bible Presbyterian Church, a fundamentalist group and certainly non-liturgical.

Now, going back to your questions in order brings us to the Nassau Bay landing. I landed with a party of Serv. Co. men, Chaplains Youngs and Haley (John Haley, the much revered Catholic Chaplain), and Ch. Haley's assistant, Frank Beckwith. Our boat landed just after the first assault troops and, like most of the boats, broached and was stuck fast. Ours was thrust well up on the shore by a huge wave and with such force that a Jeep slid against the side momentarily pinning Ch. Haley. Frank shouted for help and guys shoved against the Jeep freeing Ch. Haley so he was able to jump out with the rest of us. My next memory is the sight of a magnificent Aussie standing on the shore with his light, stark naked except for his beat-up old Digger hat. How, I wondered, did he have the courage to penetrate this enemy-held beach on a pitch-black night and wait for who knows how long for our arrival. Did he wade through the swamps to get there or did he swim in from a boat in such a stormy sea? So, I didn't come near to drowning and didn't lose any of my equipment. I think our little group moved more or less directly ahead inland from where we landed with not a clue as to where the rest of our troops might be. I do recall that it seemed a very long time until dawn! We had our slit-trenches dug and were not far from them when the first Wip planes came over to bomb and strafe. The bombs all fell between us and the water and the strafing also was directed to that area. Still, the noise and concussion of the bombs was scary enough for my first experience under fire. The rest of that first day on the beach I can't recall except for the scene at the Bn. aid station which I described. As night fell Ch. Youngs and I were in front of the Portable Surgical Hospital tent and remained there throughout the night surrounded by wounded on litters awaiting their turn in the surgery. I remember thinking that it would be wise and comforting to be dug in rather than to be lying on the surface. Yet the thought of all the wounded lying unprotected on their litters and the medics busy inside the tent erased the thought from my mind. The shells or grenades didn't seem to impact too close to us, but then what did I know in this first experience under fire? I wonder if Ch. Youngs remembers wandering off toward the Bn. Hq. tent at dawn before the snipers had ceased firing. They told me he had to dive for cover after a near miss and landed on top of a body in a trench!

I don't recall any burials on June 30 or religious services. It seems to me that the burials I assisted with were on July 1. I remember being told to assist the ~~XXXXXX~~ grave diggers and assisted by helping lower the bodies into the graves. Ch. Youngs and Ch. Haley read their respective services. Some time that day I walked quite far south along the beach with several other men but can't recall the reason unless we were looking for more bodies. The only body I remember seeing was that of a surprisingly large and husky looking Jap near the water. Just before we started back up the beach we were buzzed by a small single engine plane which I think we identified as an Aussie "Wirraway" (?) He came over us from the north, turned and came back over us even lower and I recall thinking that I hoped he wouldn't mistake us for Japs! Later in the day it seems we all moved further north and en route were again bombed and strafed. I hit the dirt (water as we were in a swampy area) with Capt. Ronald Carter, the Bn. surgeon, and the Bn. dentist on either side of me. Probably on July 2 I went with a carrying party to Napier. This was the party that was ambushed in the native garden a few miles inland. Ch. Youngs wasn't with us for some reason. He probably made the trek with the Hq. staff. Was it fate that having been quite close to the front of the column I for no reason that I recall decided to drop back to about the middle only minutes before the point was hit? All the armed men were requested to drop back on the double to regroup and I dropped my pack beside the trail and ran back as instructed. I remember a couple of walking wounded coming back down the path, one with a frightful head wound but still carrying his tommy gun. I seem to recall that we were told that he fired most effectively, though wounded, and helped greatly to repel the attack. After spraying the area where the attackers had been with heavy automatic weapons fire, we continued quietly and most cautiously until late afternoon when we formed a perimeter for the night in a clearing on the south bank of the Bitoi River. I recognized the dead men as we passed them where they had fallen in the ambush and I think they were from Bn. Hq. pioneer platoon. I don't know now whether there were 3 or 2 dead, but I'm sure that's on record. We arrived at Napier the next day in a pouring rain, were already wet to the skin having waded the river to get there, and were mighty glad to stand around the big fire they had burning there. Mighty glad too to feel the relative security of the camp.

Yes, I went on to the end and even got in a Signal Corps picture of the whole Regt. Hq. crew on the beach at Salamaua. I have a print, luckily, and a negative made when the print was fresh. Sent a print to Geo. Cisneros not long ago as he didn't have one.

I think I may have a Chaplain's story for you that should be of interest to Jungler readers. I retained a carbon copy of Chaplain Robert Smith's Historical Report of the Mindanao campaign, 6 typed pages covering the period of March 6, 1945, when we left Mindoro, to July 7 when we returned to Zamboanga from the central part of the island. I've written to him to get his reaction to the idea of publishing the story. I see no reason why he wouldn't go along with it, but we'll wait to see what he says. I don't know if he has a copy to refer to and I may have to send him one to review. He was, by the way, an outstanding Chaplain and was awarded a Bronze Star for his fearless ministry to the men under fire. * I'll copy the order and include it. I joined him on Biak after his assistant left for home and was with him until the war's end. I believe he's now semi-retired but still lives at the monastery of his order at Cambridge, Mass. He's an Episcopal priest, you will be interested to know.

Well Hargis, you asked a few questions and I dredged up more than a few answers and far too many rambling thoughts besides! If any of the above is of value to you I'll be pleased.

Sincerely yours,

Alexey Atypov

P.S. Since you asked, I've remained a bachelor. I was a music student with some professional experience as a concert pianist before I was drafted. I went on to further study after the war and resumed my career playing mostly as an accompanist for touring singers, violinists and cellists. New York was my base in the 50s and Los Angeles since then. I do no traveling now but teach privately and work at California State University Long Beach with an old army buddy, Hans Lampl, in the opera department.

* On second thought, I'd better wait until he gives permission to send the order copy. At any rate I have it in case you're interested. I also have a few pictures that could accompany his story.

peninsula with a series of towering peaks rising thirteen thousand feet into the clouds. Thick forests covered the mountain slopes. Damp rain forests spread below. Matted jungle mixed with swamps. Stands of kunai grass grew sharp enough to cut a man's skin. The heat and humidity were often unbearable. Only the New Guinea natives occupied the region, and it was the last place an American soldier wanted to go.

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By November 1942 the fight in New Guinea was under way. But the men in the 163rd were still in Australia, where they received little news from the battlefield. Still safe from the dangers of war, they were more concerned about their weekends, and Rockhampton was crawling with eager GIs. "It was a good thing there was a reasonable amount of liquor and beer available," Reynolds said. "Unfortunately, girls were not as plentiful."

The girls were plentiful enough. Australian newspapers reported an alarming increase in teenage pregnancies. In 1942 one Brisbane paper reported:

Far worse than the plight of wives deserted by USA servicemen is that of teenage unmarried mothers, who are setting the authorities a serious problem.

The problem is becoming so serious that it is a matter of US and Australian intervention. Maternity hospitals are crowded with young girls. The soldier-fathers are unable or unwilling to assume their responsibility.

In some cases, young girls of good family, who really are in love with USA servicemen, get into trouble through promise of marriage, which under present regulations cannot be honored.

It wasn't much different elsewhere. The Townsville press reported that numerous young Australian girls were looking to American troops for "easy gain." One Townsville city councilman was quoted as saying of the girls, "I can pick them out from the locals any day.

FROM POPLAR TO PAPUA

They're giddy, young and garishly painted."

Naegele enjoyed chasing the local girls and drinking beer as much as any soldier. "It was the best beer in the world and we were liked. We were young, pretty well paid by their standards, and we were available. Their boys were all in North Africa."

Arthur Merrick, a young lieutenant educated at the University of Montana, had been watching a hockey game in Great Falls when he heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The road to war seemed fast for Merrick, who quickly got engaged to his college sweetheart, borrowed money from his buddy Pete Murphy for the engagement ring and vowed to return to complete his promise of marriage.

Now halfway around the world with a weekend pass in hand, Merrick went with six young lieutenants to shop at the post exchange in Brisbane. Meeting the "ladies of the time" required more rank than any of the men had, so one of the officers, Lieutenant Slade, came up with a plan. He bought a pair of general's stars, removed the lieutenant's bars from his collar and placed the new rank on his uniform.⁵ It was funny for a moment.

"We walked out, keeping to the left of our 'general,'" Merrick said. "We heard the ladies of the time usually were in the hotel tea-room so we headed out. We were too new and green for these ladies, so we went back to the elevator. Guess who was descending at this same time? It was General MacArthur and a couple of his staff. He turned to Slade and said, 'Well hello, *general*.'"

Slade couldn't remove the stars from his collar fast enough. Impersonating a high-ranking officer was a serious offense. For the rest of their time in Brisbane, Merrick and his friends settled on being "just lieutenants." It was just as well. Time for shopping trips and courting Australia's women was about over.

Notes

1. On the Australian defensive situation in 1942, see Milner, *Victory in Papua*, pp. 3-5.
2. Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 24.
3. On the training at Rockhampton, see McCartney, *Jungleers*, p. 29.
4. Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 29.
5. Montana Chapter of the 163d Infantry Association, *The Bulletin Board*, Vol. 7, No. 3.

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In the opening campaign prepared to wage the kind of 32nd Division, comprising and Wisconsin, experienced Japanese army trained and poorly equipped many of the problems they command, and the results

The 32nd suffered substantial. Morale was low among the increasingly sick. "They were shaggy and ragged," one witness wrote. Their shoes, which had to be cut away so that they could walk, were in short supply. Malaria took increasing tolls. For others were hospitalized for it was clear that more men were required.

The 32nd Division had been in Guinea. In contrast, most of

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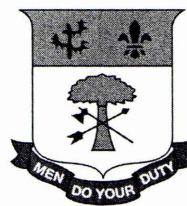
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Chapter Three

SANANANDA: REALITY SETS IN

In the opening campaign of most wars, soldiers are often ill prepared to wage the kind of battle they actually have to fight. The 32nd Division, comprising National Guard troops from Michigan and Wisconsin, experienced this when its leading elements marched into the New Guinea jungle in November 1942 to face an experienced Japanese army. Not only were the soldiers improperly trained and poorly equipped for the conditions they would face, many of the problems they encountered weren't foreseen by their command, and the results were troublesome.¹

The 32nd suffered substantial losses in a few weeks of combat. Morale was low among the troops, who were hungry and increasingly sick. "They were shaggy and bearded and their clothes were ragged," one witness wrote.² "Their feet were swollen and in bad shape. Their shoes, which had shrunk in the wet [jungle], often had to be cut away so that the troops could even get their feet into them." Atabrine pills, salt tablets, vitamins and chlorination pellets were in short supply. Malaria, jungle rot, dengue fever and dysentery took increasing tolls. For every two men wounded in combat, five others were hospitalized from jungle fever. It became increasingly clear that more men were needed soon, and the 163rd got the call.

The 32nd Division had been tapped to fight in Europe, not New Guinea. In contrast, most of the 41st Division, including the 163rd,

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had trained to fight a jungle war. "We were well trained," recalled Christian Hansen of his Rockhampton training, "But we didn't know what in the world we were getting into, and neither did anyone else until we were actually into it."

The 163rd arrived in New Guinea on January 1, 1943, at airfields at Dobodura and Popondetta. The regiment's uncelebrated arrival was something of a milestone. It represented the first full American outfit to fly into combat in the southwest Pacific theater.³

Stan Davison of Highwood, Montana, kept a detailed journal of his early days of combat, which included amusing cartoon sketches.⁴ His stories revolved around the heroic character Black Bart, Davison's proud and courageous alter ego. As a member of C Company, First Battalion, the young soldier wrote of the flight north: "There wasn't a single gun on that plane but our own weapons. I don't know what we would have done if we had been attacked. I could only see three parachutes in the plane."

The arrival of the 163rd wasn't a glorious one. Those expecting reporters and cheering crowds found silence and rugged living. One B Company soldier remembered: "It wasn't what we expected. We sort of figured there would be some sort of village with at least one store. But it turned out to be only a few native huts occupied by sick and wounded Yanks and Aussies waiting to be transported to one of our base hospitals, or waiting to get back into the action."⁵

Instead of fame, celebration and pretty admirers, the men found thick jungle and muddy swamps. They also found their predecessors, the soldiers of the 32nd, in poor condition. As they passed sick and wounded men, many thin from hunger, dirty and confused, they wondered if they were up to the task of fighting a jungle war.

"It was pretty frightening seeing these 32nd Division boys walking out," said Fred Naegle. "They took an awful beating. They were tired. They were shot up. Their clothes were in tatters. Their feet were sticking out of their shoes—they had rotted off. I said, 'Geeze! We're going in to relieve them?'"

Howard McKinney put his own twist on the realities awaiting the Montana soldiers in New Guinea: "Sometimes the wounds of the



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Unloading the DC-3s at Dobodura airfield. The aircraft were slow and clunky, making them vulnerable to Japanese Zeros patrolling the skies.

men they [natives] carried were repulsive and sickening to the eye. No man felt too good over this reception. Any illusions we had of the glories of war were quickly dispelled."

The 163rd and attached elements now consisted of more than 3,800

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troops under the command of Col. Jens Doe. Doe's familiarity with the regiment went back to the Hunter Liggett Military Reservation in California where, in 1940, the Montana men had gracefully defeated Maj. Gen. Joseph Stillwell's army. Doe was aware of the 163rd's reputation as a fighting force, as were other commanders in the theater. In fact, Lt. Gen. Robert Eichelberger ensured General MacArthur that the entire 41st Division, including the 163rd, would enter combat at New Guinea better trained than the 32nd Division had.⁶

The biggest problem facing Allied commanders was their military intelligence, or lack of it. Intelligence officials failed to determine how large the Japanese force on New Guinea was, especially at Sanananda. "We decided we did not know whether there were one thousand Japs at Sanananda or five thousand," Eichelberger wrote. The latter number would prove more accurate, but Allied commanders had to settle on a plan of attack without that knowledge.

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The men in D Company climbed aboard a DC-3 at Port Moresby, New Guinea, on New Year's Day, 1943. The plane circled several minutes, gaining altitude to begin its turbulent pass through the Owen Stanley Range. "It seemed the wings of the plane were about to touch both sides," Hugh Reynolds recalled.

The aircraft climbed through Kokoda Pass—a narrow canyon of rock lodged high in the mountains. During the flight, Reynolds, the young guitar player, chatted nervously with the pilot. He had noticed many small holes cut into each window and, being curious by nature, he wanted to know what they were for. The pilot wasn't slow with his answer: "They're for you to put your rifle through to shoot Zeros if any show up."

The pilot flew low and fast to avoid the danger lurking in the New Guinea skies. Japanese Zeros soared sneaky and fast and could easily outgun, outrace and outclimb a fully laden, clunky DC-3. In sight of the runway—a strip cut into the grassy fields on a mountain plateau—the pilot took his plane into a dive. Just before the ground

he pulled the nose up. The pilot aligned the plane with the runway and the men to get off.

Reynolds sighed. The runway was a sandy airstrip. He and the pilot were concerned that the plane could move off the runway and speed down the run-



*Colonel Harold G. Reynolds
Australian*

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he pulled the nose up hard. Reynolds nearly swallowed his heart. The pilot aligned his plane with the runway, set it down and told the men to get off. No problem.

Reynolds sighed with relief when the transport landed on the sandy airstrip. He wasn't alone. The men were glad to touch down and the pilot was equally glad to take back to the skies. "Before we could move ourselves or our equipment off the airstrip, the pilot sped down the runway and into the air," Reynolds said.



Colonel Harold Lindstrom, left, discusses battle plans with two Australian officers at the Sanananda front in early 1943.

Captain John Sponenburgh of Chinook, Montana, moved the men into the jungle. It was best to get organized in the protection of the bush. Sitting on the airstrip was a fool's move that left the soldiers vulnerable to snipers. Sponenburgh unfolded his map and marked the company's objective—a point several miles down a trail and across the Girua River. As the captain studied the route, Reynolds watched "several natives pass up the trail carrying wounded GIs that were being evacuated. The sight of those wounded soldiers added to our concern. They were a glimpse of what was sure to come for us."

After an hour marching, Captain Sponenburgh played it smart. He

yielded to the unfamiliar jungle terrain and stopped his men short of the Girua River. This, he told them, was where they'd be spending the night. Reynolds took a good look around, wondering where, exactly, they were. Sponenburgh ordered a perimeter and the men complied. They sat back-to-back throughout the night, unsure of what they were supposed to look for, or of what awaited at dawn. They had already drunk most of their water. The humid air was nearly suffocating, the foliage razor sharp. It was nothing like Rockhampton. The trail seeped, eternally wet from the rain and dripping foliage. Palms hung lazy in the muggy air. At night, the canopy blocked the stars.

That first night for Reynolds was sleepless. Every *whump, whump* of distant artillery was cause for concern. Every snapping twig and hoot caused his heart to skip and his palms to sweat. This was the largest tropical island in the world and one of its least-explored wilderness regions. It was home to egg-laying mammals and kangaroos that lived in trees. The butterflies were huge, the lizards long, the monkeys daring. Rats grew as large as cats, the roaches were as black as night, and the terrain changed daily in the constant rain. Crocodiles lurked in the swamps and brackish water. The natives, in the eyes of the soldiers, were wild and strange.

Reynolds was happy to see the first hint of daylight beam through the trees and the sunrise that followed. The jungle came alive in a flash of color and sound. The men prepared to cross the river and locate their position. The water grew deep and the soldiers, weary of their strange surroundings, gave thought to the crocodiles swimming near the muddy banks. Using makeshift rafts, they floated ammunition and equipment to the distant shore, where they picked up a native footpath cut through a field of kunai grass. Soon they found their objective—the Australian army's perimeter. The Japanese patrolled just beyond sight.

"In the swampy ground we established a perimeter of our own," Reynolds recalled. "We knew we were near the fighting because we could hear the sounds of weapons firing."

In his thirteen-part Prize-winning journal home just how comp

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In his thirteen-part series for the *Chicago Daily News*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist George Weller explained to readers back home just how complex the Japanese defenses at Sanananda were:

The Japs had advanced and retreated through all this country and knew every inch of it. They knew exactly how the narrow mud road ran eight miles from Popondetta to the crossroads at Soputa, marked only by a broken down Salvation Army hut and six saddle-sore, diseased Jap ponies....

The Japs, furthermore, were deeply, soundly and systematically dug in here, with pretentious officers' huts, firing lanes for machine guns, and sniper defenses....

About halfway between Soputa and Sanananda beach, the marshy road has a fork to the left toward Cape Killerton, which is about six miles long but is a mere forest track, impassable for vehicles wet or dry. Thus, as the Australians and Americans faced the sea, their maps showed a simple road structure shaped something like a slingshot. The irregular and highly complicated Jap lines stretched across, between the prongs, corresponding to the slingshot's rubber. They could give with rubber-like resistance.

If anything was certain, the Sanananda front was a tangle of swamp and jungle, and the Japanese were known to hide in both. They built pillboxes from concrete and secured them with steel doors. Their log guns and bunkers, erected months before the 163rd's arrival, were overgrown with vines, making them nearly invisible to the eye. The bunkers were arranged in circular patterns five yards apart, creating a connected line of defenses—the rubber slingshot, as Weller put it. A patrol could walk into a trap and not even know it. The Japanese, the men feared, waited like ghosts at every turn.

That constant threat weighed heavy on a soldier's mind. "Couple the pure physical effort to move ahead, along with the psychological impact of knowing that the enemy is just a few yards from any section along the trail, and you have a...physical and mental

anguish that debilitates most any human being," wrote Charles Linderman of Helena, a member of Headquarters Company.

The strange surroundings had Stan Davison on edge. It was his job as squad leader to scout the battalion's surroundings. The Australian soldiers, familiar with both the jungle and the Japanese, would serve as his evening guide. Davison wasn't thrilled with their lesson plan.

"The Aussies told us we were completely surrounded by Japs except for the trail we came up on," Davison said. "At dusk we could see smoke from Jap cooking fires about 50 yards from us. The Aussies weren't very concerned about it. They knew the Japs were on the defensive. We weren't too sure about that and spent a restless night."

The next morning, C Company's Lt. Harold Fisk left for patrol with an Australian squad. Minutes into the patrol he shot a Japanese soldier, thus earning the company's first combat kill of the war. Four days later, Fisk himself would be dead and his body missing.

Reality set in that night, as frightening as it was. Each man received his grenades. When darkness consumed the jungle, the men were told that if a branch so much as snapped outside the perimeter, toss a grenade. Movement through the area after dark was strictly forbidden. It was a good and simple rule intended to keep the men alive.

If it moved, the motto went, kill it.

"That first night would have made the Fourth of July in Chicago sound like a lady's aid meeting," Davison said. "I'll bet the Japs thought the whole U.S. Army was attacking. The boys were sort of trigger happy."

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Tensions ran high for good reason. Earlier that day the Japanese had launched two separate, hour-long attacks against the American perimeter. The attacks came lightning fast, hitting B Company the hardest and leaving six men dead. It was their first taste of combat and what a foul taste it was. Most of the men didn't know what hit them. To say the Japanese were strictly on the defensive had proved terrible advice.

The next day Capt. R ordered his first counter and eliminate what he placed along the road tation at best, harassing of the day and night.

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The next day Capt. Robert Hamilton, B Company commander, ordered his first counterattack. He sent a small patrol out to locate and eliminate what he believed was a single Japanese machine gun placed along the road to Sanananda. The gun had become an irritation at best, harassing B Company with random fire at all hours of the day and night.

The men set out to find the gun's position. Despite their careful advance, their attack was repelled by heavy machine gun fire. Hamilton reconsidered his plan and launched a second patrol, this time supported by advanced mortar fire to soften the target.

In the lead was Sgt. Joseph Reddoor, a Sioux from Poplar, Montana. If nothing else, the first patrol had suggested the machine gun's approximate position, allowing Reddoor's men to advance with a little more confidence. His squad moved into the jungle, unsure of what lay ahead. Suddenly a muzzle flashed from a strange-looking mound built between trees. It was a Japanese pillbox, cleverly hidden. One round hit Reddoor in the hip. Another struck him in the foot. He collapsed and pulled himself behind a tree.

Reddoor had found the position. Now what? His squad was outgunned, unable to move closer. Despite his wounds, Reddoor examined the situation. He pulled the pins on two grenades, crawled from behind the tree and tossed the twin bombs. The blast shook the air, felt deep in the belly of every man. The explosions killed several Japanese soldiers, but the machine gun continued to fire.

Sergeant Herman Belgarde, a Chippewa from Brockton, Montana, was on the patrol that day. He saw Reddoor down and bleeding. Risking his own life, he raced into the open, firing his Tommy gun from his hip as fast as he could. He reached Reddoor and found his wounds to be deep and incapacitating. The gunfire continued even as Belgarde lifted the wounded man over his shoulder. Running and firing at once, he carried Reddoor to safety. Belgarde was injured in the rescue, but both men would soon recover.

It was a bad day for Captain Hamilton and his men. Two attempts to destroy the position had failed. Weller, in his colorful words, explained the mounting tensions and bloody toll:

*

This was but the opening move in a kind of cat's-cradle series of attacks, back and forth, across and between the flooded Sanananda road and Killerton track which, by gradually shaving off and slicing up the Jap network of dugouts and fire lanes, eventually turned the whole 80 square miles of jungle into a kind of madhouse, where men slept in water, where demented Japs wandered alone and by dozens, and where many on both sides died alone in fern-strewn glades.

Captain Hamilton was ordered, and equally determined, to take the position. On January 5 he dispatched two B Company platoons, each with orders to overrun the Japanese bunker once and for all. To do so, Second Platoon would attack from the front while First Platoon swept in from the side. Assaulting the position from two directions, Hamilton hoped, would catch the Japanese off guard and allow his men to take the position. The problem was, nobody on the first two patrols had seen the additional machine gun placements hidden in the woods. What Hamilton believed was a single gun actually consisted of five, with four guns guarding the flank of the first.

Timing would be key, but the timing was off from the start.⁷ The attack was to take place simultaneously from two directions. But Second Platoon began its charge before First Platoon was in position. The machine gun popped in the afternoon, dropping Ralph Sullender of Whitehall, Montana. He lay bleeding in the grass, mortally wounded. The rest of Second Platoon crashed into the position head on, but the attack stalled as quickly as it started and the men were forced to fall back.

Even as Second Platoon fell back, First Platoon continued to advance on the position from the side. There was no turning back for these two officers and twenty-eight men, even as the previously unseen guns opened fire on them.

Sergeant James Eder of Poplar, Montana, recalled the cost of that assault: "Leo Limbocker was the first man to die. Both John McMeel and Otis Potter tried to save him but they saw the Jap tracers pass too close to his body. Benske would have tried, but we talked him out of risking another death to save our man. Lieutenant Ellers and

Corporal Pinkenstein w rebounded to kill both h was wounded and was left

Mendoza's death was a The soldier from Los Ang open for hours. Every ti Japanese gunfire drove th ther kill Mendoza nor le cried out, "Medics! Medi tated his pleas for help. l with American soldiers n

With eight men dead attacks proved costly, and Potter and McMeel, the l in action and believed de said Eder. Several weeks company chaplain found

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The men sat in their t that never seemed to enc water from prior storm men aggravated and mi mets. It was no use. Eac

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Corporal Pinkenstein were also wounded. Conners' grenade rebounded to kill both him and Lester Koustrup. Julius Mendoza was wounded and was left to die under the Japanese guns that night."

Mendoza's death was a bitter pill for the men in B Company. The soldier from Los Angeles, California, lay alive, bleeding in the open for hours. Every time his comrades mounted a rescue, the Japanese gunfire drove them back. The Japanese soldiers would neither kill Mendoza nor let medics treat him. Every time the man cried out, "Medics! Medics!" the Japanese soldiers mockingly imitated his pleas for help. It was a sadistic game that didn't sit well with American soldiers new to the battlefield.

With eight men dead and three wounded, Company B's failed attacks proved costly, and it had nothing to show for its loss. Both Potter and McMeel, the latter from Hayes, Montana, were missing in action and believed dead. "Nobody ever found McMeel's body," said Eder. Several weeks later, when the battle finally ended, the company chaplain found McMeel's mess kit in a Japanese bunker.

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"You don't hear much about one hazard—the big black rats," recalled F Company's J. Fallstick. "One rattled in our mess gear and guns cocked all down the line. I stabbed him with my knife and silenced him and ruined my mess kit."

When Fallstick reached the front on January 6, he and the other newly arrived soldiers with Second Battalion, 163rd Infantry, had to learn the rules of combat at New Guinea the hard way. "That first night somebody with dysentery left his hole after dark and was killed," Fallstick remembered.

The men sat in their trenches enduring a heavy New Guinea rain that never seemed to end. When it wasn't raining the jungle dripped water from prior storms. Trenches filled with runoff, leaving the men aggravated and miserable. Some tried to bail water with helmets. It was no use. Each hour brought new hardships.

"Muffled by the rain the Japs crept in," Fallstick said. "You couldn't see three feet ahead, but the brush moved with bodies."

Nobody hated the rain as much as Charles Linderman. The tall soldier from Helena watched the jungle take its toll on his friends. He hoped and prayed he would stay healthy, but the odds were against him from the start. "Only the most diseased soldier took the trouble to go to the bathroom after dark. The disease that drove Yanks and Aussies out of their foxholes at night was dysentery and diarrhea. Even these illnesses didn't drive all the men out of their trenches, and the newly issued steel helmets were used for a lot of odd jobs."

The GIs measured the rain in feet. Their foxholes became filthy, disease-ridden pools. Water seeped from the soil as if the ground itself were a saturated sponge. At night, when the men weren't using their helmets to bail water from their foxholes, they used them as pillows to keep their head above the rising grime. The smell of rotting bodies hung on the air. A good cigarette could cover the stench, but only for so long.

"A few troops were beginning to lose weight from the poor food, the tension and the constant water soaking," Linderman said. "The feet were beginning to suffer from being soaked. Jungle rot set in under the arms and in the crotch. Sores developed from the tiniest of scratches."

Insects loved the wounds. Flies, mosquitoes and sweet-bees swarmed around the men, feeding off their infections. Bugs feasted on bloated bodies left rotting in the jungle. When there was nothing left to eat, the pests moved on to the next victim, dead or alive. At night, when the bees and flies subsided, the mosquitoes took over, big and black, spreading their malarial plague.

Yet every day the sun rose new and every day the fighting started fresh. The heat turned the jungle into a sauna. For much of the 163rd, the battle for Sanananda had entered its second week, and Colonel Doe decided on the regiment's first big push of the war.

Doe was no stranger to combat. He graduated as a young man from the Military Academy in 1914, and just four years later was serving as the commanding officer of a machine gun battalion at the battles of Saint-Mihiel and Argonne in World War I France.

But Doe knew this was a different sort of war and a different style of combat. At noon on January 8, following artillery and mortar

fire, he ordered B Company to strike the same Japanese positions. Its men dead and three wounded, B would offer support, the Sanananda road.

Davison was at bat for rations and ammunition company—was preparing to trail to reach the command post. The man ruled. Davison helped with medical care.

There, as medics tried to get that he had jammed full of muck and was working fast to get the barrel worked fast to get the still left without him.

Captain Jack Van Sweated out an intense Japanese perimeter. The best. The shells hit the front. The plan hit. Artillery stopped. At Japanese away from

It was a tactic that "the artillery and the was supposed to be men," Davison later said. One man of Three Forks, Mor

Captain Van Duynward, but they soon was a bad time to die into an impossible

fire, he ordered B Company back into action. The company would strike the same Japanese position that three days earlier left eight of its men dead and three wounded. This time, however, C Company would offer support, attacking a second Japanese position across the Sanananda road.

Davison was at battalion headquarters that morning collecting rations and ammunition when he heard that C Company—his company—was preparing to attack. He and several others rushed up the trail to reach the company and join the fight. On the way, a shot rang out. The man running in front of Davison fell, a bullet in the leg. Davison helped carry the wounded soldier to headquarters for medical care.

There, as medics treated the wounded man, Davison discovered that he had jammed his Tommy gun into the mud. The barrel was full of muck and wouldn't fire. He stopped to clean the weapon, ramming the barrel brush down the gun and treating it with oil. He worked fast to get the gun into firing condition, but his company still left without him.

Captain Jack Van Duyn led C Company forward. The men sweated out an intense artillery barrage aimed at softening the Japanese perimeter. The soldiers stayed low under fire, hoping for the best. The shells hissed overhead and pounded a position to the front. The plan hinged on their attack starting the moment the artillery stopped. At the height of confusion, they would catch the Japanese away from their weapons.

It was a tactic that worked well when the timing was right. But "the artillery and the attack were not coordinated right, and what was supposed to be a rolling barrage landed among our foremost men," Davison later learned. Two soldiers were killed and two others injured. One man had his arm amputated. William Callantine of Three Forks, Montana, was among the wounded.

Captain Van Duyn couldn't hesitate. He pushed his men forward, but they soon encountered a swamp—dry the day before. This was a bad time to discover that rainwater had turned the crossing into an impossible marsh. The water was too deep to cross in rea-

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When cut-and-run perimeter, Japanese tree could kill an unsuspect yards away. For a shooter, the 163rd's outer p

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said. "Company C thanked Christ it had a man like Van Duyn for company commander."

As the Japanese knocked A Company from the fight, B Company was engaged in its own battle, still trying to eliminate that machine gun on the Sanananda road. The artillery gunners had run out of shells, except those with delayed fuses. "The shells impacted like coconuts falling from trees," according to one soldier who described how the bombs burst harmlessly in the mud. "We charged bayonets again, only this time we blew no whistle and our charge was a walk in a ragged line. We got nowhere."

The losses suffered by B Company were heavy—at least six men killed, one missing and ten wounded. Those who didn't die suffered agonizing injuries like fractured ear drums and bullet wounds to the hip, shoulder, hands and feet. It became increasingly clear that the Japanese were dug in deep. Rooting them out wouldn't be easy.

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"If a bullet comes through the area the GIs duck down," Linderman wrote. "It's a game not unlike the Montana men have played before with gophers, ground hogs and chipmunks—a snap, a shot, the gophers duck. A little later their heads pop up again. The GIs play the same game, only they're the targets."

When cut-and-run patrols weren't harassing the American perimeter, Japanese tree snipers were. Even in the jungle the snipers could kill an unsuspecting soldier from more than two hundred yards away. For a shooter perched high in a tree, the soldiers manning the 163rd's outer perimeter were easy targets.

"The keen-eyed sniper could steady his precision killing tool on a branch and tighten the butt to his shoulder," wrote Hargis Westerfield. "He could take a clear site-picture and squeeze his trigger. A Yank cowered in a hole might hear the prolonged dying groan of a man in the next squad. Or, after a deadly silence, he might find his buddy a pale corpse with a deceptively small hole in his forehead."

Sniper fire remained a problem from the moment the men arrived.

The snipers were especially menacing for Adam "Pete" Petrovich, the factory worker from Michigan. He suffered a painful injury at the hands of a sniper early in the battle.

"I played possum because I knew the sniper got me," Petrovich said. "He got me on the right side of my [hand]. The bullet had traveled from my right side to my left and came out my arm. I knew I was hit." Wounded and dazed, Petrovich found his feet and stumbled down the trail. The first person he came across was the chaplain.

"I said to him, 'Why don't those yellow SOBs come out and fight like men!' I'm glad I played possum because, had I moved again, I might have gotten another shot, and it could have been fatal."

Sniper fire wasn't the only danger. At dusk, Japanese ground patrols probed areas that snipers, watching through binoculars, observed to be vulnerable. If the patrols drew close enough, the raiders fired randomly into the American line, then disappeared into the jungle with ease.

"A Jap patrol came to the edge of our perimeter and shot Richter through the head as he was sitting with his back to the outside of the perimeter—he died instantly," Davison said. "Frank Kundert [of Bozeman] was wounded through the back. This could have been avoided had the men been on alert as they were supposed to be."

The men placed counter-snipers on the forward edge of their perimeter to reduce such attacks. One observer scanned the jungle. Another, with his rifle steadied, took a deep breath and waited. If a sniper fired, the observer looked for the muzzle flash. The rifleman would then take aim to snipe the sniper.

It became a back-and-forth affair that left both sides vulnerable. Because the Australians had never briefed the 163rd on counter-sniping, it was a lesson the men learned on their own over time. They caught on fast, setting up their own tree snipers and building traps in the woods by linking grenades with cords. Nobody wanted to engage in hand-to-hand combat. They preferred to kill from a distance.

"The Japanese are excellent at cut-and-run tactics," Linderman said. "Our bayonets were much too long and made the rifle too unwieldy for close-up fighting. No one was talking about any bayonet charges, or even bayonet fighting with the Japanese soldiers."

Second Battalion when it was ordered block the trail, it was troops had of escaping break what had become

Under the command marched on. The allowing command Progress was slow. gled vines and shrubs

Ralph Marlow of "Our cruelest march to Killerton. We covered muddy holes. Some made them useless

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Second Battalion received its first big role of the war on January 9 when it was ordered to block the Killerton trail. If the battalion could block the trail, it would effectively remove the only means Japanese troops had of escaping to their more westerly garrisons. It could also break what had become something of a tiresome stalemate.

Under the command of Maj. Walter Rankin, Second Battalion marched on. The men strung telephone wire as they advanced, allowing commanders to stay in constant touch with headquarters. Progress was slow. The men chopped their way through grass, tangled vines and shrubs.

Ralph Marlow of F Company remembered crossing the terrain: "Our cruelest march of all was the 1,400 yards down Suicide Trail to Killerton. We climbed over huge logs and jumped into deep, muddy holes. Some men dropped their rifles into thick mud, which made them useless."

The silence didn't feel right to one man. His instincts proved correct. As the battalion approached a clearing, stepping free of the jungle's tangles and hidden hazards, a Japanese machine gun cracked from the tree line. Marlow hit the ground, hoping the gunfire would pass him by. The lead zipped through the air, coming too close for comfort. Some men were lucky, like Hooken Hopstad of Glasgow, Montana. Others were not, like Stanley Gorlewski, one of the first to fall. Robert Murphy was shot and killed.

Tree snipers looked down at the men prone in the grass. The soldiers moving below were easy targets, crawling like turtles in search of a rock under which to hide. Thomas Monsted was hit. He lifted himself once and fell, and never moved again. Major Rankin had to make a move, but he needed a clear picture of what his men were up against. Weller described the episode in the third part of his report:

A giant tree was hung with long vines about two centimeters in diameter—the kind which the Japs, whose strength is in their upper shoulders and legs, scramble up easily, but Americans find difficult. Rankin called a for-

FROM POPLAR TO PAPUA



Young soldiers begin closing on Sanananda in Papua, New Guinea, not knowing what to expect.

mer circus acrobat, Corp. Bernardo Escobar of Mountain View, Calif. These vines hang free as much as 60 to 100 feet before reaching the overlying branch. Hand-over-hand, Escobar's trained muscles carried him upward, a telephone strapped to his body. When he reached the top, despite the danger from Jap tree snipers, the irrepressible Latin ex-showman shouted, *I see them, I can see them clearly.*

Rankin hissed his temperamental Tarzan into silence then got in touch by telephone with the mortars....After an experimental shot for range, Rankin called for a regular saturating fire.

Major Rankin ordered one platoon from G Company to the edge of the opening. There, the men could protect the battalion's left flank as it moved across the clearing. The men took the position as ordered, engaging heavy fire from inside the trees. Branches snapped and bullets ricocheted. The men couldn't see the enemy hidden behind the brush but they didn't have to—they knew they were fighting nose to nose.

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The firefight grew heavy, as they could get. Marlowe sounds of men crying out was prone in the kunai (grass) ahead. Medic Bays ran to the back, and Herman, sh

Captain William Benson Company across the clearing. Captain Paul Hollister b Together they established ion to regroup.

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Notes

1. On the 32nd Division in McCartney, *Jungleers*, pp. 32–3 *New Guinea, January 1943* (C.
2. Milner, *Victory in Papua*,
3. McCartney, *Jungleers*, p. 3
4. Reynolds, *History of Wc*
5. *History of the 41st–163*
6. Preliminary assessments
7. Details of this action fr *41st Infantry Division*, p. 21.



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The firefight grew heavy. Rifle fire ripped past men hidden as low as they could get. Marlow was terrified by the gunfire and the sounds of men crying out around him. "Soon our second platoon was prone in the kunai (grass) fighting Jap machine guns a few yards ahead. Medic Bays ran through Jap fire to bandage Green, shot in the back, and Herman, shot in the shoulder."

Captain William Benson saw an opening. He took it, leading G Company across the clearing to cover the battalion's right flank. Captain Paul Hollister brought the rear of the column forward. Together they established a new position allowing the entire battalion to regroup.

The day's operation cost Second Battalion four killed and seven wounded, including Green and Herman. But the first stage of the plan to capture Sanananda had been completed. Second Battalion had successfully blocked Killerton trail—the last possible route of escape for Japanese troops now caught inside ground controlled by the Allies.

Notes

1. On the 32nd Division in New Guinea, see Milner, *Victory in Papua*, pp. 132–133; McCartney, *Jungleers*, pp. 32–38; and Charles R. Linderman, *The Sanananda Trail, Papua, New Guinea, January 1943* (C. R. Linderman, N. p., 2000), pp. 65–69.
2. Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 196.
3. McCartney, *Jungleers*, p. 36.
4. Reynolds, History of World War II (unpublished journal).
5. History of the 41st–163d Infantry, in *World War II Operations Reports*, Entry 427.
6. Preliminary assessments by General Eichelberger in Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 330.
7. Details of this action from Hargis Westerfield's interview with Sgt. James Eder, in *41st Infantry Division*, p. 21.



Chapter Four

SANANANDA:

ON THE VERGE OF VICTORY

Second Battalion had successfully blocked the Killerton trail, taking with it any hope the Japanese had of escaping up the coast. The tide of battle was turning in the Allies' favor, but the hardest fight still lay ahead.¹

The 163rd had to flush out and eliminate strong pockets of Japanese troops caught behind the block. The men knew they had the Japanese in a pinch. They also knew the Japanese were ready to fight to the death. "They didn't have any replacements, and we didn't have any replacements, either," said Doug Ferris, who was wounded by a grenade burst in the marshy charge on January 8. "They were staying there until they died. They were fighting to the end, that's the impression that I got."

No one expected an easy battle, least of all the commanders, who were hungry for accurate and telling information. Where were the Japanese positions? How many were left? What condition were the soldiers in?

There was only one way to find out. On January 12, Stan Davison, a.k.a. Black Bart, the cartoon-drawing soldier, was ordered to lead a patrol to scout Japanese positions and troop strength. It was 0430

when he set into the jungle with a soldier named Nowlin and a man from regimental headquarters, whom he simply called Tommie.

"We made our way through the thick jungle, crossing the Jap trail," Davison said. "I had decided it better to circle around behind

the Jap perimeter. Ab observing, a lone Jap

Davison dropped to find cover. They sat soldier would pass the soldier, wondering what the man began digging at body, told Davison food, not a fight. Lil desperately hungry—

"He circled up right on my right side within about four feet from looked him straight atter of an inch thick very filthy and he said

Davison jumped pointed his Tommy man fell back, his head

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The soldier stepped mind to punch the where he would punch only thing he could a man in such a manner

"Tommie, who jumped up and partly gray, his eyes M-1 was shaking for. He jumped back

He then jumped position, falling on him. Tommie the

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At 10:15
To S.M.

While the record came far from reaching the record mark of 113 degrees above, it hit a maximum of 103 Monday, according to Elmer Hall, co-operative government weather observer. There was some slight moderation Tuesday, with a top of 96 recorded. While the temperature was far below the record figure, still it

H. W. Richardson Of
News-Record Visits
Fort Peck Project

H. W. Richardson

Handcraft to Be
Taught at School
Sessions, August

A handcraft school for home demonstration leaders to be held in

work could proceed on full scale, in spite of the delays, and take pleasure in still ahead of schedule by more than 100,000 cubic yards.

The Massman Construction company is now working part of the equipment down to the end of the railway channel. Ahead of schedule by a comfortable margin, Massman estimate that it will have completed the excavation work by September, although operations will soon become somewhat restricted in the narrowing portions of the spillway.

the Jap perimeter. About the time we were getting set to do a little observing, a lone Jap came wandering out toward us."

Davison dropped to the ground. None of the men had time to find cover. They sat motionless, holding their breath, hoping the soldier would pass them by. Davison watched the knife-wielding soldier, wondering what he had planned. He was surprised when the man began digging for roots. The look in his eyes, his emaciated body, told Davison he was weak with hunger and looking for food, not a fight. Like his fellow soldiers, the Japanese warrior was desperately hungry—near starvation.

"He circled up right in front of me," Davison said. "I was lying on my right side with my Tommy gun covering him. When he was about four feet from me he stopped and peered into the brush. I looked him straight in the eye. He was wearing glasses about a quarter of an inch thick and had a long black beard. His clothing was very filthy and he smelled rather rank."

Davison jumped to his feet, doing his best to hide his fear. He pointed his Tommy gun at the soldier and feigned confidence. The man fell back, his hands in the air, fright flashing in his eyes.

"I was sort of dazed myself, not knowing what to do with him, as we were too close to the Jap perimeter to fire and give away our position. I motioned with my left hand for him to come toward me."

The soldier stepped forward. Davison had already made up his mind to punch the man in the face and drag him into the brush, where he would proceed to kill him as quietly as possible. It was the only thing he could think of doing given the circumstances. Killing a man in such a manner wouldn't be an easy task, he knew.

"Tommie, who was lying in the undergrowth, got buck fever and jumped up and pointed his M-1 at the Jap. Tommie's face was partly gray, his eyes were sticking out of his head an inch, and his M-1 was shaking like a leaf. The Jap must have thought he was done for. He jumped back screaming, No! No! and fell flat on his back. He then jumped up and scrambled through the brush toward his position, falling several times. I stopped Tommie from firing on him. Tommie then turned and crashed through the brush like a

wild man in the opposite direction the Jap had taken."

Davison and Nowlin chased Tommie down. They held session in the jungle to decide their next move. They had to act fast, that was clear. In the confusion they weren't sure which way to go. Davison had lost his azimuth chasing Tommie, who was jeopardizing the patrol's safety.

If the patrol went north, Davison knew, it might hit Gona. If they went west, they might find Second Battalion on the Killerton trail. The third option was to go back in the direction they had come. Davison feared this would take the patrol into the Japanese perimeter—the heart of remaining Japanese resistance. Tommie's unpredictable behavior wouldn't help. With no azimuth to guide them and a frightened soldier threatening their safety, Davison still opted for the last and most dangerous option.

"We were soon in the middle of a knee-deep swamp with vines and undergrowth making progress next to impossible. One kind of vine in particular would hook to your clothes and rip them off of you unless you stopped and took the barbs out the same way they went in. The mosquitoes were around us in swarms."

The patrol wandered through the swamp for more than three hours. Davison dodged Japanese huts and dugouts. Snipers fired at him. Insects nipped at his exposed skin. The heat grew heavy and the men grew thirsty. They had been on patrol now for ten hours and wanted dearly to find their way back to camp. Finally, they found a partial clearing. A closer look showed that it was occupied by Japanese soldiers. Communication lines ran down the trail toward Sanananda Point. Footsteps approached. It was a thirty-man patrol, and Davison and company took cover fast. They jumped into the brush just as the troops passed by, some as close as five feet. One nearly stepped on Davison's hand.

This was it. This was going to be the end of it all. Davison and Nowlin lay on their backs as still as they could. All three men suffered from dysentery. "Tommie couldn't control his and had several accidents during the course of that afternoon," said Davison, who was certain Tommie's constant fidgeting would give them

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The hours passed Late that afternoon Japanese position. hammers on glass buried itself in th Tommie grew incre

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away. “All we could do was lie there and pray that no Japs would come digging around after roots. We heard them talking and laughing and walking all around us all afternoon long.”

The hours passed. The flies buzzed and the mosquitoes nagged. Late that afternoon, American artillery rained down into the Japanese position. The shells ripped the air, landing like so many hammers on glass marbles. A hunk of shrapnel the size of a fist buried itself in the ground three inches from Nowlin’s side. Tommie grew increasingly stressed.

“He had wanted to make a break for it all afternoon, but we talked him out of it, knowing it would be the end of all of us. Being the ranking man present, I could have ordered him to stay, but at times like that rank doesn’t mean much.”

Night fell like a curtain, heavy and fast. Only then did the three men appear from hiding. They crept through the jungle as quietly as possible, doing their best to remain undetected. “Tommie sounded like a bull in a China closet. We could hear Japs talking to the right and left of us. They must have heard us but I guess they thought we were Japs heading up to raise a little hell with the Americans.”

Davison considered it a small miracle when his patrol stumbled on the battalion perimeter, which he recognized by its crooked tree. The next problem would be getting through the perimeter without getting shot by his own buddies. None of the men on Davison’s patrol knew the new password. The password changed regularly, and they had been gone too long.

“Yates, are you there?” Davison called out, hoping his friend was on guard duty. Yates wasn’t there but Johnny Mohl of Bozeman, Montana, was.

“Who’s there?” Mohl called back.

“Black Bart and patrol!” Davison said, breathing a sigh of relief.

Mohl passed along the information: “Don’t shoot! Black Bart has come back!” Davison was never so happy to see a familiar face, or to have a dry cigarette. He lit his smoke and felt the whir of good luck spin about his tired body. Everyone had thought he was a goner. He had, too.

FROM POPLAR TO PAPUA

"I think they were about as glad to see us as we were to see them. I called the captain [Jack Van Duyn] up on the phone and told him we were in. He thanked God right there on the phone that we were back, and he told me I could report in the morning. I have often heard some of my fellow soldiers remark that they prayed when the lead got to flying fast, or when they were in a tight spot. I don't believe that I'm an atheist, but I never once thought of God during that trying afternoon. I guess I was too busy trying to figure out what I was going to do in case the Japs discovered us."

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Allied commanders learned more about the Japanese each day. What they didn't know was the impact starvation was having on the Japanese troops.

The same day Davison found his way through the jungle, Japanese soldiers received their last two ounces of rice. It was all that remained of their dwindling food supply. Starvation was wearing them down bit by bit, moment by moment, contributing directly to their defeat. Signs of cannibalism were turning up in abandoned camps. With rotting bodies scattered about the jungle, some half eaten, others bearing grotesque wounds, the entire battlefield took on a haunting and frightening feel.

One of the gruesome discoveries was that of Lt. Harold Fisk, who had died in C Company's failed attack of January 8. His body wasn't recovered immediately but was later found lashed to a lattice. Fisk's legs had been removed and presumably eaten by starving Japanese soldiers. A field sketch rendered by a medic detailed the discovery.

Major Gen. Oda Kensaku of the Japanese army watched sadly as his men died one by one, not at the hands of American soldiers but from starvation and disease. He wrote that "most of the men are stricken with dysentery. Those not...in bed with illness are without food and too weak for hand-to-hand fighting....Starvation is taking many lives and it is weakening our already extended lines. We are doomed. In several days we are bound to meet the same fate that

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Two soldiers hold up what is believed to be the cannibalized remains of a young American officer who died in battle in January of 1943.

overtook Basabua and Buna....Our duty will have been accomplished if we fight and lay down our lives here on the field."

Just how sick Japanese troops were became increasingly apparent to American commanders in the field. On January 14, just after sunrise, a patrol found a sick Japanese soldier lying in the brush outside the American perimeter. The patrol took the man prisoner—one of the few taken during the battle—and brought him back for interrogation.

The soldier's capture proved worthwhile. He confessed that Japanese commanders had issued orders that very day calling for the withdrawal of every healthy soldier from Papua. This soldier had departed with the rest of his men, but he had been too weak to keep pace in the jungle heat. He collapsed on the trail, where he would have surely died had he not been discovered by the American patrol.

The soldier's story filled Allied commanders with hope. It was all they needed to know. The tide had finally turned. Every available man within the 163rd was sent to block the escape of Japanese soldiers, sick or otherwise. The 163rd would surround them. The 18th

FROM POPLAR TO PAPUA

Brigade, along with other supporting elements, would sweep across the ring, crushing whatever resistance it encountered.

The brigade made quick work of the task. By early afternoon it had swept the pocket, reappearing with the trophies of war—Japanese anti-aircraft guns, grenade launchers, rifles. The only thing it left behind was 152 dead Japanese men.

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Lieutenant Howard McKinney, commander of A Company, First Battalion, had criticized the 163rd for its poor training back in 1940 when the men were still in Montana. Several years had since passed, and McKinney was now confident in the skills of his soldiers: "I felt we were as well trained as any. I know that commanding A Company in combat, all you had to tell them is what we have to do, where we're going to do it, and how we're going to do it, basically right down to the squad leaders. They took it from there."

The morning after the patrol had taken its prized Japanese prisoner, McKinney's company completed an equally lucrative task. Just after sunrise, an A Company platoon slipped across the Sanananda road. The men crept into the Japanese stronghold without being detected and called back the news—they were in.

When McKinney heard of the infiltration, he didn't hesitate bringing the rest of his company forward. He ordered an all-out attack to take the enemy by surprise. The Japanese soldiers resisted fiercely, moving fluently within their maze of interconnected bunkers and fire trenches. It was a perfect example of George Weller's slingshot analogy—bend but not break.

Word of the attack quickly made its way to Colonel Jens Doe, who immediately ordered an additional platoon from C Company to attack from the east. At the same time, he instructed B Company to attack from the west. The Japanese troops held their ground with stoic desperation. Despite the concentrated effort of three Montana infantry companies, it became clear the position was not going to fall that day. It was time to regroup.



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Colonel Jens Doe, commanding officer of the 163rd Infantry Regiment, takes a moment at the battle of Sanananda. By war's end, Doe had earned the rank of major general and was placed in full command of the 41st Division.

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For the first time since arriving at the front, First Battalion stood under the full control of Colonel Harold Lindstrom. Lindstrom was quick to devise a plan of attack. After harassing the Japanese with artillery fire at night, cannon crews would begin an intense barrage at dawn. First Battalion would then attack from the jungle. Companies F and G, borrowed from Second Battalion, would assist under the command of Maj. Walter Rankin, who had successfully led his men at the Killerton block.

“C Company was to be the spearhead of the battalion's attack and I was the man of the hour, as I knew the area in which the Japs were,” Davison wrote in his diary. “We were issued one day's ration, a bar of chocolate and a can of corned bully per man.”

The barrage began at 0850 on January 16—right on schedule. It was the heaviest shelling the men had ever witnessed. The whistle blew ten minutes later, marking the charge. The whistle pierced the jungle, softened only by the shouts of men screaming their way into battle.

With Davidson's squad in the lead, C Company rushed the trail. The soldiers had been instructed to form a skirmish line at the first sign of resistance. But the barrage had been so effective, blasting craters into the earth six feet deep, that Japanese troops had already abandoned their forward positions, running to bunkers farther back.

Davison found a Japanese soldier dead on the ground. He and his squad paid the body little attention. One man said he had never seen a soldier die with his eyes closed. Perhaps a closer look was necessary after all. The Japanese soldier suddenly awoke. He had been too sick to fall back with the rest of his men and decided to play possum. The heavy artillery had blown off his pants.

"I didn't think we should fire so I called to Jenkins that the Jap was alive," Davison wrote. "I guess Jenkins just passed him up, so Johnny Mohl gave him a burst with his Tommy gun and Captain Van Duyn shot him through the head. We then proceeded on and came to the same swamp I had been lost in."

Davison wouldn't get lost twice. He and the rest of C Company, supported by B Company, advanced unopposed into the Japanese line. Nearby, Company A took heavy machine gun fire on its side of the push. The heat was stifling. The air in the small, flat opening was dead still. Fatigue wore heavily on each soldier in the assault. Seventeen A Company men were already wounded in the attack and nine had been killed. Twenty others had dropped out from heat exhaustion and more would surely follow.

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The slingshot was about to snap. Major Rankin and his men prepared to abandon their block on the Killerton trail and help Colonel Lindstrom's troops in their advance. Rankin's soldiers dropped their packs and chopped their way through the jungle in columns. But the jungle, thick and hazardous, separated the columns and the advance slowed to a standstill.

The platoons regrouped under Rankin's order. It was time to cross the Sanananda road, not far from where A Company

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remained engaged in its white-knuckled fight against entrenched Japanese machine gunners. The men stepped into the clearing, but the Japanese had it covered. The ambush caught F Company in the open. The men fell prone in the grass. No matter which side of a tree they moved behind, the rifle fire followed.

Rankin handed Ralph Marlow urgent orders instructing F Company to move back. Marlow ran forward, dashing past men pressed into the grass. One man was already down, a hole in his thigh. Sergeant Ellis Olson was dead.

Marlow handed the orders to Capt. Conway Ellers of Shepherd, Montana. Calm under fire, Ellers instructed F Company to fall back one man at a time. Robert Ordish of Kalispell, Montana, was the first to rise. Just as the soldier gained his feet and started to run, a burst of gunfire cut him down. Wounded in three places, he dragged himself into the brush to await help.

Ellers was forced into a difficult position, and he had to make a decision under pressure. If they couldn't fall back, the men would have to push forward. Ellers ordered the men to advance, but no one moved. He then ordered Cpl. Carlton Tidrick of Belton, Montana, to take his squad forward and destroy the two machine guns. Tidrick called his men to their feet.

"His squad doubled forty yards, hit the ground and emptied their guns at what they thought was the machine gun nest—a dangerous looking native hut," Marlow said.

The machine guns weren't in the hut. It was a decoy. Instead, they sat hidden above a small ravine, which offered the gunners a clear lane of fire. Tidrick's approaching squad became an easy target. Kenneth Paul of Bigfork, Montana, fell with wounds, and Tidrick himself was struck three times. He was still able to move and that was enough. He dragged Paul to cover, where the two men huddled in the brush, bleeding badly. Tidrick bled from a hole in his chest, his left wrist hung shattered. He wheezed with each breath and coughed in pain. Yet he sat there behind that tree, supporting Paul with his good arm. When help arrived, Tidrick insisted that his fallen squad member be treated first.

FROM POPLAR TO PAPUA

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As Captain Ellers and F Company remained pinned under heavy fire, Hugh Reynolds moved to a forward position designed to hold a telephone and two men. He connected his field phone to the communication line he and Lloyd Leppink had strung out the day before.

"I attempted to call back to the mortar battery, but all I could hear were Jap voices," Reynolds said. "They had tapped into my line and I dared not use it."

Reynolds needed a working phone. He examined his options and decided to link up with A Company's commander, Lieutenant McKinney. When Reynolds learned that McKinney's company was also engaged in a firefight, he ran toward Second Battalion's command post, where Colonel Lindstrom was keeping tabs on the battle. Reynolds reached the post safely and stepped inside. Moments later, several Australian soldiers followed him in.

The Australians seemed to pay little attention to the battle. They found their billycans and dug holes in the ground. They filled the cans with swamp water and boiled it for tea. Just as the tea simmered, a bullet ripped into the post, striking Colonel Lindstrom in the buttocks and knocking him to the ground.

Dean Thorson had been carrying a pot of tea up to the command post when the colonel went down. Just then, a Japanese soldier jumped from hiding and attacked Thorson with a saber. Thorson spun and leveled his gun. He pulled the trigger, shooting the man dead. Thorson took the man's sword as a trophy. The pot of tea was lost but Colonel Lindstrom would be fine.

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The men were fighting more than a decimated Japanese army. They were also fighting disease, which crept in on nearly every soldier in the jungle—American, Australian and Japanese. The mosquitoes, flies, maggots and rats didn't distinguish nationalities when hunting for food.

SA

"Fever has taken the men in his camp," Davis said. "I have 179 healthy men along with battle casualties and many growing sick."

Nowlin, who had been in the area since January 12, showed the onset of the disease. He wasn't the only one. He had seen a dozen malarial soldiers in the entire command.

"Malaria and cholera," Schooley reported. "I doubted that all the Mosquito nets were working. Mosquitoes were everywhere."

Victory at Sana'a. January 19, it remained.

"Most everyone [Japanese] in the area were dying," Charles Linton said. "They were known as the 'dying'."

The final push. The plan was simple: to clear a second line. The swampy area. January 8 still had the advantage. The Japanese knew the advantage of a desperate last stand. The duty of his men.

"Fever has taken a heavy toll, along with the dead and the wounded," Davison wrote in his diary on January 17. He counted the men in his company, which had arrived at New Guinea with 179 healthy men. Nearly three weeks had since passed, and disease along with battle casualties had reduced the company to 115 men, many growing sicker by the hour.

Nowlin, who had accompanied Davison on his infamous patrol on January 12, nearly died of a chest wound. Davison himself showed the onset of malaria, fighting a temperature of 104 degrees. He wasn't the only man afflicted with fever. Confronted with a sudden malarial scourge, the medics worked at a frantic pace to save the entire command.

"Malaria and dysentery threatened an epidemic," medic K. B. Schooley reported. "We had too little medicine for dysentery and doubted that all the men, unsupervised, took quinine for malaria. Mosquito nets became so heavy with rain many were discarded. Mosquitoes were as bad by night as by day, and nets made little difference."

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Victory at Sanananda was inevitable. Yet as close as it seemed on January 19, it remained just out of reach.

"Most everyone held an opinion that there were plenty of [Japanese] in the bush with a lot of fight left in them, even though they were dying of starvation, sickness and shortage of ammunition," Charles Linderman wrote. "Short of everything except guts, they were known to die hard."

The final push to eliminate the last Japanese stronghold was on. The plan was simple in theory. It called for the men of B Company to clear a second line of bunkers while C Company took the first line. The swamp that caused C Company so many problems on January 8 still had to be crossed. Because of this obstacle, the men knew the advantage rested with the Japanese, who were now making a desperate last stand. As Major General Kensaku had written, the duty of his men would be accomplished by laying down their

FROM POPLAR TO PAPUA

lives on the battlefield. All evidence suggested that they were preparing to do just that.

For the men staging the attack—those present the first time—it was the same thing all over again. Rifle and machine gun fire was intense from the start. Mortar fire whistled overhead and pounded forward positions. This time, however, one platoon managed to cross the stream under the leadership of Johnny Mohl.

Mohl crossed the swamp with nine men, including Cpl. Wilbur Rummel. Covered by fire from their platoon, Mohl and Rummel crawled forward through rain and mud. They snaked close to the Japanese line, keeping their eyes on the targets ahead. Now within reach, still unseen, they tossed their grenades into bunkers. The bombs blasted in a bang of smoke and fire, and the guns inside fell silent.

Mohl and Rummel single-handedly knocked out the Japanese stronghold. The rest of the company crossed the stream before the smoke settled. George Weller, ever present on the battlefield, caught word of Mohl's heroic act:

If the Japanese were still living they would remember Mohl....Mohl moved his boys to cover, worked his way alone to the nearest pillbox, and silenced it with grenades. Then joined by another soldier, the two destroyed five more pillboxes.

Mohl then brought eight wounded men from his advance section, went back to the unwounded, and held the area until reinforcements arrived.

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Arthur Merrick of Great Falls, Montana, watched native New Guinea families flee the battle, crossing the river to the ocean. The women of the group wore large head nets and carried the family's belongings, which ranged from children to pets. The men of the group carried sticks. They beat them against the water to frighten off lurking crocodiles. Sharks were also cause for concern, but the

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natives were accustomed to their wild surroundings and dealt with them as necessary.

Earlier that day, the GIs had shot and killed a stray Japanese soldier. The body lay on the beach near the river. Distracted by the natives crossing nearby, Merrick forgot about the corpse: "I was sitting on the beach at dusk, maybe twenty-five feet from the body, endeavoring to fend off the black gnats and wondering how I could be in such a godforsaken place. A crocodile surfaced near the dead Jap. In less than twenty seconds, the croc ambled from the water, picked up the body in its jaws, and disappeared back into the water. From a calloused point of view, the crocodile solved our problem about what to do with the dead Jap."

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After engaging in two costly assaults of its own, I Company had been unable to capture and hold the southern tip of the Japanese line. One of the company's officers, Lieutenant Slade (the man who had pinned the general's stars on his collar in Brisbane to impress the ladies), was thought to be dead. But late one night, Slade dragged himself back into the company line. That same night, hot food arrived, morale returned, and every man in I Company hoped the next attack would do the job.

The men sat low on January 20 listening to mortars pound away at the Japanese position. When the barrage slowed, Second and Third Platoons attacked. The platoons covered two hundred yards when one American mortar fell short, wounding a soldier in the leg. The men got back up to continue their charge when a second mortar dropped in, killing Capt. Duncan Dupree of Poplar, Montana, and 1st Sgt. James Boland of Great Falls, Montana.²

Joe Upshaw, in charge of fifteen of the regiment's 81 mm mortars amassed in a nearby perimeter, explained what may have happened that day. "There were fifteen mortars firing with a time of flight of probably thirty seconds—think of all that stuff that's in the air at the same time. This one round went up and whistled. We

knew by the sound that it had dropped off a tail, so it wouldn't fly accurately. It dropped short and killed two of our own boys."

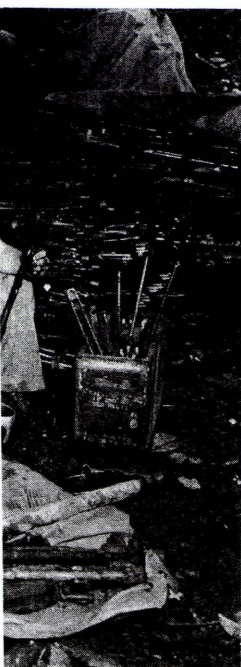
Lieutenant Loren O'Dell of Billings, Montana, stepped up in Dupree's place to lead I Company forward. But the company's advance had slowed, giving the Japanese time to embrace the charge. Their machine guns fired, killing Lt. John Oleson and his runner. Another man fell with wounds to both legs. He lay bleeding for two hours before dying of his injuries. Alfred Carlson suffered a mortal chest wound and Howard Barnett died of a wound to the head.

The attack had been anything but successful, leaving the survivors bitter and frustrated. But late the next night a little luck came I Company's way, when several Japanese soldiers fled their position. Disoriented in the dark, they ran straight through I Company's perimeter. No need to shoot. One GI rolled a grenade onto the trail and waited for the blast. The explosion disabled one Japanese soldier, leaving him unable to walk. He continued to wail in pain all night long, dying a slow death just outside the American perimeter. The GIs obeyed their golden rule—never move from your foxhole after dark. The death wail kept the men awake until dawn.

At first light, Upshaw's 81 mm mortar crews pounded the position with several hundred rounds. The saturation fire ended with machine gun crews blasting treetops to knock hidden snipers from their perches. Covered by supporting fire, I Company rekindled its attack from the day before. No gunfire. The men drew closer. Still no gunfire. The men crashed through the perimeter to find that most Japanese soldiers were still hiding in their shelters. What resulted was a slaughter, according to one GI. The Japanese were killed en masse, their final position overrun. After six days of fighting, I Company had broken the stalemate.

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Davison was growing weak with jungle fever, his temperature of 104 degrees holding firm. He carried dead American bodies back to the chaplain for burial. Then he was ordered to count dead Japanese



ned and repaired.

FROM POPLAR TO PAPUA

soldiers. He came back with a number—two hundred of them.

"I got my Jap boots that day. All the boys were after souvenirs," Davison wrote in his diary. "We were probing around a Jap hospital tent looking for bodies and anything else we could find when the chief came running up to me and informed me there was a live Jap in the tent."

No one cared. After three weeks of combat, the men were too busy hunting souvenirs to care about a single, sick Japanese soldier. A GI stepped up and shot the soldier dead. "The Jap's body hadn't stopped twitching before [the soldier] reached in and grabbed his pistol off of him, fearing that someone would beat him to it. The Jap had a hand grenade lying by him with the pin barely hanging in it."

Sanitized
version

Notes

1. Actions described in this chapter are covered in Milner, *Victory in Papua*, pp. 347–374; Westerfield interviews, *41st Infantry Division*, pp. 431–432; Charles R. Linderman, *The Sanananda Trail, Papua, New Guinea, January 1943* (C. R. Linderman, N. p., 2000), p. 139; and Reynolds, *History of World War II* (unpublished journal).

2. *41st Infantry Division*, p. 40.

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Chapter Eight

BIAK:

THE FIGHT FOR CORAL CAVES

The Butchers put their victory at Wakde aside and headed northwest toward the island of Biak, where other elements of the 41st Division were locked in combat with an entrenched Japanese garrison.¹ En route to join the battle, which called for another amphibious landing, the men of the 163rd Infantry caught up on sleep, often dozing in the shade of trucks and tanks. Over radios they listened to news arriving from Europe where, on June 6, 1944, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and the First Army had made a successful but costly invasion along the Normandy coast, breaking through Hitler's so-called Atlantic Wall.

The tides of war were turning fast, but for the men still in the South Pacific the road home lay through Japan itself. There was no telling how long it might take to get there, or what would happen once they did. Japan showed no sign of surrender and, short of a miracle, the war in the Pacific might drag on for years.

The men enjoyed their time between battles. They had plenty to eat and drink. Plenty of cigarettes to smoke—stories to tell. Plenty of time to think about the next mission and making it home alive. Mail was always welcome, what arrived of it. Outgoing letters were censored, sometimes arriving home with text blacked out—whole paragraphs if need be.

"By the time the letters made it home, as long as it took, whatever you had written about had probably changed anyway," said

Fred Naegele. "But still, you couldn't tell them anything about what was going on."

Most of the soldiers didn't know much about the state of the war anyway. That June, the Allies continued to close on Japan one island at a time. Two marine divisions were set to attack Saipan and Guam. In Europe, while Eisenhower's First Army fought its way through France, the Allies were also driving north through Italy.

The world was truly at war, and the Montana soldiers were ready to do their part. "There were these three big airstrips on Biak and that's why we were going there," Naegele said. "They were long enough and hard enough they could take our heaviest aircraft and put our bombing force within range of the Philippines and Borneo and Sumatra, where the Japanese were getting their oil."

One soldier described Biak as a "twisted old shoe thrown down in the sea by an angry god." Cliffs rose as high as three hundred feet above beaches carved by turbulent tides. Thick rain forests covered much of the flat ground, and a rocky plane advanced farther up,



High coral ridges, complete with caves and elaborate bunkers, proved to be effective fortifications for Japanese troops who successfully defended Biak for several months, causing a shake-up in the American command.



M-51 anti-aircraft gunner sits poised to counter Japanese air attacks.

offering little water. After floating in circles offshore to stave off the threat of a Japanese air strike, Second Battalion, 163rd Infantry, moved to the beach on June 12. The men met no resistance—a welcome change when compared to the landing at Wakde.

Ralph Marlow's first impression of Biak wasn't favorable. He saw the rocky shores covered with brush and debris. To the left he saw the sleek barrels of AA guns trained at the sky. Stenciled on each gun were Japanese flags—trophies for each plane the crews shot from the sky.

Just as Marlow dropped his pack, just as his company regrouped on the beach, an air alert sent them running. "We saw destroyers shoot red AA tracers far out at sea where three Jap bombers were diving on the ships." Marlow heard two loud explosions and saw the splash of enemy fire around the ships. "A Jap bomber fell from the sky in a ball of flames. As we cheered a second bomber burned in the sky."

Dark columns of smoke rose from the U.S.S. *Kalk* anchored offshore. The destroyer burned on the water. A third Japanese plane flamed in the sky, bounced over the waves and sank. The burning *Kalk* exploded when its deck torpedoes caught fire, a bright display seen for miles around. The ship was dead in the water, its engines no longer functioning. The violence of the battle rattled the men onshore.

Hugh Reynolds saw Japanese fighters buzz overhead, lining up for attack. He dug a trench as fast as he could move his shovel. Sand flew through the air and, just as the planes closed in, he jumped in for cover. "As they came into view over the ridge, their guns were already blazing."

The AA guns opened fire, banging away. Black puffs of flak burst overhead. But the attack ended as quickly as it started, and Reynolds moved with his company across the beachhead. He took up position near a shaded trail meandering from the jungle. Patrols scouted the woods and the men settled in, waiting for darkness.

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Naegele hated the patrols the most, especially on Biak. The 105 mm cannons that had served so well at Wakde were useless against Biak's steep coral terrain. Since idle time was wasted opportunity, the men were quickly put to work on jungle patrol.

"Our patrols were very small because it was so hilly," Naegele said. "You didn't have to go very far to find trouble. You never knew when the Japs would pop up, hiding in all those holes. You'd come up on them by surprise if you were halfway stealthy about it. Stealth was the name of the game—no smoking, no talking. Anything that rattled or reflected light was covered."

If Naegele hated patrolling during the day, he hated the nights even more. The hollow hours after sunset were never easy. The coral was unforgiving and rest came difficult. On a moonless night, phosphorous glowed strangely in the dark. Birds and animals emitted odd noises, keeping the men awake. The strange and frightening sounds floated on the dead-calm air. Some believed the Japanese never rested. They were always on the move, and Naegele's heart raced with apprehension.

"We'd be sitting in still positions with booby traps out on the trails," Naegele said. "You could hear them coming and you could smell them. They never quit smoking and with the dense heavy air, that smell carried. They had a smell of their own. By the time they got to

where they were endangering our position, we were waiting for them.”

Such was the case when Dean Henry of Harlowton, Montana, heard a twig snap after dark. He remained still, peering into the night. A small Japanese patrol approached from the woods. Henry, a veteran of prior battles, watched and waited as the patrol moved down the trail. The young gunner held his breath, hoping they wouldn't spot him. When the moment was right, he placed his finger on the trigger, took a deep breath and opened fire. The machine gun flashed in the night, its *thump thump thump* shaking the ground.

Reynolds was in the patrol sent to scout the woods the next morning. He found one dead Japanese fighter along with evidence that surviving soldiers had dragged away two other men. “All of the sudden we stumbled onto an officer who was wounded but still alive. He was hidden behind a log, so we were right on top of him before we spotted him.” The wounded officer rose halfway up, looked Wilbur Erbe directly in the eye and raised his pistol. Acting on instinct and fear, Erbe fired his own weapon. With a single shot he hit the officer in the hand and head. “The shot tore part of the grip off the Jap's pistol,” Reynolds said. “It proved that he had his sights set on Erbe.”

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The night attack was a sign of things to come. The Japanese had dug in for a long, drawn-out fight, supplied with the provisions needed to support an extended campaign. Accordingly, the ground fighting picked up on June 19—the day Lieutenant Kreiger led Third Platoon, G Company, onto a ridge in “Jap country” known among the soldiers as Ibdi Pocket. Thick with catacombs cut deep into coral cliffs, the men feared the terrain and its hidden Japanese guns.

Here was a forbidden forest filled with unknown hazards and traps at every turn. Kreiger's platoon encountered a grim sight from the start—a Japanese corpse tangled and hanging in vines high overhead. To reach the ridge, the soldiers moved along the cliffs, gripping tree trunks and branches, climbing like heavily armed Tarzans. At the top they spotted a Japanese pillbox. Seconds later, the platoon's

scout saw a helmet jerk back into the gun slot. The position was manned. The patrol was vulnerable.

“After a second of silence, we flattened under a rain of grenades that jangled our ears,” said Hargis Westerfield. “Hot steel seared us. Arnold Johnson cried out. His rifle thudded to the ground. Most of us cleared that ridge in seconds.”

The platoon slipped off the ridge for cover. But three men remained trapped in the open, including Arnold Johnson; he died of his injuries two weeks later. The effort to reach the ridge proved demoralizing. There had to be a better way.

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Down below the ridge that same day a convoy of men from I Company pushed through the hot jungle. Mostly unarmed, the group had been instructed to carry supplies to a new position occupied by K Company, about one thousand yards away.

“We knew K Company needed our supplies badly, but we did not know why the detail totaled only twenty-five to thirty men, and why we were mostly unarmed,” said John Sullivan, the convoy's scout that day.

Sullivan moved through the heat, down the trail, his helmet off. One of the few men armed on the detail, he carried a Tommy gun at the ready, keeping his eyes on the track ahead. He couldn't see the Japanese soldiers hiding in the brush, and he didn't have time to react when the grenade rolled onto the trail.

The explosion sent the men to the ground. Fragments pierced Sullivan's neck and shoulders. He turned to see as many as eight Japanese soldiers charge from the grass, screaming, their weapons drawn. Chaos followed. Sullivan fired his weapon and, in a moment of irrational thought, he wondered if he hit anything. Just then, a Japanese soldier attacked with his bayonet, smashing Sullivan's cheek. Another soldier ran past, slamming the barrel of a mortar tube into Sullivan's head.

The ferocity and suddenness of the ambush stunned Sullivan. He had been tackled to the ground and was now engaged in a hand-to-



Biak was riddled with caves, providing countless hideaways for the Japanese defenders. Such caves caused many problems for Allies in the battle for Biak.

hand duel. The reality of the situation no longer mattered. Time stood still. This was a fight for survival and one Sullivan had to win. He acted on instinct, giving little thought to his actions as he rolled around with his attacker, grappling for the upper hand. Larger and stronger, Sullivan slipped behind his assailant, wrapped his arms around his neck and squeezed the life from the man's body.

The fight was on all around him. Sullivan was certain the four men behind him had been killed in the initial grenade burst. Bodies littered the trail as he began to run. He ran past other American soldiers wrestling with their Japanese attackers. He saw one man stabbed through the leg with a bayonet. He ran dizzy and half blind, his eyes swelling shut, filling with blood.

Walt Timm was the fourth man in the column that day. "The whole side of the jungle trail was moving in on us. Japs in camouflage uniforms charged in on us with rifles and bayonets and even the barrel of a knee mortar. Light was on their bayonets as they leaped at us from five to six feet off the trail out of the grass."

A Japanese soldier jumped on Timm's back. He flipped the man to the ground where somebody else—he wasn't sure who—shot him. A second grenade exploded nearby, knocking Timm to the ground. At the same time, Ballard Stanchfield saw a Japanese soldier drive a bayonet through the leg of a friend. Two other Americans beat a man to death with their helmets.

Depending on their position in the column when the attack began, the soldiers would later say the fight lasted anywhere from ten seconds to ten minutes. Clarence Miller, of Menard, Montana, was dead. Raymond Medina lived until the rescue party arrived to carry him back to I Company's perimeter. Godfrey Mihoover was mortally wounded in the opening grenade blast and died from shock. The bodies would lie on the trail until the next day, when an armed patrol arrived to haul them out.

Sullivan ran back to the ration station, his vision quickly fading. He was nearly blind by the time medics moved him by Jeep to a field hospital. Even with grenade fragments lodged in his neck and shoulders, a broken cheekbone from the bayonet, a deep head gash from the mortar tube, a cut under the chin and nearly blind, the most painful part, Sullivan remembered, was having his head shaved with a dull surgical blade for stitches.

When news of the attack reached headquarters, commanders suspected the ambush had been a matter of bad luck for the convoy. Because the Japanese had attacked with a mortar tube, not a

machine gun, commanders concluded that they had been setting up to bomb I Company's perimeter when the convoy suddenly approached. When the Japanese saw the convoy coming, they sat in wait. The size of the patrol gave them only one option: attack.

Allied commanders knew little about the strength of the Japanese forces on Biak, the extent of their defenses, or how long they could hold them. Intelligence had placed the Japanese garrison at around 4,400 troops. But they actually numbered nearly 11,500 men, and they were defending some of the most formidable fortifications in the world. Their interlinked caverns ran as deep as four stories underground. Their caves held everything they needed to survive for months on end. One cave was large enough to hold 1,000 men. Ringed with pillboxes, bunkers, trenches and machine gun nests, their positions were nearly impenetrable.

Still, news reaching families back home was upbeat, even if conditions on Biak were grave. In June, the Associated Press reported this:

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS—American Sixth army forces advanced to within a mile and one half of Mokmer airfield on Biak Island Monday, having been stalled for several days by Japanese snipers and machine gun nests, it was announced today.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur's communiqués announced that ground troops were approaching the cliffs dominating the Biak island airdromes as Liberators bombed enemy gun positions and installations in the rear areas. One Japanese plane was shot down.

Americans have been converging on Mokmer airstrip from two directions since the first push toward the field was slowed by fierce Japanese resistance from snipers and machine gun nests in the high area overlooking the coastal approaches to the field.

The truth was that the 163rd and other Allied elements couldn't penetrate the cliffs and drive the Japanese from their fortifications. A new plan was needed if commanders hoped to make progress.

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On June 26, after heavy preparatory fire, the Allies launched an all-out attack just before sunrise. The pre-dawn assault was a tactic rarely used. The commanders hoped to surprise the Japanese soldiers, who typically vacated their positions at night.

Hugh Reynolds joined B Company for the raid. "Things seemed eerie and strange," he said. "Things were going pretty well as we slowly moved up the trail. We bypassed several unmanned Jap pillboxes, which they manned during the day but pulled out of at night. Had they been there, it would have been much tougher getting to the bottom of that ridge."

The patrol had surprise on its side. Anything that rattled was taped down. Anything that reflected light was covered. Talking wasn't permitted. Silence was golden. The stealthy approach worked until one man stepped into a trip wire, launching a flare into the night. It was the worst thing he could have done. The flare signaled the company's approach and the Japanese were quick to react. Armed with bayonets, two soldiers lunged from the dark and were shot. If the flare didn't give the patrol away, the gunfire surely would.

The sky turned from midnight black to purple to pre-dawn blue. With enough light to see, orders were given to advance, never mind the flare. By now, company scouts could see the cave in the cliff. A closer look revealed its guard—a heavy machine gun. The men loaded a bazooka and fired. The shot was dead-on and the position was destroyed.

By slipping past Japanese scouts in the dark, and by eliminating the machine gun position, Company B scored what the men later called "the first pre-dawn infiltration assault of the war." It was big enough to label the mission a success, but the company didn't stop there. Reynolds moved with the patrol past the cave until the men reached the crest of the first ridge. The Japanese were waiting.

"All hell broke loose as we saw them and they saw us," Reynolds said. "Since they had been here for months, they had every place in those ridges plotted on their maps, and they knew the exact data to



American troops wait for Japanese soldiers to flee their cave position before opening fire with a .50 caliber machine gun.

give their mortars in order to hit anywhere they wanted. Everywhere we moved the mortar fire followed us. We returned mortar fire on them but they had caves and bunkers to protect them. We, on the other hand, had no topsoil to dig a hole in."

The mortars whistled down around them. The fighting was intense. The sun, now high in the sky, turned the black coral ridge into a furnace. Within an hour of fighting Raymond Gagnier and Bernard Kees were killed, and Reynolds faced his own worst fears: "A mortar round hit about six feet in front of me as I lay down among the jagged coral outcropping. Shrapnel became embedded in my hands and face, and as I took stock of myself, I realized everything



Japanese-held caves smolder after a gun and mortar assault.

had gone quiet. I was bleeding in several places but I didn't feel I was hurt too bad. But not being able to hear scared the hell out of me."

Reynolds found a medic. The medic wrote him a note: *You must be evacuated for proper care*. Reynolds said he wouldn't leave until he was sure someone else could observe the mortar fire in his place. "There were several wounded soldiers waiting to be carried out. Since I was able to walk, I helped carry the stretchers. On the way out, mortar shells were still bursting around us and I remember wondering if I would make it out of there alive. I could feel the percussion of the rounds and see the explosions."

On the way down the trail Reynolds saw Dean Henry, his friend from Harlowton, Montana. Henry was walking toward the battle with his machine gun. When the two men passed, Henry expressed concern about his injured friend. Neither had time to chat. Besides, Reynolds couldn't hear a word Henry said, so the two parted ways. Later that day, Henry was wounded in battle.

Nearly a month had passed since Second Battalion arrived on the island. Back home, Montana celebrated Independence Day with the rest of the nation. But on Biak there was little cause for celebration. The Japanese still held their ground in the rocky ridges, and the Americans still probed for new ways in. The surprise pre-dawn attack on June 26 had failed and the death toll was rising.

The slow progress threatened continued operations on Biak and caused a shift in the high command. General Horace Fuller was relieved as task force commander and replaced by General Robert Eichelberger. At his own request, General Fuller also resigned as 41st Division commander. General Jens Doe, a longtime favorite among the men of the 163rd, took his place and received his second star.

July 4 would see a different sort of fireworks on Biak. Commanders pulled their rifle companies off the line as mortar platoons from Companies D and H fired a steady volley of ordnance into the high ridges. The barrage lasted for three days and nights. Now it was time to inspect the damage. A reconnaissance team from A Company moved up for a closer look. The men returned with bad news—not only had the Japanese survived the volley, they were rebuilding their tattered positions.

The news was demoralizing and sent commanders scrambling to come up with a plan to dislodge the Japanese from the ridge once and for all. They devised a false escape route to allow Japanese stragglers to flee the battlefield. Those who took the route would be shot and killed; the Americans had the exit covered. Flamethrowers arrived as well. If the soldiers could get close enough to a cave to use them, they would burn anyone hiding inside.

The men in F Company put the new weapon to use. They approached a pillbox set into a cliff. When the patrol got to within fifteen yards of the position, the flamethrower fired a stream of burning fuel into the opening. "Japs screamed, crawled out, and ran around on fire," one soldier said. "We mercifully killed four of them as they ran. One died inside."

On July 22, commanders called on the Army Air Corps to break the stalemate at Biak. Rifle platoons once again withdrew from the hills. At dawn, crews increased their artillery and mortar fire, and when eight B-24 bombers appeared on the horizon that afternoon, the men cheered.

"They came in low-level with delayed action fuses on 1,000-pound bombs," Naegele said. "All of them unloaded at once, the whole works. The concussion—Boom! Boom! Boom! It was incredible. We were a couple miles away. It didn't last very long. They just dumped their whole load and kept going. They put them right in that small area. It was so tough on the Japanese they were goofy from the concussion."

Westerfield remembered similar results. "The bombs seemed to just float down. The ground exploded and trembled like an earthquake."

Smoke lingered heavy on the ridge. The bombers disappeared as quickly as they had come. Now it was time for the soldiers to move in and destroy any pockets of lingering resistance. Just how entrenched the Japanese were became clear. They had constructed as many as seventy-five pillboxes and occupied as many as seventeen caves. A naval cannon guarded one cave, protected by a bunker nine logs thick. Inside, the cave ran four stories deep. The men climbed a rope ladder down into the darkness. They found two Japanese soldiers hiding inside and shot them both. As they left, they blew the cave shut.

"They had caves with rivers down below," Naegele said. "They had decks built for sleeping quarters and kitchens and everything else. They were protected. It had been an impossible situation."

The caves were more meticulous than anyone had imagined. A patrol with L Company discovered a large cavern descending three stories and containing four different levels. A command log from that day reads: "Will dynamite cave this afternoon....To date—total of 17 caves, which could accommodate two-hundred enemies." The log described four caves as "extremely large." The larger caves



were used as both living quarters and aid station. One cave held sixty cases of mortar ammo, one bag of rice and one case of canned meat. In another, the men found more than forty Japanese soldiers in varying stages of decomposition.

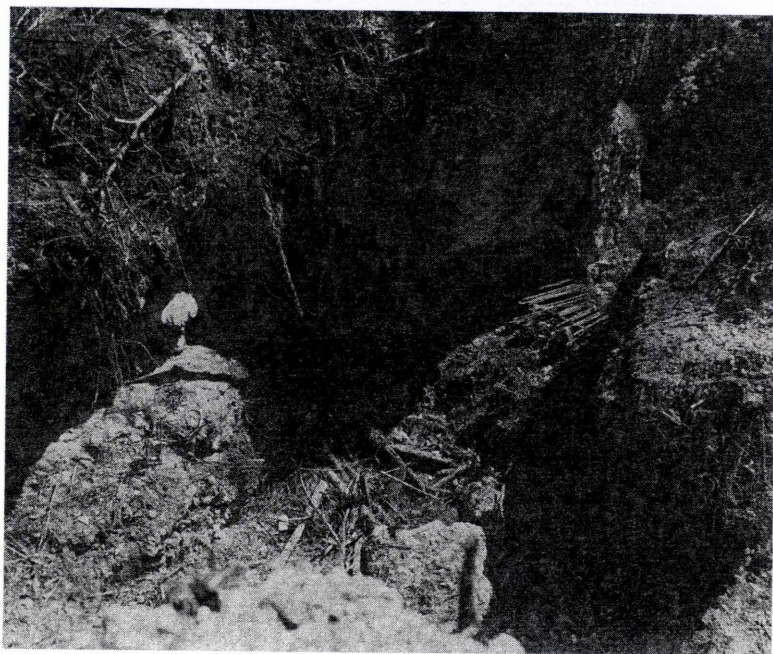
The GIs also found an assortment of American clothing, equipment and food. Rations included rice and canned meat. The dead Japanese soldiers found in one cave were said to be in good physical condition, equipped with good gear and clean clothes.

After such intense fighting, Naegele held little remorse for the Japanese soldiers who had died underground in the bombing run. "They deserved it. They were cruel, cruel people. They had no regard for life—none. Fortunately, their leadership was very weak. Their soldiers were well-conditioned but they weren't very smart. They were very devious."

Naegele believed better training, a tougher mentality and superior weaponry gave the Americans the final advantage at Biak. "The Japs had no supplies whatsoever, but they'd rarely surrender."

Notes

1. On the invasion of Biak, see McCartney, *Jungleers*, p. 117; Westerfield interviews, *41st Infantry Division*, pp. 183–192; and Reynolds, *History of World War II* (unpublished journal).



Troops explore parts of the elaborate Japanese defensive complex after a heavy bombing run helped destroy lingering resistance.