

DIARY OF TOSHIYASU TSUTSUTANI

4TH COMPANY 1ST BATTALION

23RD INFANTRY REGIMENT

We landed in Buin in January of 1943.

Since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war our 23rd infantry regiment were fighting well in the North and Mid China. After we had completed the second Chengsha military operations we expanded to Chonan and supervised there. Then our 23rd Infantry Regiment was concentrated near Wuchang in November 1942.

Nobody knew where we were to be sent. I also knew nothing about it. Some of the men were having an optimistic dream of returning to the homeland.

Late in November 1942 the regiment stayed at Wuchang for about a week and then left Mid China, along with all of our memories about the battles we had fought and the friends who were killed in action, and went down the Yanzi Jiang River. On the way we saw such beautiful scenery along the northern banks of the river. We landed at Nanking where we stayed for a night and then headed for Shanghai by train. We reached there before dawn and were billeted near Shanghai Junior High School. It was at the beginning of December.

After we've arrived in Shanghai we were kept busy everyday with the changing of equipment and the addition of new troops. Some of our men went back to Japan, but in exchange many additional troops replaced them including officers.

Weapons, our infantry company's light machine guns were changed from the good old Type 11 Light machine gun to the Type 96 Light machine gun. We got new clothes. They were summer issue, so we could imagine going south, but no one knew the exact destination. The officers of each company were concentrated in the headquarters of the SNLF. They were trained in supervising submarines and in spotting the track of torpedo. We were getting tense.

Before long we left Shanghai. The headquarters went aboard Oridono Maru with the main force of the 2nd Battalion, the 1st Battalion on Teio Maru, and the 3rd Battalion and the 4th Company on Meiu Maru. Wearing summer clothing at a time just before winter we envied the field gun fellows inside the ship.

The ships went south with a strict watch on under water and arrived on Pescadores Island. On new years day 1943 we arrived in Palau, landed for training, but went back on ship immediately and left as the situation had changed suddenly. On the 9th we landed on Truk Island and saw the combined fleet for the first time. We were going south for Guadalcanal Island, but since the operation was suspended our 6th Division was attached to the 17th Army and headed for Bougainville Island.

The division got divided into three parts and left Truk Island heading south in zigzags. On the evening of the 20th January Meiu Maru carrying the 3rd Division were attacked by an enemy submarine and sunk. Fortunately, the ship did not sink immediately, so the troops and weapons were not lost. After drifting for a day and a night, soldiers were quite

exhausted and suffered a great deal of mental shock, as it was a first time experience for everyone.

22nd, at last we land at Buin, Bougainville. We headed for the gathering point at night and joined the main body of the regiment. The bivouac in Bougainville was completely different from the one in mid China. Fortunately in our regiment there were many troops from Okinawa and so they taught us how to make a roof from the bark of the Manila hemp² trees that were growing wild. Thanks to them we managed to shelter from the rain.

This was the last time that the regiment was gathered in the one place. We didn't have much work to do except from maintaining arms, munitions, and other equipment. And also the air raid from the enemies was always at night and furthermore it was only on a small scale. Just in case we did make an air raid shelter, but seemed we didn't need even that.

Since the regiment was concentrated in the one place Colonel Hamanoue the regimental commander decided to hold a sports meeting. We made a track out of a relatively flat field of palms. The fantastic run and jump of 2nd Lt. Taniguchi Mutsuo, an adjutant of the 3rd Battalion amazed us all.

Scouting geological features and making maps.

At the beginning of February 1943 I was told to scout geological features to the Gazelle Gulf on the West Coast. At that time we only had a nautical chart and not of the inland areas.

I judged that Laguai (which was the gathering place) to Gazelle Harbour was 60km in a straight line from a chart. But thinking of the errors of the chart, I prepared for the scouting assuming it as 70km. I went scouting with two squads serving under me and one wireless squad from the communications units.

We arrived at Aku using a compass. Fortunately we found a guide there but the negotiation was hard. They were using a language called "Pidgin" that had been derived from English. From then on we decided to hire a new guide whenever we were in a different tribal area.

The paths were so narrow that it was possible just for the hares to go through. We had to go through them moreover in a rainforest in lat. 70s, though the temperature was low we all got troubled by an awful dampness and the rivers that appear every few kilometres. We stayed at Taitai and Mosigetta for one night each and arrived at the destination, Mamareko¹, Gazelle Harbour.

All we did was just walking through the paths of the rainforests which were quite dark even though it was still noon. We walked in straight lines when possible with the idea of constructing a car road by expanding the paths. It was fortunate to have scouted by foot so as to have gathered so much information.

I gave my report to Col. Yamanouchi, division's chief of staff. After a week or so I was asked to return to Gazelle since the divisions staff had decided to investigate for themselves. We went along with the same members as well as Major Fukuda, 1st Battalion commander.

Nothing much happened but we could easily imagine that the operation wouldn't be without its share of difficulties. Especially in a jungle that has poor visibility and no specified map of the area. We were in an uncertain condition considering the basis of army behaviour that you try to determine the place that you are in.

After the scouting the regiment marched forward to Taitai. The 1st Battalion headed near Mosigetta and the 4th Company, the company that I am in, headed for Mamareko¹. We scouted geological features and stuff so as to build up a strong point in the future.

At that time the 2nd Battalion moved to the Shortland Islands leaving the 7th Company behind in Bougainville. The 3rd Battalion was with the 4th Company, that I was in. They had been attacked while on the Meiu Maru by an enemy submarine and were in Buin to recover their fighting strength. They moved to Rekata, on the Northern end of Isabel Island, late in April and changed the guard with the 2nd Division. Hence the regimental commander was left with the 1st Battalion and the 7th Company under his command.

The 4th Company went directly to Mamareko¹ while the 1st Battalion and the other companies went on building the roadway and arrived at Taitai at the beginning of March. They reached Mosigetta in mid March and kept guard there.

After all of the deposition of troops were finalised we started construction of billets. A well-covered and dry location was chosen to build raised floor accommodation. Materials were everywhere but the only thing that we didn't have was nails. So we built everything with cane-work and made the roof from woven palm fronds. It was so comfortable compared to the shabby shed that we used to sleep in.

After the billet, we started making a map. As you could see the coastline with your eyes we managed to make a map quite quickly using trigonometry. It was not as easy though when mapping the interior.

The only way we could measure the road was Dousenhou (Road Line Method) and at the same time checking direction and distances so it took us ages. Moreover as each squad took charge of their own area, the distances didn't always agree and we had a hard time.

It was during our work, on the 18th April 1943 that Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto the Commander-in-Chief of the combined fleet was killed in the air over Buin. The belief of an invincible combined fleet got insecure and we were quite depressed.

The situations before enemy attack.

30th June 1943, the US military attacked Rendova and three days later they landed at Munda. Because of these developments the 3rd Battalion withdrew from guarding Rekata and returned to Bougainville late in July. However on the 30th July it was on the move again, this time for Kolombangara Island under a commander from the South-East Detachment.

They then forged ahead to Banga Island immediately and fought bravely producing excellent results. They lost though many comrades, particularly the main strength of their battalion after being attacked by an enemy fleet and a destroyer after leaving Kolombangara Island.

The battalion having not received any supplies then marched across Choiseul Island and was picked up by the 2nd Battalion which was guarding the northern end. They finally returned to Bougainville on the 13th October after four months of desperate fighting.

The 2nd Battalion which had been guarding the Shortlands from March returned to Bougainville at the beginning of August. They had orders to guard Torokina but upon reaching Taitai these orders were cancelled. They ended up staying at Laguai where once more they received orders that subsequently were suspended, these were for a dispatch to Mono Island. Eventually late in August they advanced to the northern end of Choiseul Island and picked up the evacuated 3rd Battalion.

At Mamareko¹ the 4th Company was detailed from the 1st Battalion and were busy doing guard duties as well as expanding roads and making maps. A squad (which Morinaga was in) was dispatched to Motupena Point, which was 5km south west of Mamareko¹. There they were to observe the cape, liasing with a navy observer.

In August 1943 the regiment headquarters were moved to Taitai. At the same time the main force of the 1st Battalion under Major Fukuda advanced from Mosigetia to Mamareko¹ and started to fortify the area.

The geological features around Mamareko¹ had a curved coastline at Gazelle Harbour and had a reef, which was four to five hundred metres away from the coast. There were always white crested waves. Between the reef and the coast was a calm surface of water 3 or 4 metres deep.

There were a little bit of coconut palm groves by the seashore, everywhere else was covered in dense forest. There were lots of typical South Seas trees 20 to 30 metres high, in between was a dense growth of vines. You could never see more than 5 metres ahead of you. The roots were huge and this made it hard to walk.

These were the typical Bougainville forests. The ground near the seashore at Mamareko¹ was damp and when we dug we found water. Maybe for the enemy it might not have seemed such a big obstacle, but for us it was hard work constructing our positions.

There was though good materials all over the place and if we had enough workers we could have made anything. However since we didn't have any cement we couldn't get rid of our misgivings; that's how well our shelters could protect us from enemy attacks.

Those days we didn't have enough supplies but still it was comparatively good. Just off shore at Mamareko¹ was a cargo boat of 3 – 4 hundred tons, which we called "the sea truck". It was an unarmed civil boat employed by the navy and we respected the crews braveries in completing such a long trip to the Southern Hemisphere.

At that time Sgt. Moriaga who was in charge of the observation team at Motupena Point saw two of our pilots come down accidentally above the Gazelle Harbour. They were floating so he saved them immediately by canoe. The fighters that landed were from an army squadron based at Rabaul. They had been flying on a mission to Rendova when damaged by enemy fire and managed to make an escape. Unfortunately their fuel had run out and were forced to ditch their planes in the gulf.

There was one more fighter pilot that had landed his plane on the grasslands behind Motupena Point. I reported to the battalion chief straightaway and got the search under way. However it seemed as if it were grasslands that would make a good field for landing, but actually it was swampy ground and alas the pilot was unable to extract himself and was found dead. We recovered the machinegun and compass and a piece of his body and returned to Mamareko¹. I realised that the distance from the base for the fighter planes were an important factor in winning a fight. The two rescued pilots made their way to Buin on foot.

At that time the troops were quite healthy. However there were some malaria patients since it was in the tropics, they suffered fevers everyday. There was however no situation where all of the troops of the squad got infected.

There was some other diseases like tropical tumours. When we treated them they seemed to have been cured but after they would reappear. The troops were calling them platoon tumours, company tumours, or battalion tumours depending on how large they were. It was a kind of kidding but they were such an unpleasant thing to have.

Cape Torokina was at a distance that could just be barely seen from Mamareko¹. Between them, all of the jungle lined beaches provided good landing spots. In this area there was the equivalent to one squad dispatched from the 1st Battalion. In September the 2nd Company was dispatched as well. The company commander was Horinouchi, he payed me a visit on his way to Torokina. I think he was from Hokkaido and one year senior to me. I felt that he was ready for his death as he said goodbye with a smile. That was the last time I saw him alive.

For the meantime in the northern area one squad from the 7th Company was collecting all kinds of information.

The 3rd Battalion which had escaped from Kolombangara Island were billeting somewhere between Mosigetta & Mamareko¹ while recovering their health and fighting spirit which had suffered quite a lot.

Attacking Torokina.

We were building up our defences for the coming attack. We dispatched the troops and did some field practice and training. We were raising the morale to regain the honour that had been lost in the fighting on Guadalcanal.

Everyone under the officer didn't think about coming back alive but thought of the strengthening of the forces and so trained at bayonet drill (fencing). WO Yamaji was a professional. We only used two protectors and trained hard in the forest. I remember the words that the divisions staff officer had to say, "If the USA's military see this fighting spirit they will hesitate to land". This memorial bayonet drill trainings ended on 31st October 1943.

1st November before dawn I got woken up by a thunder like roaring of guns. Then WO Yamaji said, "I hear the sound of gunfire. I'll go down to the beach" and ran out. I followed him immediately and Sgt. Major Hatanaka and 2nd Lt. Inada as well. The direction the sound came from was definitely Torokina.

We reported immediately to the battalion headquarters. The company was despatched to guard the place and the observer at Motupena Point were to report the action of the enemy warships.

I knew nothing of what the regiment or the battalion were planning but anyway I prepared just in case we make a sortie with WO Yamaji.

The roar got lower but the enemy's fighter and reconnaissance planes started to fly above our heads.

The squads were told not to go to the seashore and prepare to adapt ourselves to fit the situation. We still don't know what's going on. Enemy fighter planes are getting more active. After a while their squads would be strengthened, moreover with their mechanical technologies an airfield would be constructed in a moment and the number of fighter planes would increase.

Anyway if the bombardment was really of the 2nd Company at Torokina, I am sure of their complete defeat. They only had some machine guns and a cannon. We still knew no information about the bombardment.

Soon after noon, stir began to run through the troops. An orderly reported that Kubo, an army surgeon, came back. He is from Sagaken and graduated from Seoul Medical College. He had joined our 1st Battalion in Shanghai. He really liked to make jokes, he was a person with a fine character. He reported what had happened to the 2nd Company, to the battalion chief with his army sword still on his waist. The 2nd Battalion had been completely beaten up.

On the 3rd November we got orders to attack Torokina. We were already prepared so we waited, but the order to depart didn't come. In the early morning of the 4th we got the order. The order was to reach the forest located east of Jaba, which was 15km north of Mamareko¹.

The 4th Company left the 3rd Platoon in Mamareko¹ and headed to the destination along the coastline. It took time because we had to watch out for the enemy's planes but it was better than the squad that had to carry heavy weapons. We had 150 men in our company.

Our company was followed by the main body of the battalion and then the main body of the regiment and then the heavy weapons squads. Even if we could have hidden from the enemy planes, it was quite possible that their submarines had observed our long march. Anyway we had to march along the shoreline because it takes too much time to go through the forest and then the enemy might strengthen their guards. Although it was along the shoreline we had to walk through the bushes, so it was not that easy. When the planes came we temporarily hid in the bushes. It took a lot of effort but we finally got to Jaba in the late afternoon. We could see towards Torokina well from the seaside at Jaba. They seemed to have a runway and we heard some noises of planes.

From here we had to march at night. It was a lot more difficult to walk at night. Particularly the Jaba River was so deep and we got into the water to our necks. We marched at night, at 10pm we camped in the jungle south of Napoi (Koiari) and prepared for the next day.

Next morning we entered a hilly district. We marched behind the 3rd Company. All went quite smooth. In the afternoon we decided to walk across the Saua River, its width being about 100 metres and as a river in Bougainville it was comparatively big. The point we had to walk across was flat land and there was a strong probability that we could get fired upon. Fortunately though we didn't get bombarded.

After we had marched forward for an hour, the march stopped suddenly. I thought I heard the sound of a gun. In this situation we got an order to fan out to the left side of the 1st Company. Suddenly we were fired on fiercely from the right, it was 4pm. This was the first shots fired at us by the US Army. We couldn't even poke our heads up. WO Yamaji and I were at the same place and we both couldn't do a thing, there should have been the 1st Company on our right. We thought that maybe we were shooting at each other by mistake so WO Yamaji shouted, "We are your friends! We are the 4th Company!" (in Japanese), but we were fired on some more from within the distance that could have heard his shout. We still considered the possibility that they could be our friends so we did not fire back. The firing then suddenly stopped. At that moment the 1st Company was already marching forward and the firing was from US troops that had penetrated behind them.

The company marched on towards Torokina heading towards the seaside. After a while we were fired on again from in front. The first platoon started counter attacking, they were firing at each other fiercely at close range. When I ordered the 2nd platoon to attack from the left, from behind them, 2nd Lt. Andou reacted immediately, when we fired some light machine guns and grenades the enemy retreated. Because it was getting dark already the company built up a strong point there and prepared for a possible bombardment. I told the troops to dig a shelter just under a big tree. Such a method of shelter had become common sense for the soldiers.

The position we had grabbed from the US Army consisted of 10 people. There were just some easily made shelters and behind these were 10 boxes of C rations, actually we didn't realize that until the next morning because it was getting dark when we took the position. For the whole night we could hear enemy trench mortar shells bursting far behind us.

Losing ¼ troops.

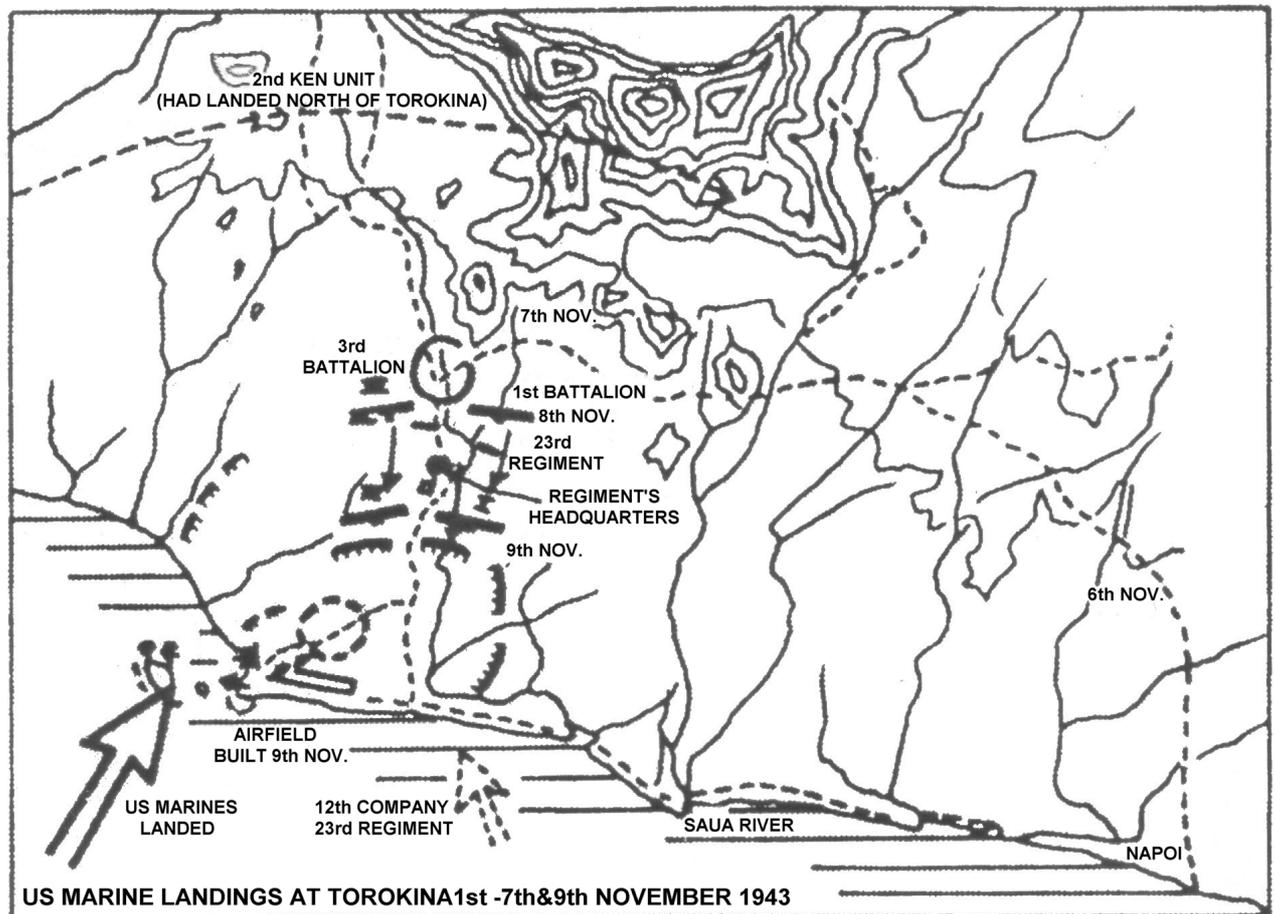
As day broke on the 8th November we received an order to march forward and keep on attacking. The 2nd Platoon was at the company's front line, so we started to move forward. The battalion commander Major Fukuda came near me and used the compass to see the direction to attack. He was always brave, as he had been in China, and always marched at the frontline along with the company commander. For this all of the troops trusted and respected him.

Jungle fighting always happens to be shooting at close range. Their carbines were quick at firing and it was the same as if every one of them had a machine gun. When they started firing it was like roasting tons of sesame seeds.

The bullets fly just above our heads and when they hit a small tree it easily collapses, so the area seemed to have been cleared. When there was a dead person we couldn't even see them because of the fallen trees. It took hours to go 20 – 30 metres forward because

the enemy was so strong. I called out to the 1st Platoon and put 3 light machine guns in a line and marched forward firing. At last we managed to occupy the area. Marching a further 20 – 30 metres we met more enemy and again we had such a huge fight that all the surrounding trees were felled. For a while there was a deadlock and when I was talking with WO Yamaji on what to do our battalion commander came along. As I was reporting the situation to him he was shot. “You got shot sir”, I said and moved near him. “Be quite”, he said and he was really calm. He was a samurai. Even though it was 40 years ago I can still picture those days. I think after a few minutes WO Yamaji was shot as well.

At this moment the 1st Machine Gun Company (1st Lt. Sanjo) arrived to back us up. With their fierce firing the enemy retreated. After taking almost a day we occupied their guarded position and it wasn't long before the 1st Company, which was in the second line, got ahead of us and marched to the area along Torokina road.



At 4pm we were caught in a sudden shower. It became even darker in the forest and we thought it was a perfect time to march forward attacking. The front marched forward at once and the 4th Company went left and reach Piva River. Again there was a deadlock and as it got dark each platoon formed a circle and dug shelters in case of bombardment. We were lucky not to have lost any soldiers by that time.

The 3rd Battalion deployed to the right of the 1st Battalion and advanced aggressively. But there were about 300 enemies on the northern banks of the Piva River making a

strong stand. Above our heads were 30 fighter planes that obstructed our advance, however we managed to overrun their position until the evening and then we reached the 1st Battalion.

This night Colonel Hamanoue, the regimental commander, analysed the situation and decided to destroy their trench mortar as it was thought to be the reason we had difficulty in advancing. So he commanded the 7th company to go and destroy them but they eventually gave up because of the marshy terrain.

The next day the 4th Company started to advance and to their surprise found that the enemy had pulled back. The advance took time though as we had to crawl flat on the ground. Before long we reached an area without much scrub and so we could walk. After walking 300 meters we met the enemy bombardment at 9.30am. I got the company to make a great leap behind them. Fortunately there was a creek running whose depth was unexpectedly deep reaching our breasts, so I deployed the troops in there. The enemy bombardment was fierce and charged in our direction while keeping up his fire.

Mortars rained down, their fuses were set for immediate explosion and they all exploded when hitting the trees. Exploding at the top of the trees the broken pieces fall down to the ground. It was like a shrapnel shell, it was like a continuous machine gun. There was more light since the top of the trees were all crushed. The enemy started to fire a signal frequently and seemed to avoid shooting by mistake. It wasn't long until maybe they had found out that we were in the creek and they started firing rifles and machineguns.

On our right was a battalion gun. I don't know how they fixed their legs but they bravely started firing from zero distance in the river. The enemy stopped firing and after about an hour the battlefield started to fall silent. I was worried about the main force of the regiment that were caught in the middle of the battle, so I sent Sgt. Major Hatanaka to the battalion headquarters. He returned after 30 minutes.

He reported the regiment adjutant's directions, "The main force of the regiment was severely damaged. The 4th Company are to escape from here and join the main force of the battalion. They had already escaped".

I organised the battalion gun escape first, which took a long time and then organised the escape of the 4th Company. Fortunately there were no more enemy troops so the company could evacuate quite quickly. Just in case we fired a few shots but there was no reaction. The company met the main force of the regiment at 12.30pm. We lost 17 people that day. Especially, I heard with profound regret the death of 2nd Lt. Fukuda, leader of the 1st Platoon.

The 3rd Battalion was also bombarded and so they also evacuated. Colonel Hamanoue, the regimental commander, was wounded in the battle, as was also Major Tanaka, staff officer of dispatch. Captain Ooba the 3rd Battalion commander took over command. The regiment decided to retreat to the Saua River and from there to prepare for the next attack.

10th November was a day that we spent sending back the wounded and fortunately there were no attacks. Since Mid-China this was our first tragic battle. 160 were killed in

the battle and even more were wounded. We had 1200 men, so we had lost $\frac{1}{4}$ of our men in just one action.

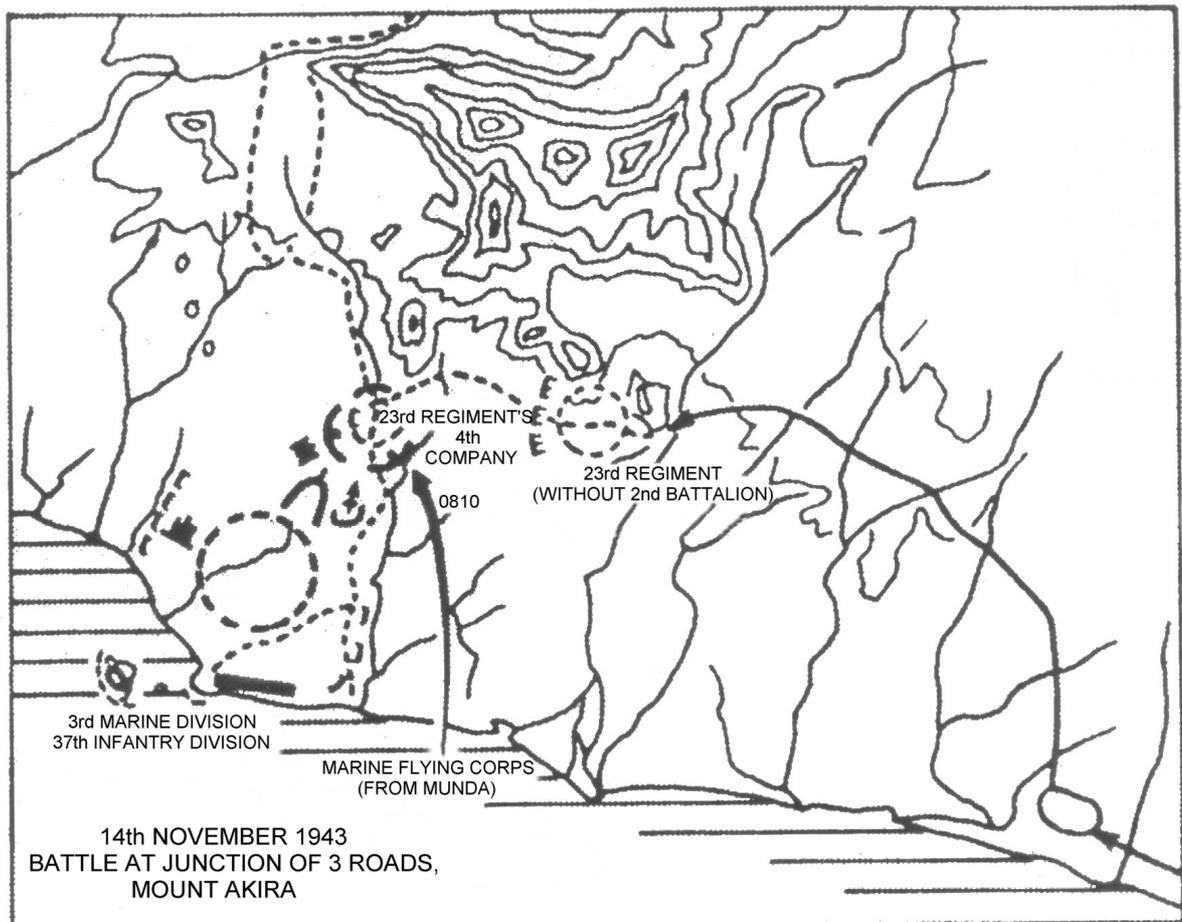
Destroying the enemy completely at Napoi (Koiari).

On the 12th November Ooba, the proxy regimental commander, ordered the 1st Battalion to stop the advance of the enemy towards us and help the regiment to recover the attack on Torokina. The 1st Battalion delegated this task to myself, the chief of the 4th Company.

The 4th Company, at 4pm, with a machinegun platoon, headed to the foot of Piva hill. We had a careful lookout for enemies during the march, but there were none. There were not yet any enemy around the junction of the three roads (junction of East West trail & Numa Numa trail).

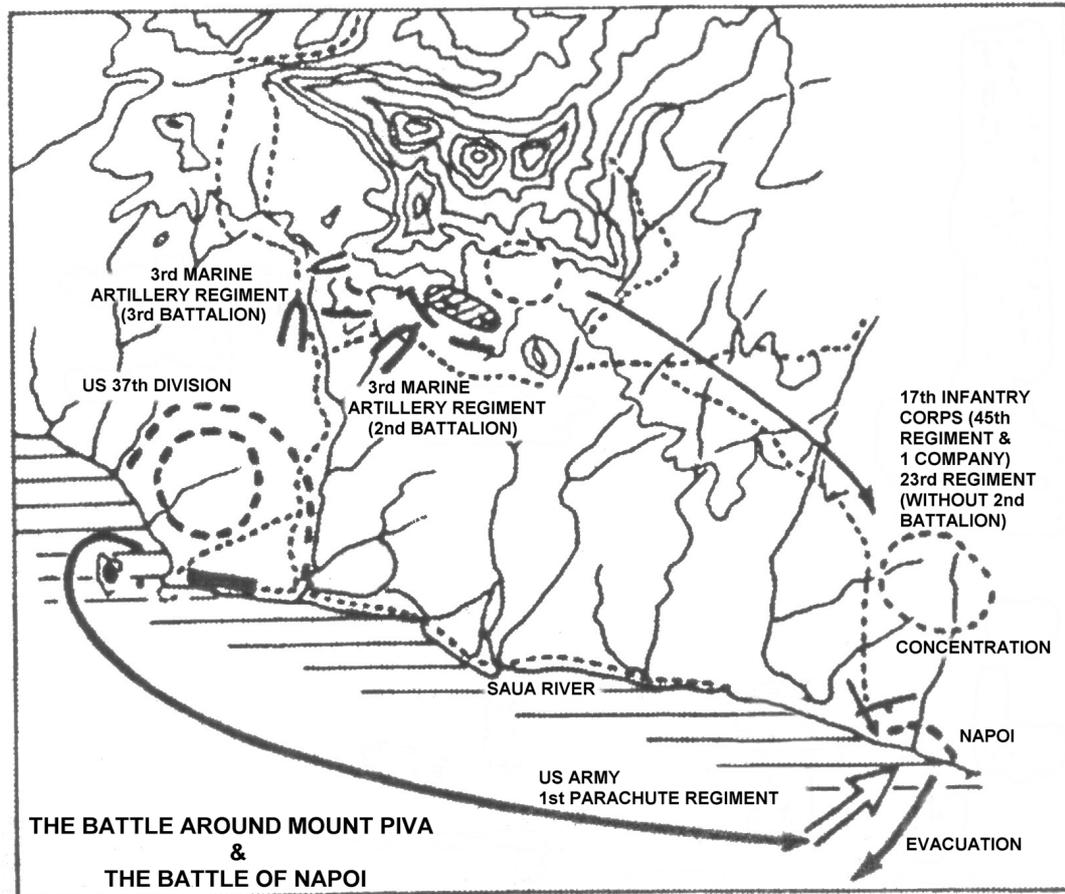
We started to dig in straight away. (6pm) The position was in a circle of about 60 – 70 meters diameter. We made it so that we could shoot in four directions. The shelter was dug under a big tree and covered with branches.

That night there were no clouds and we had a full moon. The mud was soft since it was volcanic ash, so the construction went smoothly. We finished our work before dawn.



At 9am on the 13th the enemy arrived and we started fighting (Battle of Coconut Grove*). As we had constructed our positions on a reverse slope the enemy couldn't see us until they were right up close. So at 20 meters away from our position we opened fire killing a good number of them. They also lost some of their men while helping those

caught in the fire. Their trench mortar wasn't very effective against our position as it was small. They were totally confused.



14th the enemy increased their number of troops. We were attacked by trench mortars and fighter planes but there was no damage, at that time we got an order to withdraw but it was of course impossible, so we continued fighting. At noon some enemy tanks arrived but they couldn't locate our position and we managed to damage the tracks on one of them. At 1pm the enemy withdrew and so we also made good our withdrawal to the regimental assembly point.

At that time the main force of the 1st Battalion had already reached the point 1km west of the junction of the three roads. On the 15th they constructed a strong point 1km northeast of the junction in preparation for the enemy's advance.

The enemy advanced to the Numa Numa road and closed it. The 1st Company attacked them but didn't succeed. The enemy then expanded their bridgehead from the western side of Piva River to the western area of Tenou Mt (Cibik Ridge^{*}).

The regimental commander returned the 4th Company to the 1st Battalion and also moved some troops from the 3rd Battalion to the 1st Battalion in order to strengthen it. From the 21st we attacked Tenou Mt. (Cibik Ridge^{*}) but again we got caught with trench mortars and it didn't succeed. The mountain was steep and it was impossible to climb up and so we gave up the attack.

At the time the detachment headquarters were in Napoi (Koiari). However the detachment commander thinking that there is a strong probability of enemy landing

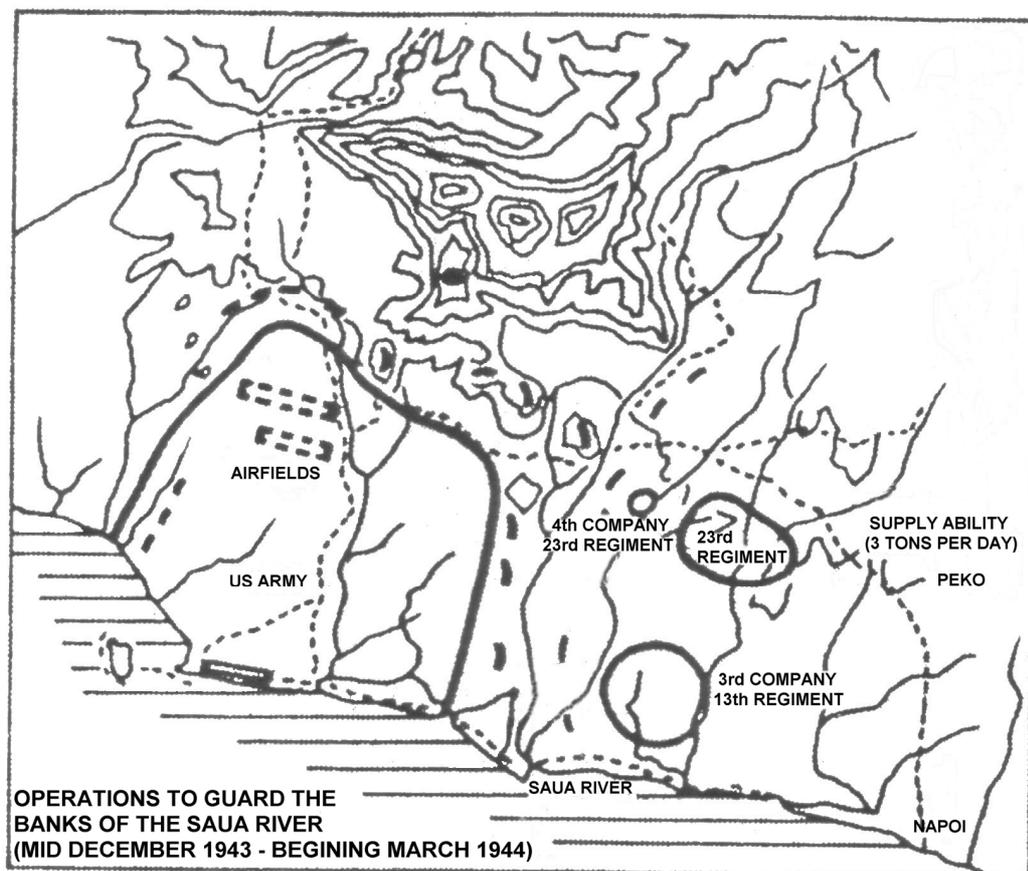
around Napoi (Koiari) ordered our regiment which was in the area of Tenou Mt. (Cibik Ridge*) to gather at Napoi (Koiari). We headed for Napoi (Koiari) from the morning of the 25th. The 4th Company, which was the rear guard, arrived at Napoi (Koiari) on the 27th. We were now under the command of the newly appointed battalion commander Captain Tsuruya.

The 27th & 28th was quite and uneventful so we got some good sleep. Since 7th November we had been fighting everyday. We were suffering from bombardments, damp land, and decreasing supplies. We also had failure in our attacks. The mental anguish was so painful, even worse than physical fatigue. The troops were exhausted!

On 29th, in the morning, the enemy landed. The gathered regiment immediately went to the landing point and attacked them. The 4th Company was in the right front line of the battalion and attacked towards the shoreline.

The enemy's gunboat started bombarding us. In the afternoon there was some fighter planes that fired towards the ground. We were desperate because we couldn't lose Napoi (Koiari) in order to recover Torokina. They received quite a battering from our infantry rifles, other heavy firearms, and the zero distance bombardments. Finally in the evening they withdrew leaving plenty of war supplies.

We then proceeded to the left bank of the Saua River in order to guard against the enemy crossing over to the left side of the river. I posted guards and lookouts on the left bank and the main force of the company at the main line of resistance. I sent a scout to the Saua River everyday to keep a lookout for any enemy.



1943 was coming to an end like this. However the troops had a hard time cooking because of the planes. They had to cook in the middle of the night and before dawn and had to be very careful so as not to produce any visible smoke.

In January the enemy started to fire some kind of a field gun and at the same time sent a scout into our area. On the 10th February 1944 there was a skirmish between our scouts and a group of enemy scouts. They soon withdrew but we lost our patrol leader, Sgt. Major Hatanaka. That day WO Yamaji who was wounded at Torokina returned from medical care. They were both old friends but unfortunately they couldn't congratulate their health together.

Just before the battle of Napoi (Koiari) we increased our strength with the return of the 3rd Platoon, whose leader was 2nd Lt. Manji. However the actual conditions were not so good. Our company had lost 83 troops killed in the fighting and adding the number of wounded and sick, our strength was like one platoon. Other companies were almost in the same situation.

The night before the 2nd Torokina attack.

For the 2nd attack on Torokina, we changed the guard of the left bank of the Saua River with the 13th Infantry Regiment and headed for Kujun Mt., the place where the regiment was. The distance was not very far but it took longer than what I expected since we were physically tired and we had to cut a path through the forest as we went.

Moreover there were many steep hills and it was hard for the foot soldiers to walk. The heavy firearms squad had an even harder time, while the foot soldiers were resting, they were panting under the heavy loads, shoulders bleeding, both day and night. I couldn't imagine how hard it was. At the same time our company's Sannomiya Platoon forged ahead on the planes behind the highlands of the enemy's position and backed up the regiments advance.

As I have mentioned before, our regiment's 2nd battalion had been stationed on Choiseul Island since August 1943. For the purpose of helping to recover Torokina they returned to Bougainville late in January 1944 and late in February they went back to Peko where the regiment headquarters were.

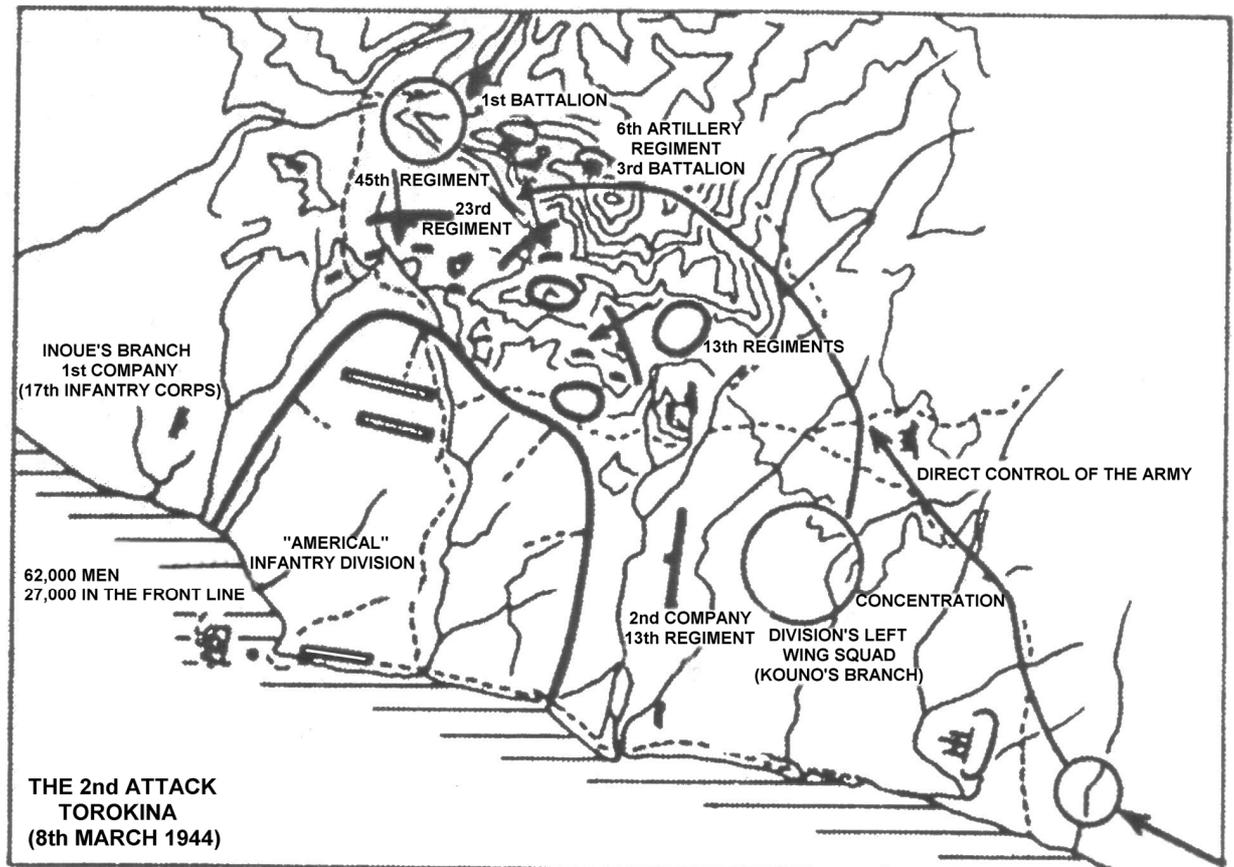
The 1st Battalion was so fatigued due to the first Torokina operations. Also the 3rd Battalion was still fatigued from both the Battle of Kolombangara and the first Torokina operation. It was in this condition that the 23rd Infantry Regiment found itself while constituting the main force.

So on the 6th March the regiment, for the attack on "800 highlands" (Hill 700*) deployed the 2nd Battalion to the right frontline of Yae Mt. and the 3rd battalion to the left frontline. The 1st Battalion was deployed in reserve.

To get to the foot of the Mt. each battalion had to climb over a mountain range just behind it. We were tired, what with the heavy equipment and the steep gradient. When descending down the other side we saw the enemy's position. There was an airfield. The heavy firearms squad and artillery had a really hard time of it. I could not express how painful it was for them, for they managed to bring the heavy arms over the Mt. whose

height was over 1000 meters. Our regiment under the command of Lt. Col. Kono was a main force of the Iwasa Detachment and fanned out. We waited until the time was ripe.

We started attacking on the 8th March. The division's strategy was to first let the Iwasa Detachment drive a wedge between the enemy lines at "800 highlands" (Hill 700*) and have the enemy strength concentrated here. Then the 13th Infantry Regiment on the 10th March attacked the "600 highlands" (Hill 260*) to concentrate their forces to the eastern side of the bridgehead. During that the 45th Infantry Regiment, the most powerful force, attacked from the western side of the bridgehead to destroy their airfield and capture them.



In addition the artillery assists them (12 Mountain Artilleries, 2 15cm Howitzers and 2 10cm Howitzers). The mountain artilleries were positioned at the top of Kuju Mt. (Blue Ridge*) Howitzers were at Mt. Akeyama which was north of Napoi (Koiari). The artillery was to attack the airfield with their full force when the Iwasa Detachment started attacking. After which they were to support the infantry with their firepower. They only had though 40 15cm rounds, 80 10cm rounds and 1200 mountain artillery rounds between them, but even though they still had a hard time carrying them.

We were beaten by the enemy's bombardment.

On the 8th March, the 23rd Infantry Regiment at the frontline were ordered to attack the "800 highlands" (Hill 700*) and Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill*) that constituted the main part of the enemy's position. This was an important attack that would affect the fate of our army. The 2nd Battalion at the right front line whose chief was Major Abe were to

attack Temoku Mt. and the 3rd Battalion at the left front line whose commander was Major Ooba were to attack the “800 highlands”

However at 4.30am we started firing. The infantry marched forward attacking. The artillery fire was accurate and the airfield was on fire everywhere. We could see planes leaving. I felt great satisfaction after such a long time, but the next moment the enemy's ships cannons, heavy cannons and anti-aircraft guns opened fire towards the top of the mountain. We were overwhelmed. The infantry fought with bare hands. Shells rained down on the infantry and it wasn't long before the surrounding forest had caught alight. Both battalions suffered a huge blow.

8th March, night. The 3rd Battalion that was attacking the “800 highlands” (Hill 700*) lost half of their men. We couldn't restart attacking and were sorting out the battle line.

On the other hand the 2nd Battalion that had headed for Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill*) had to attack at night and so waited. However at 9.30pm they were bombarded by the enemy fleet offshore and suffered a loss. The battalion commander had been very persuasive of the importance of Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill*) and was firm that his troops should attack it.

The 2nd Machinegun Company's efforts deserve a special mention. The company losing all but 13 men had charged at the enemy at 11.30pm. The company commander was wounded and blew himself up with one of his own hand grenades.

We failed to attack at night, however the battalion commander ordered us to attack at 12.30am on the 9th and we occupied the southern slope of Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill*) but lost contact with the regiment. From noon on the 9th the 2nd Battalion was counterattacked. They had expended their ammunition so it put them in a difficult situation. At 1.30pm the enemy occupied the “800 highlands” (Hill 700*) and Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill*) but the battalion still defended the others desperately.

It was hard for the 2nd Battalion to have any contact with the regimental commander. The scouts couldn't make any contact but 2nd Lt. Sannomiya from the 4th company finally succeeded in contacting them on the 11th.

In this severe situation Major Abe, the battalion commander, was self-possessed. “As long as I'm alive, we will occupy Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill*)” he said. “We don't have any provisions. If there could be any supplies, we want hand grenades”, he requested. The regiment then collected grenades from the squads around the headquarters and supplied them to the 2nd Battalion. On the other hand the 3rd Battalion had been exhausted but after the attack on the “800 highlands” they were near to total destruction.

The regimental commander, considering the situation of the 3rd Battalion had sent the 4th Company (without the Sannomiya Platoon) to reinforce them. So I, the 4th Company commander with WO Yamaji had reached the headquarters of the 3rd Battalion before the company itself. Major Ooba, the battalion commander, at the 8th station of the “800 highlands” (Hill 700*) thinking that a successful attack was impossible, ordered the 4th company to stay around the headquarters.

The strenuous efforts of Abe's battalion at Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill*) are praiseworthy. However the battalion was ordered to withdraw from the frontline.

The strength of the regiment at this time was:

1st Battalion 416 (including 10 officers)

2nd Battalion 228 (including 7 officers)

3rd Battalion 225 (including 9 officers)

The regiment had only the strength of 5 companies.

When our regiment was bravely fighting at Temoku Mt. and the “800 highlands”, the 23rd Infantry Regiment was attacking the “600 highlands” (Hill 260^{*}) on the 10th March before dawn and they managed to occupy the southern hill (South Knob^{*}). From the evening of the 10th the enemy started to counterattack from positions on the northern hill (North Knob^{*}), but we managed to beat them back.

Since the battle at Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill^{*}) and the “800 highlands” (Hill 700^{*}) weren't progressing the 45th Infantry Regiment that had started attacking lastly was the division's last card to play. So the division ordered Abe's battalion and the 3rd Battalion to observe Temoku Mt. (Cannon Hill^{*}) and the “800 highlands” (Hill 700^{*}) while the 23rd Infantry Regiment's 1st Battalion was disposed behind the 45th Infantry Regiment as a divisional reserve.

On the 12th the 45th Infantry Regiment tried to advance to the northern command but was prevented by enemy presence. They started attacking again on the 13th but the enemy got their caterpillars out and counterattacked us tree times from the morning, eventually losing our position that we had occupied with great effort at 3.30pm and retreated to starting point.

On the 15th the 45th Infantry Regiment started attacking in the morning while the main force of the battalion advanced to the airfield. However after sunrise the US Army started bombing as well as using flamethrowers and bazookas. By 9.30am we had lost the position that we had occupied.

We started to return to the place behind the 45th Infantry Regiment that was an important point to them. The return however wasn't easy. We had to cross through previously bombarded areas with no tree cover. This could lead to enemy spotter planes seeing and thus attacking us. We reached our destination, Napei Mt., with great effort, as it was steep going. We could not dig a shelter because of the risk of bombardment; instead we had to move frequently.

The soldiers were so exhausted and had become skinny through loss of weight; they looked really pitiful on the march. However we still had the spirit to attack and were ready to die for the battle. The distance wasn't very far but it took us such a long time and the plan to attack on the 19th was postponed until the 24th.

The 45th Infantry Regiment attacked, reaching the centre of the enemy's camp who then counterattacked with their full strength. With the 45th losing half their number we had lost the ability to fight.

At last the Torokina operations were suspended. We had fought bravely, even astonishing the enemy. Most of the squad fought at the risk of their lives embodied with a powerful spirit. Substantially we were defeated by the overwhelming quantity of their supplies.

During this operation we lost 468 troops and had 705 troops wounded.

The regimental commander, on the 25th, in the evening said to the officers, “It is really disappointing that we did not succeed but all of you had fought hard enough”

Fight with the Australian Army.

We returned to Taitai from Torokina. We didn't have the US Army chasing us so it was better. On the route we took we saw many dead soldiers, mostly having been reduced to a skeleton.

The soldiers who pulled out alive were also looking unearthly. The most horrible scene was the withdrawal of the heavy firearms squad. The sick walking day and night groaning and they were as slow as an ant.

Soon we passed Mamareko¹, this was some achievement for us considering that we were so exhausted and walking as slow as a cow, but at least we were leaving the enemy behind us. Then we passed Mosigetta where the headquarters had been and arrived at Runai which was to be our new base.

There we put effort into farming and collecting food and we tried to recover our health. When one's physical strength was bad they fell sick quite often died. We didn't have any supplies from the rear. The supplies were stocked for the next counterattack. We had to find food by ourselves, however our gardens were quite often destroyed by the enemy from the air.

Around this time the native's attitudes towards us were changing and were beginning to act more as if they were enemy. I don't really know, but I think that maybe the bombardment of the gardens is lead by the natives. We didn't have a direct battle but the situation was not very good. Even though we didn't have any battles we still had a lot of hard times, 1944 was drawing to a close.

The US Army, which had landed at Torokina and built a bridgehead, didn't pursue us. However early in 1945 the Australian Army, which had exchanged with the US Army at the end of 1944, started aggressive operations towards us.

When the 13th Infantry Regiment had retreated from the Puriata River and the Australian Army had crossed and had reached a place, so called “Australia-dai” (Slater's Knoll^{**}) we planned to attack them in this unprepared situation. We started the operations from the beginning of March.

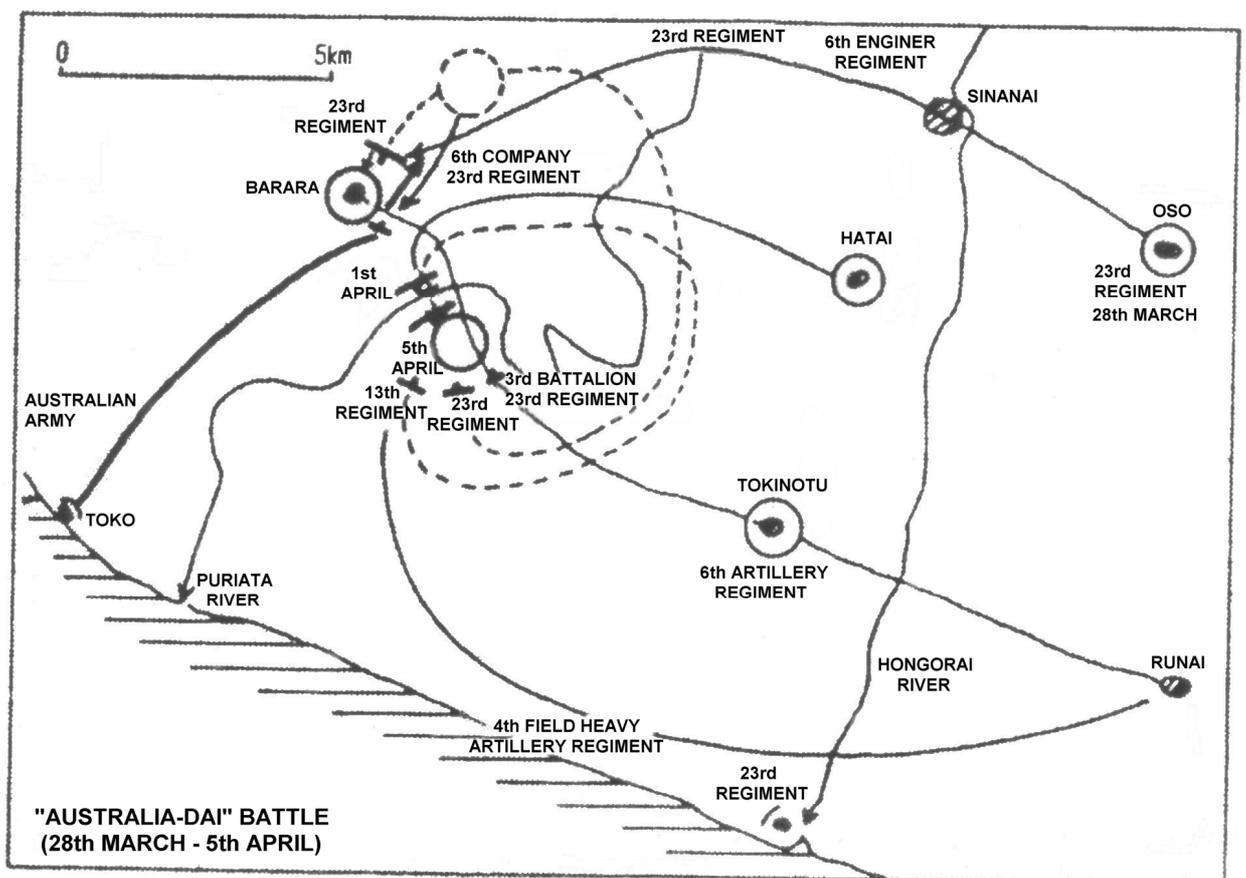
The operation was bold. The 13th Infantry Regiment were to attack from the west of “Australia-dai” (Slater's Knoll^{**}) and the 6th Field Gun Regiment were to attack from the east of “Australia-dai” (Slater's Knoll^{**}). The 23rd Infantry Regiment was to attack Barara.

During the night on the 29th March we defeated the enemy in Barara. We then made a detour and made a surprise attack on the junction of the three roads at Toko after which we received an order to attack “Australia-dai” (Slater's Knoll^{**}) from the staff officer of the division.

In this operation the 23rd Infantry Regiment was in the night frontline and from the Buin road we attacked the “Australia-dai” (Slater’s Knoll*). The main force of the regiment attacked the enemy’s main position and the 3rd Battalion attacked the left wing of the position.

The 1st Battalion was in the right frontline and the 2nd Battalion was in the left. We prepared at night and when we were just about to charge before dawn we were caught in a rain of bullets.

There were barbed-wire barricades around their positions. Soldiers charged to the wire and were killed. Afterwards other soldiers used their bodies to jump over the wires. It was totally like hell. In this situation our attack was really ineffectual and in a short time we were to lose. Most of the battalion/company officers and commanders were killed. It seemed that we had lost our fighting ability.

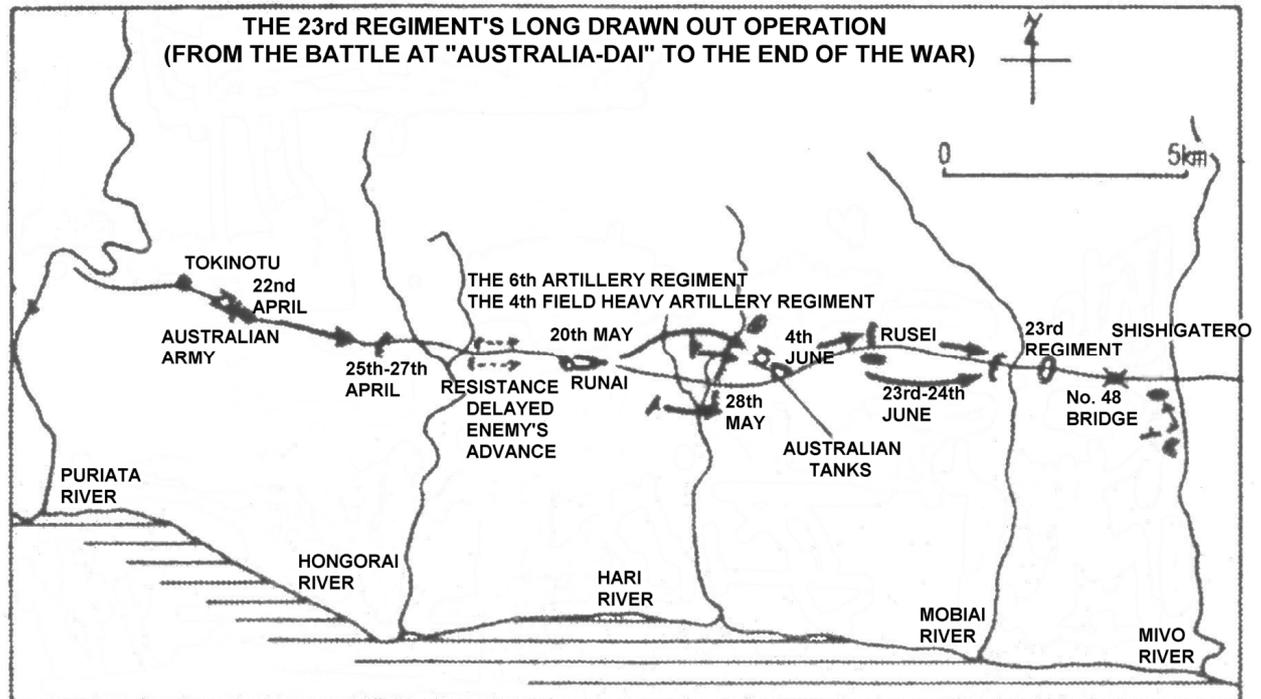


The 3rd Battalion’s main force was utterly destroyed and so the division ordered the former 1st Battalion commander Major Fukuda to suspend the attack and withdraw to the starting point. From then on Fukuda took command of the regiment.

On the 7th April the regiment constructed a position at the east bank of the Hari River. We put the cannon on the other side of the river. We planned to fire from the rear of the enemy. We also made many dummy positions. The enemy however didn’t attack from the front but from the right with tanks.

Our strength had become quite weak by now and the company had only 20 – 30 men, some had less than 20. Our strength might have been weak but our spirit was high and we

were well disciplined. On the 4th of June the regiment retreated to the western bank of the Mobiai River.



We would rather die than surrender.

We were so weakened by this time. Many soldiers were incorporated into the 23rd Infantry Regiment. We ate everything we could eat, lizards, snakes, etc. We could've died of hunger or a bullet. This was our situation before the last battle.

The regimental commander ordered the 2nd Battalion (Major Hasegawa being the commander) to occupy a position at the western side of Mobiai River. He also ordered the other battalions to go to the eastern bank in support of the 2nd Battalion.

The enemy attacked our 2nd Battalion on the 23rd June. Our counterattack succeeded twice but on the 24th we lost our position at last. The regimental commander ordered the 2nd Battalion to withdraw along with the main force of the regiment to Shishigatero. Now we had to guard the banks of the Mivo River or otherwise we would be in big trouble.

The regimental commander decided to build a strong point in the forest south of Shishigatero and we had the job to keep guard of the area.

In mid June the Australian Army arrived in the Mobiai River area. On the 26th they occupied the area between the A road and the B road, and reached No.48 bridge. They dug in here.

We attacked repeatedly and on the 9th of July the 2nd and 3rd Battalions also started attacking. We approached secretly and the engineers managed to break the barbed-wire barricade, but because of the fierce firing coming from the enemy we were setback.

At this moment the order came through from regimental headquarters to suspend the fight, but it was too late. The 2nd Battalion had already started to attack.

The 3rd Battalion was still there when the order arrived. After this, the regiment occupying the right bank of the Mivo River, made a lot of guerrilla warfare and prevented the enemy from advancing.

The soldiers were exhausted all the more. On the 9th August the 6th Company fought with only 12 soldiers at the position by the Mivo River. This situation was the same for all of the other squads. Before long the war was heading towards an end.

On the 17th August 1945 I received an order about burning the regimental flag. On the 20th August the special attack corps (suicide squad) returned on the evening, so all of the squads were back. All the officers gathered and in a solemn atmosphere burned the regimental flag.

By the way, of more than 5000 soldiers that were present when leaving Shanghai in December of 1942 only 135 survived to return to Japan.

¹ Mamareko was misspelt Mawareka on Australian maps as was Tokinotu (see maps) which was misspelt as Tokinoto.

² Manila Hemp (*Musa Textilis*), a banana like plant with inedible fruit.

* Names give by American troops to geographical locations in and around Torokina.

** Name given by the Australian troops to this geographical feature.