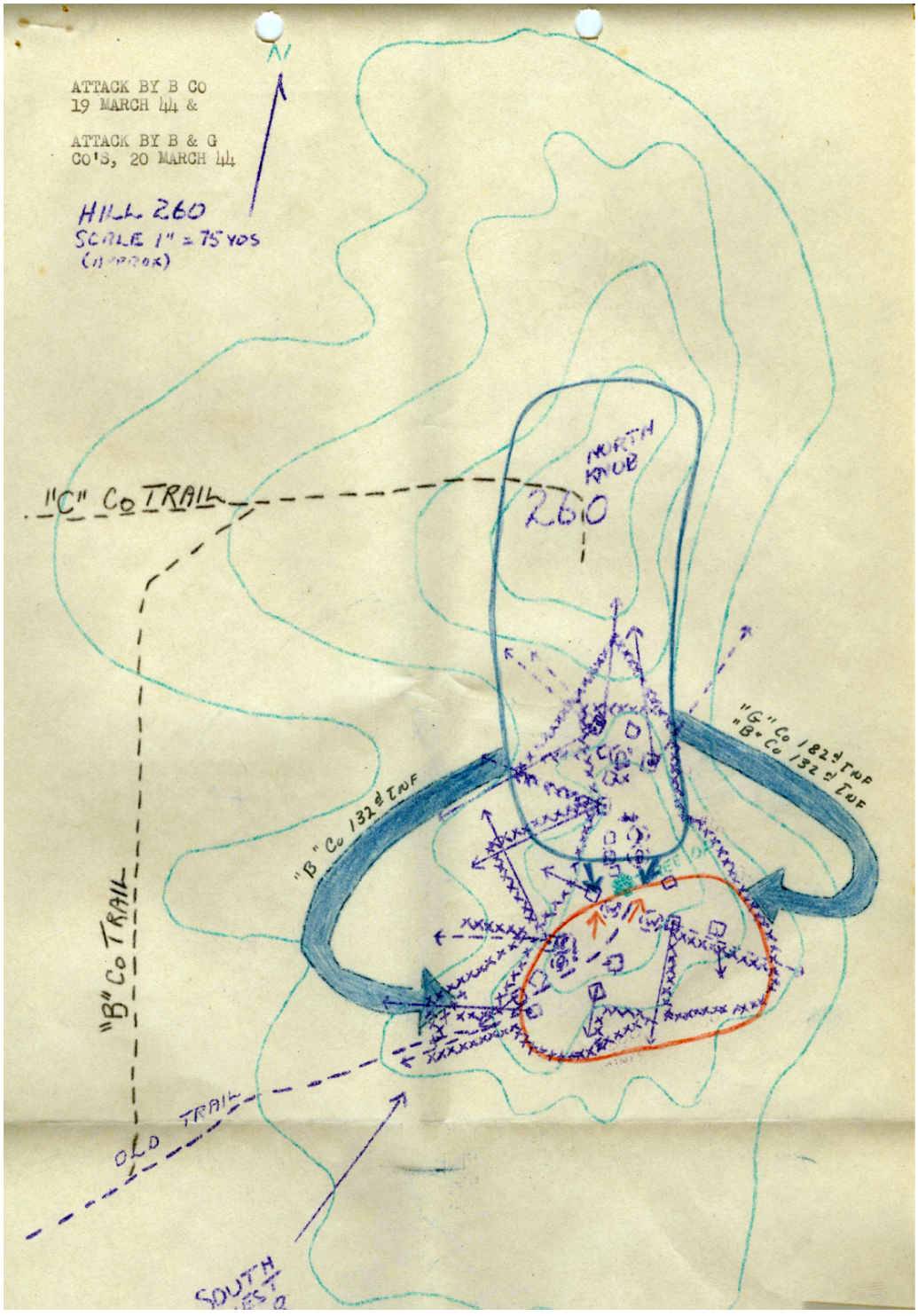
By the second week of the battle for Hill 260, the Japanese forces atop the hill were mostly isolated, but still firmly entrenched. The Americans had retaken the North Knob of the hill, and established a perimeter around the base of the hill.

American units tried innovative methods to dislodge the Japanese. They rigged gas pipelines and improvised gasoline can launchers to try to burn the Japanese out, to no avail. Eventually, artillery and even anti-aircraft pieces were lugged into the jungle and mounted in positions that enabled them to fire almost point-blank at the Japanese.

A 75mm cannon mounted on a nearby hill blasts away at Hill 260.

Infantry units continued to launch all-out attacks on the Japanese forces on the South Knob. The map shows two separate attacks, one on 19 March (left) and

one on 20 March (right). Both attacks moved from safe positions on the North Knob, down into the jungle, and then up the side of the South Knob. Company G advanced on 20 March with Company B of the 132nd Infantry. ***David and his units would have been laying wire up the trails to keep the units in contact with the rear.***



They fought their way to the top of the hill, suffering a number of casualties. At the top, they observed Japanese units signaling their surrender. As the Americans advanced to investigate, the Japanese dropped back in their hole, and mortar fire began to rain down on the Americans. It had been a trap. News of

the fake surrender was reported in American newspapers, complete with an account from Lieutenant Richard Roy. Eddie McCarthy of Company G was killed during this assault, and Ed Monahan was among those wounded.

On 28 March, American forces advanced up the hill and discovered that the few remaining Japanese soldiers had abandoned the hill and disappeared back into the jungle. The Hill was at last back in American hands. Men scurried about preparing new defensive positions.

In the photo, the toll of the American artillery fire over the previous three weeks is evident[1]. Looking south from the North Knob, the blasted remnants of what was once a thick jungle were all that remained. The hill was in ruins when the Americans reoccupied it. 21 American bodies were recovered in the rubble, along with over 200 Japanese corpses.

[1] ***This is similar to how our hills looked in Vietnam, after an action, or clearing it for a firebase.***

American soldier dumps lime on a Japanese corpse atop the hill

A soldier burns refuse with a flamethrower

Japanese weapons collected in the cleanup on Hill 260[2]

The cost of victory had been high. On 9 March, the day before the attack, Company G reported 147 men on duty. The day after the fighting concluded, 29 March, Company G could muster only 85 men. The rest had been killed, wounded, or had fallen ill. During the fighting, the 182nd Infantry underwent a dramatic change of command. In a period of less than a week, numerous men in positions of importance were reassigned. Colonel William Long, commanding officer of the 182nd Infantry Regiment, and Lieutenant Colonel Dexter Lowry, commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion of the 182nd, were both reassigned.

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[2] ***In the jungles of the Central Highlands every once in a while we would run into old caches of Japanese weapons such as these that were used by the Vietnamese against their resistance against the occupying Japanese troops during WWII. Ho Chi Minh was an ally of the US.***

Their replacements, Lieutenant Colonel Floyd Dunn (left, new CO of 182nd) and Lieutenant Colonel Jacob Sauer (right, new CO of 2nd Battalion) pose in at the tattered remains of the OP Tree after the conclusion of the battle. Company G was not immune to these sweeping changes. Company CO Captain Donald Pray was reassigned, as was First Sergeant Frank Fitzgerald. Veterans of the unit continued to argue for decades about what could have been done to avoid the initial loss of the hill, and the protracted battle and heavy casualties that followed.

The defeat of the Japanese at Hill 260, and everywhere else along the American perimeter of the March offensive, proved the end of significant organized Japanese resistance in the Solomon Islands. Their losses were so great that they would never again prove to be an offensive threat on Bougainville. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 500 Japanese soldiers died in the fighting on Hill 260 alone, and many more were wounded. As many as 5000 may have perished in the larger offensive, against only 264 Americans killed.

On March 22, however, rumors of men being sent home had halted temporarily when something concrete developed. In accordance with War Department plans a rotation policy was put into operation. Taking into consideration available space on shipping returning to the United States, the Americal was allotted a limited number of berths. Based on rank and length of service overseas, the quota was distributed among the units on a pro-rated basis. By rank, names of those eligible for shipment back home were placed in hats or helmets in each unit and drawn. Selected men then hurriedly packed, said their goodbyes and hustled to the beach to board the ships for the first leg of the trip back to civilization.

The long-rumored rotation policy was now in operation, but, sadly enough, the monthly quotas were hardly high enough to put a dent in the number of officers and men eligible for selection. As the months on Bougainville passed, however, the quotas did show a steady increase. Morale alternately waxed and waned among the older men as rumors sifted through the Division concerning the size of the next quota. All seemed to hold out, though, in the hope that next month would be their month.

On **June 7, 1944,** word arrived that D-Day was taking place in Normandy, France. The liberation of Europe was underway. ***A few days later, Anne's Uncle Joe Stefanak landed and joined General Patton's Army's drive into Germany.***

In September, David's mother, Georgianna, would receive a letter from his commanding officer, Warrant Officer Jack Hallman, commending him on being a good soldier. He described the conditions and how her son was in good health and hoping he would get his chance to rotate home soon[3]. See the letter below.

[3] In the end, David would not leave the Pacific until August of 1945. He would be the last man in his original company to leave for home. He served 42 months of WWII in a combat setting. In retrospect, I only served 14 months in Vietnam. Thinking about my Father's length of service, made my short stay an incentive to make it out in one piece.

September 9, 1944.

Dear Mrs. Cazeault:

Although a complete stranger I'm taking the liberty of writing you in regards to your son, David. His being so far away, for such a long time, I can understand a Mother's worries, wondering how he is and what he is doing.

David has been under my direct supervision for the past six months and I assure you he is a good soldier and doing more than his share towards ending this terrible war. He is in the best of health, as jovial as ever and participates with interest in all the recreational activities.

The rotation policy has been rather slow up to the present time and I can't give you anything definite as to the date David will be home, but I can say, the war department is doing

everything possible to speed the return of men who have two or more years overseas service.

These past 32 months in the South Pacific have been "no bed of roses," but in that time we all came to realize, more than ever, how much our folks and home mean to us. What we went through, roughing it, existing under all conditions has really broadened our minds, made us more dependent upon ourselves and I'm sure will tend to make us better citizens when this world is once again at, what we hope will be, eternal peace.

I want you to feel free to write me at any time in reference to your son and I will be only too glad to give you any information you may so desire.

Sincerely,

W. C. Jack Hallman