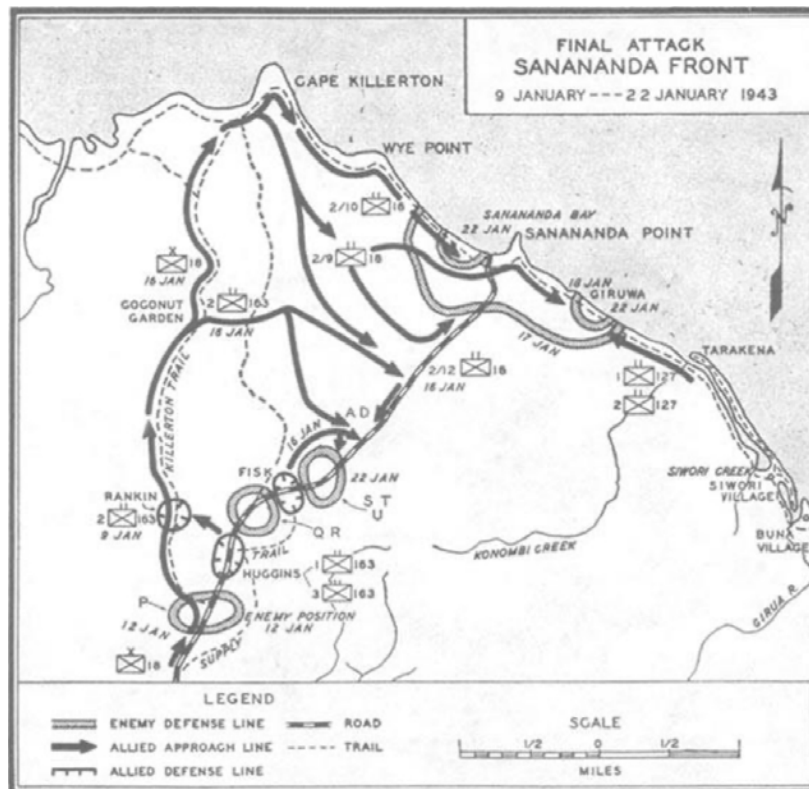


## Sanananda

by Colonel (Retired) John B. Driscoll

Montana's 163rd Infantry Regimental Combat Team Headquarters, as well as its 1st Battalion Headquarters and weapons Companies D, H, and M each in their turn slipped inside the steaming jungle perimeter called HUGGINS, as 163rd Commander Colonel Jens Doe assumed command of The Sanananda Front January 3, 1943. Earlier Lieutenant Harold Fisk from Company C, patrolling with Australian infantry, killed a Japanese sniper hidden in a vine-encased tree. Now Company B men were climbing into water-filled two-man foxholes in the jungle surrounding HUGGINS, a 75 x 50-yard grassy and bushy flat place under sniper-filled trees. After they'd replaced the exhausted Australian infantry, Japanese attacked twice, each time fast and hard for an hour, leaving six U.S. men dead. Four days after his first combat kill for the 163rd, Fisk died leading his platoon in an attack. When his partially cannibalized body was recovered by Company A near perimeter KANO, 300 yards northeast along the corduroyed Sanananda Trail, KANO became FISK.<sup>1</sup>



Map from: Victory at the Battle of Sanananda Road, Papua, 12-18 January 1943 ([army.gov.au](http://army.gov.au))

<sup>1</sup> 1735 members of the Montana Army National Guard's 163rd Infantry Regiment were sworn into federal military service to protect and defend our United States Constitution September 16, 1940. Respectively, 1st Battalion's Companies A, B, C, and D were stationed at Sidney, Poplar, Bozeman and Harlowton/Whitehall; 2nd Battalion's E, F, G, and H were at Culbertson/Wolf Point, Kalispell, Glasgow and Billings; 3rd Battalion's I, K, L, and M were at Great Falls, Lewistown, Billings and Chinook. Medics were at Whitefish and Service Company at Bozeman

Montana's infantrymen were in jungle hell-holes, L-shaped to help them survive rolling grenades. Straddle latrines outside the trip-wired rattle-cans and grenades were for day use. The fetid water rotted clothing and jammed weapons. From 1/2 hour before dark until 1/2 hour after daylight, they listened and looked for snipers with grenades, pins pulled, lying at arms length. Any movement in dripping darkness was considered enemy. Black rats as big as cats, roaches, land-crabs, snakes seeking body warmth, tusked boars, corpse-eating crocodiles, tree kangaroos and monkeys made their own sounds. Leeches and spiders stayed quiet, as did soldiers even in daylight. Swarming mosquitos, chiggers, gnats and flies brought malaria, scrub typhus, dysentery and dengue fever. Ambulance service for sick or wounded came as stretchers born by "Fuzzy Wuzzies," deeply compassionate wild-haired indigenous people who often wept when their patient died. Japanese soldiers following the Bushido military code, treating surrender as dishonor, moved about from vine-covered concrete-lined log bunkers engineered with fire lanes coordinating machine guns, at perimeters P, Q, R, S, T and U. P had four perimeters comprising blocking the Killerton Track and Sanananda Trail 300 yards southwest of HUGGINS. Between HUGGINS and FISK were R and Q on the trail's right and left, respectively. Northeast of FISK in the trail's bend jungle hid U across from S and T on the left.

On the second day Company B sent a patrol to destroy a single machine gun. The gun hidden in a camouflaged pillbox wounded patrol leader Sgt. Joseph Reddoor from Poplar, who then killed most of the emplaced Japanese. The gun still fired wounding Sgt. Herman Belgard from Brockton, who rescued his patrol leader. Next day two Company B platoons lost 8 men killed, another wounded and one missing bayonet attacking the position which turned out to have four more machine guns guarding the flanks of the first. Trying again on January 8, Company B walked with fixed bayonets against R, while Company C attacked Q. The old long-style bayonets caught in the vines when raising to fire ended their use, with nine killed and eight wounded. Company B fought two weeks protecting HUGGINS: "Like a frontier outpost against Indians." They held off day attacks on seven sequential days and night attacks on five sequential nights. The night of January 11 was a grenade throwing battle with no losses. A dead Japanese sniper hanging 30 yards over the kitchen area from a rope around his leg and the sniper-killing of his machine gun section SGT DeVol Cassidy of Billings caused Lieutenant Arthur Merrick, Jr., of Great Falls, to organize a three-man anti-sniper team around the marksmanship of PFC Matthew Black Dog of Brockton. The team was interviewed by George Weller of the Chicago Daily News for his 13 part series on the battle. Company E displaced Company B at after two weeks.<sup>2</sup>

On January 9 Companies G and F passed through the southeast side of HUGGINS. Crossing the trail they used machetes and slogged 400 yards west to cut the route for Japanese escaping from P. Company G supported by Company F attacked Japanese on the Killerton Track and established perimeter RANKIN, rotating every 24 hours to position a new platoon in deep water near the Japanese. On January 12 two battalions of Aussie infantry with three tanks stormed P and failed, losing three tanks and 151 casualties including 34 killed. On January 14 a Company B patrol found an enemy soldier south of HUGGINS and gave him food instead of killing him. After the sick POW revealed that in P "all able-bodied men had left." Australia's 18th Brigade

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<sup>2</sup> Colonel Howard A. McKinney, Retired, With "A" Company, 163rd Infantry at Sanananda New Guinea.

attacked P from the south while Companies G and E attacked from the north, killing 258 Japanese.

Company F moved 1.5 miles up the track to push east abreast of Company G and get behind S. They entered a prepared field of fire and lost three men killed and four wounded from two machine guns. Corporal Carlton Tidrick of Belton brought his squad forward to engage the guns they thought were in a native hut. There were two guns concealed in a narrow ravine that hit Tidrick three times and Kenneth Paul of Big Fork three times. Using his good right arm, Tidrick half-carried and half-dragged Paul to safety and reported the machine guns' location. Company F moved on, keeping right of Company G as it flanked several raised huts and an open hospital area near A-B. For Company G the stench at the hospital was unbearable. Bodies, swarmed by flies, lay in rows of twelve. Some soldiers were too sick to fight. Others, including orderlies were clutching grenades. When a "corpse" sat up and started firing, a brutal firefight broke out and grenades held under blankets by some patients exploded. Starting with enemy riflemen and light machine-gunners, 163rd's men shot anything that moved. Meanwhile back at the ravine Company E's Captain Buckland of Browning and Sgt. Lund of Wolf Point killed the gunners that killed and wounded Company F men. The next night of January 17 more Japanese blundered into Company F to be killed while causing more casualties,

On January 18, Company F patrolled south along the east side of Sanananda Trail to north of U, killing 54 Japanese, while suffering one wounded and one killed. On January 19 Corporal Leslie Cameron of Kalispell, covered by riflemen, crawled close to Japanese lines to call indirect fires from his Weapons Platoon, Aussie Field Artillery and the 163rd's 81 MM mortar battery onto a Japanese position 150 yards wide. With fixed bayonets they charged on line into a draw and crossed a small stream but were surprised by heavy enemy fire. Losses from the bayonet charge were seven dead and 14 wounded, one seriously. After U was liquidated four days later, Company F learned they'd assaulted an almost impregnable position of 19 machine guns in heavily manned log bunkers organized around machine guns bolted to the motor blocks of buried trucks. Company E had replaced Company F and provided fire support for the successful assault by Companies I and L on January 23. By then Company F suffered 15 killed, 22 wounded, and one seriously injured.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Company A had been attacking enemy position Q in phases, with only their heads and weapons above water to occupy R's vacated enemy positions, heavy with the stench of dead. Using mortar and artillery fires to clear R, they left a 15-foot tall stump in its center, equipped it with a ladder of telephone wire and monitored enemy movement across the trail inside Q. 2nd Platoon crossed the trail north of Q muffled by heavy rain. As they crawled with two squads up and one back they passed three skeletons wearing dog tags from the U.S. 32nd Infantry Division. They turned south in 6 inch-deep water around the east end of a 30-yard open grassland. The platoon leader rolled a grenade down a machine-gun fire lane, signaling both lead squads to begin shooting. The Japanese responded with devastating machine-gun and rifle fire. The platoon retreated with four wounded toward R. On January 15th Company A, less 3rd Platoon, attacked Q with 2nd Platoon targeting the machine guns and having 1st Platoon pass through them to

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph Marlow, *F 163's Most Accurate History of Sanananda*, 41st Infantry Division, Fighting Jungaleers, pp. 431-433.

break through the first line of bunkers. Company A held its ground under heavy fire from deeper in the perimeter while Companies B and C joined the attack. For his actions, Sergeant Paul Ziegele of Jordan earned the Distinguished Service Cross.

The next morning Company A supported by 15 minutes of battalion mortar and heavy machine-gun fire attacked at 0900 northeast from FISK across 200 yards of open terrain against unknown enemy strength at S. Companies B and C struck from the west and northwest. Mortar fire fell short and there was insufficient coordination between the three companies. Company A lost 9 men killed, 17 wounded, with 18 men and 2 officers heat exhausted from crawling in the sun under clear skies. Company B, serving as reserve to Companies A and C, did not know the attack had failed and almost walked single file into S. Learning Company A was in trouble, 3rd Platoon tried to help and suffered five casualties before escaping in darkness.

After two weeks in the jungle most men had malaria with 103 degree temperatures, yet HUGGINS held. On January 21 a 2000 round mortar barrage preceded a four-company attack by 1st Battalion on S. Company B passed a corpse heap of 300 Korean Marines and three dual purpose cannon with ammunition, 24 inches long in clips of 6, stacked like cord wood. Company B killed 165 Japanese, while suffering no losses. Having started fighting at Sanananda with 187 men, Company B was ending with 21 able-bodied, 112 sick, 27 wounded and 27 killed.

Back on the morning of January 12 Company L, after losing one man to a sniper, attacked northward to destroy Japanese coconut log pillboxes, losing three more men killed and two wounded, while killing 10 enemy. The next day three companies in HUGGINS conducted a major assault on the same area for 5 hours. Company L found most of the enemy had pulled back, then buried the remaining bodies. By January 17 many Company L men were being moved to the rear with dysentery, fever, diarrhea and skin disorders, and the Company was placed in 3rd Battalion Reserve. On January 20 Company L received an attack order that was cancelled in favor of Company I having better strength. Since January 17 Company I had been actively patrolling from FISK and attacking U on the 18th, 19th and 20th resulting in significant casualties. Then well into its main attack on January 21 an 81 MM mortar fired short near Company Headquarters, killing Captain Dupree of Poplar and 1st Sergeant Boland of Great Falls and wounding three others. With Lieutenant O'Dell of Billings leading, Company I with elements of Company L attacked the next day and the next, killing a large number of enemy rifle and mortar men while losing a total of 10 dead and 18 wounded.<sup>4</sup> The same day Company K engaged in severe hand-to-hand combat with Japanese who stumbled into their perimeter.<sup>5</sup>

On January 22 the entire 163rd Regiment conducted a 41 minute sweeping attack following concentrated mortar, machine gun and artillery fires. Three men from each squad walked out front on point as company machine guns swept the trees with continuous fire. Company G killed 50 Japanese. A sergeant in Company I was killed. Company K killed 32 Japanese and took one prisoner. Company L killed 36 Japanese. The next day three Japanese rose from the bush near

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<sup>4</sup>Dr. Hargis Westerfield, "I Company 163rd Infantry Storms Perimeter U," 41st Infantry Division Fighting Jungleers, pp. 39 & 40.

<sup>5</sup> Col. Howard A. McKinney, Retired, "With "A" Company 163rd Infantry at Sanananda, New Guinea," white paper archived at the Montana Military Museum.



Company K, but when Lieutenant Rawstrom motioned them to raise their arms, a camouflaged machine-gunner killed the officer. All of the Japanese involved were killed, thus clearing the track and the trail to the Solomon Sea. Montana's 163rd Regiment, experienced 97 killed, 250 wounded, and 4 missing in action with nearly everyone else sick. Later these survivors heard the Japanese propagandist "Tokyo Rose" call them the "The Bloody Butchers of Sanananda." The 163rd Regimental Combat Team made amphibious landings at Aitape, Wakde, Toem, Biak, Zamboanga and Jolo and fought across Central Mindanao. At Kure, Japan, they landed near Hiroshima and walked through piles of radiated ashes.<sup>6</sup> In late 1945 the last survivors sailed aboard the *Admiral Mayo* into Seattle's Elliott Bay.

My Butte neighbor, John T. Shea, drafted with the first 17-year olds to fight in the 7th Infantry Division on Okinawa, told me about disembarking from the front portion of the *Mayo* which had been sealed by crew quarters from the back portion. "I was walking down the gangplank and I turned around, and the guy right behind me was from Montana. I think his name was Hawk—yeah, that's right, Tommy Hawk. He was from one of those towns out in Eastern Montana, Livingston or somewhere. He looked like hell. He'd been fighting in the jungle the whole damn war!"

That was Company B's William Hawk of Poplar, returned with the 41st Infantry Division Jungleers from the longest overseas deployment of any American division in WWII.

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Hargis Westerfield, *Our 41st Division in World War II*,