

HISTORY OF THE THIRD BATTALION, FIRST MARINES

The exploits of the Third Battalion, First Marines fill some of the most colorful and stirring pages in the military annals of the United States. This Battalion is part of the oldest permanently organized regiment of the Marine Corps. This is part of the sweltering Marines who suffered the incredible hardships of the famous march of Samar, and the benumbed Marines, who in the withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir, kept the MST open. The Third Battalion fought in the Boxer Rebellion, Philippine insurrection, Guadalcanal, Peleliu, Okinawa, and Inchon to mention a few.

The Third Battalion was first formed because of the need for stalking out insurgents in the Philippines. By the end of 1899 the Third Battalion (15 Officers, 325 Enlisted) under the command of Major Littleton W.T. Waller had arrived in the Philippines.

From 1899 to 1901 detachments from the Third Battalion at Lavite were detailed as guards and garrisons at various posts in the Philippines and took part in some of the operations conducted by the U.S. Army forces in the Philippines Insurrection. Throughout, the Marines were characterized by high courage and discipline. During this period, part of the Battalion was ordered from Lavite to Olongapo to occupy the town and bar the surrounding area of insurgents and marauders. Less than two months later, the following statement was announced: "A patrol system has been inaugurated in and about Olongapo. This insures peace and tranquility to the town. No more robberies by 'Ladrones' have occurred since this was established, and the population of the town is increasing daily by the ingress of men from the insurgents and families from the mountains."

BOXER REBELLION

In 1900, while the Marines were helping to restore law and order in the Philippines, a violent anti-foreign organization of militia-type units (China Boxers) rose in rebellion against foreign influence in China. Murder and pillage were daily occurrences. The Third Battalion, under Colonel Meade, arrived at Taku on 11 July. They were brought together with the rest of the Regiment, part of which had previously been halted by the Boxers. The Third Battalion moved with the Regiment towards Peking. Along the way, the Boxers launched cavalry attacks on the allied column but were repulsed. The expedition reached Peking on 14 August and immediately launched an attack on the outer wall of the city. On the following day, the Chinese were gradually driven out of the remainder of the city. From here the Battalion returned to the Philippines.

In 1900 and 1901, the areas occupied by Marine Units in the Philippines remained comparatively free of insurrection. Far to the Southeast, however, soldiers of "C" Company, Ninth Infantry, stationed at Balogiga, were murdered by the insurgents. Destiny beckoned to the Marines. On 20 October, a Battalion of Marines who were recently in the Third Battalion were alerted for duty in Samar. At the end of the month, the Marines arrived in Basey, Samar. Headquarters and two Companies stayed and the rest continued on to Bolangia to relieve the 17th Infantry. The Marines pecked away at the insurgents and pushed them back to their fortified defenses on the Soboton Cliffs along the Soboton River. This position the insurgents considered impregnable. The next morning the Marines reached the cliffs to discover that they had been deserted; the enemy had gone to the next higher cliffs. The Marines scaled the cliffs, drove the insurgents from their positions, and destroyed their camps.

CUBA

Shortly after this, under the terms of the so-called "Platt Amendment" the United States was responsible for maintaining a stable government in Cuba. In 1906 rigged elections set off a revolt. The Marines were ready. A floating Battalion reached Havana on 12 September. Four days after this arrival, a provisional Battalion was organized at Marine Barracks, Norfolk, and was enroute to Havana. On 18 September, the Third Battalion, First Marines was formed at Philadelphia and on its way south aboard a cruiser. Fullblown

intervention became a fact on 29 September. Besides these, four more Battalions were being formed. The order for the Third Battalion was guard duty.

The Third Battalion served at Guantanamo Bay from May, 1912, to May, 1913. In 1914, the Battalion participated in maneuvers in Puerto Rico and Vera Cruz and managed to fit in a brief stopover in Philadelphia. The following summer they went to Haiti to protect American lives and interests. Things were now quiet for Third Battalion, First Marines, until the beginning of World War II.

During the years following World War I, the attention of the Marine Corps focused on the probability that future actions would require greater emphasis of the offensive phase of warfare. In the reallocation of territory after World War I, the Japanese had received two former German fortifications, which would become serious barriers to the advance of the United States Fleet across the Pacific.

WORLD WAR II

In February, 1942, the First Marines were brought up to full strength. The Third Battalion was to go into combat within a few weeks and move to the West Coast on 22 June to sail as part of the First Marines from San Francisco to New Zealand. With only a few days ashore, the regiment left New Zealand on 22 July and sailed for Kojo, Fiji Islands, to rehearse for the Guadalcanal Operations.

Guadalcanal, a foreboding amalgam of mountains, jungle, swamp, and sword grass, was garrisoned on 7 August 1942 by some 2230 Japanese. Intelligence had received inaccurate news of about twice this total. The landing site picked was about five miles east of Tunga Point where there was no expected enemy resistance. Third Battalion was in the second wave of regiments among the First Division.

The Fifth Marines landed without an incident and First Marines duplicated their maneuver. Still no enemy. The troops thrashed toward the Japanese airfield in Tanga Point. On 8 August the Marines had taken the airfield, and the Japanese had not yet countered. After the Marines had secured the airfield, the Navy left leaving the Marines to fight without air support. When the Navy was leaving, four ships were destroyed, which constituted a U.S. Navy defeat second only to Pearl Harbor. If Guadalcanal was to be held, the Marines would have to do it alone. They set up a defensive perimeter around the airfield.

The First Marines held a 600-yard stretch of the Guadalcanal perimeter along the banks of the Ilu. Within a few days, in the second Japanese attack, the Third Battalion was hit. Colonel Gates termed it a "Holding Attack." Once again the Japanese were repulsed leaving 200 dead in front of the Third Battalion's position. First Marines held the enemy for four months and then made preparations for leaving Guadalcanal. By 12 January 1943, with combat over momentarily, they were bound for Melbourne, Australia.

On 4 October, the Regiment, less its Third Battalion, sailed for Goodenough Islands. By the 25th all Battalions of the First Marine Regiment began small unit training. By 1 December, they were ready for combat.

On Christmas, 1943, Third Battalion sailed to Cape Gloucester and loaded with the First Battalion under light, but effective, supporting fire. The loading had been practically unopposed. On 28 December (a day when sixteen inches of rain was recorded), the Third Battalion, First Marines, moved to the Cape Esperance area of Guadalcanal for landing rehearsals preparatory for the assault on the Palau Islands. On 15 September 1944, the First Marine Regiment, now under the command of Colonel Lewis B. Puller, headed for the shore of Peleliu as the left assault regiment of the Division. First Marines had the toughest job because they were to attack up the long axis of a precipitous ridge dominating all Peleliu and heavily combed with coral-limestone caves and masked in jungle undergrowth.

PELELIU

Three days before the landing, the fire support ships and planes from four escort carriers began to bombard Peleliu, since most of the important targets were deep underground or hidden by jungle. Because of inadequate aerial photo coverage during planning, and because of lack of experienced supervision, this bombardment had been correctly de-

scribed as "the least accurate for its purpose of any in the Pacific". Unfortunately this was not realized before the attack.

Attacking, the Third Battalion was on the left, Second Battalion on the right, and First in reserve. The Second Battalion drove inland against resistance described as "moderate". They traveled in 350 yards. Here, facing the airfield and building area from the far side of the woods, the Second Battalion tied in with the Fifth Marines on its right; and, perforce, was ordered halted and held up pending solution of the problem facing the Third Battalion.

By this time, the Third Battalion was in very serious trouble indeed. From the moment of landing they had run into opposition of the most stubborn and violent kind from strongly employed Japanese who added small arms and automatic weapons fire to the brutal artillery and mortar shelling which was blanketing the whole area. What was worse, the leading elements had not advanced a hundred yards inland before they found themselves confronted by a most formidable natural obstacle which showed on none of the advance maps or intelligence reports: a long, rugged coral ridge about 30 feet in elevation, its precipitous face honeycombed with caves and dug-in positions. All initial assaults were repulsed, even after the tanks had been brought up. Troops attempting to storm the northern portion stumbled into a wide, deep anti-tank trench, dominated by the ridge itself and cleverly enfiladed, where many of them remained pinned down for hours. Late in the afternoon, the securing of a precarious foothold on the southern sector of the ridge top improved the position somewhat, but gave cause for little optimism.

This accounted for more than eight hours of some of the fiercest fighting in the Pacific War. The Company to the far left of 3/1 was responsible for securing the flank of the entire Division. The most important objective in this zone was the point just to the north, previously mentioned, from which destructive enfilading fire was being poured the length of the beachhead. The threat this position presented to the entire leading operation was self-evident.

There was no evidence that naval gunfire had had any effect whatsoever on these installations.

Resistance was fierce and stubborn, so the support platoon was committed. The ensuing firefight lasted nearly two hours. During this time most of the enemy infantry protecting the installations were killed, and what was left of the two platoons stormed the point, driving off the remainder and annihilating the pillboxes by taking advantage of their blind spots.

The principle installation proved to be a powerful reinforced concrete casemate built into the coral near the base of the cliff. Mounted on the casemate was a 47mm Anti-Tank, Anti-Boat Gun, which had been enfilading the beach all morning. This was taken by creeping down on it from above.

The next day, the attack started in the morning, at which time the Second Battalion on the right made excellent progress. But on the left in the 3/1 zone, the line was unable to advance at all. The enemy were determined to recapture that bitterly contested point, but they were unable to muster forces for a major attack until about 2200 on the night of D-plus-1. They attacked the left company and it resulted in a Japanese slaughter.

From 15 September to 1 October 1944, the Marines at Peleliu fought one of the bloodiest battles ever recorded. It was fought against a determined enemy in protected positions. Victorious at last, the proud Third Battalion returned with the First Regiment to Pavuvu to prepare for the assault on Okinawa.

OKINAWA

Okinawa was larger. It was nearer the Japanese homeland; it had more time to be prepared; and it had a solid force of fanatical defenders. 3/1 landed with the First Marines on D-Day, 1 April 1945, and was soon dispatched to the northern area of the island, where the Japanese were conducting a highly effective guerrilla-type campaign. After landing in Kawada, they were to assist that regiment in patrolling its extensive zone of responsibility, which covered area of 140 square miles and included 95 miles of coastline. During this time, the 22nd Marines' Quartermaster dump was attacked by an enemy group of 200 men. The intruders were driven off.

Plans were now being made to commit the Third Battalion as part of the First Marines, in the south as much-needed reinforcement for the XXIV Corps attack. Then, on 28 April, this maneuver was accomplished. The Third Battalion didn't meet any action until 2 May. The frontal and flanking fire that had driven back Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, stopped the Third Battalion shortly after it had crossed the line of departure. Third Battalion spent the day in limited patrolling and extensive mop-up action. Then the direction switched from south to southeast. Jumping off at 1630, after a ten minute artillery preparation, 3/1 fought its way to a series of small hills about 300 yards south of Mujagusuku. Machinegun fire and mortar shells fell continually on the forward elements, and, when the companies were ordered to dig in at 2000 and hold the ground they had taken, a series of heavy infiltration attempts began. The night was marked by violent hand-to-hand combat on the hill held by the front company as the Japanese and Marines struggled to gain possession of the high ground. The Third Battalion won, but only after enduring the most hazardous night it was to spend on Okinawa. All along the front the ferocity of enemy resistance was undiminished. As veteran Japanese units were decimated, they were rebuilt with rear area replacements and now infantry elements were introduced to the line.

Third Battalion also had much to do with the taking of Wana Ridge, a rugged barrier in the path of the First Division. The attack plan called for fire teams to work out relays of tanks in Quana Draw during the morning in an attempt to clean out the reverse slope positions on Wana Ridge.

During the early part of the afternoon, the tank-infantry teams of Company "L" continued to work on positions in the draw against increasing enemy opposition. At approximately 1500, Company "Y" started across the mouth of the draw. Company "I", attempting to follow Company "Y"'s assault, was pinned in the draw by heavy machinegun and mortar fire. By 1800, Company "K" had fought its way up Hill 55, then they withdrew to Wana Ridge for the night defense. The Third Battalion was also instrumental at Shuri Castle and Yuza Hill. Okinawa was secured on 22 June, and the advent of the Atomic Bomb caused an early cessation of hostilities on 10 August 1945.

3/1 went back to China to assist in the repatriation of Japanese troops. It remained there until 1 January 1949, when it moved to Camp Pendleton.

There were only 18 months of peace before hostilities broke out in Korea. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command, called upon the Marines to perform one of history's most famous movements; turn the enemy's flank; cut his supply lines; strangle his troops south of Seoul.

INCHON

On 15 September 1950, the Third Battalion landed. It was to drive forward and secure its portion of the O-1 five. This two mile arc bent inland as far as 300 yards to include two objectives. The first was the seaward tip of Hill 233, a long east-west ridge beginning 4,500 yards southeast of the beach and blocking off the stubby Munbang Peninsula which projected southward. The second was a small cape, topped by Hill 94.

When landing, the men were brought ashore in a haphazard maneuver by the Navy, but eventually made it. The Third Battalion began its sweep of the Munbang Peninsula with two companies attacking southward from Hill 233. The going was tough.

Then, on the 21st, Colonel Puller committed 3/1 to the relief of battleweary outfits. The Third Battalion swung northeast from Lookout Hill to flank the enemy positions. Crossing the Kaldon against light resistance, the attackers ran into trouble at the fortified lines fronting southwestern Yordongke. After heavy machine guns of 3/1 lasted a battery of Communist automatic weapons, two companies attacked along the stream branch. Progress was slow, but at a cost of 11 killed and 18 wounded, the Marines rolled up the heavily defended dike and reached the bridge entering the city.

That night there were five attacks against the position without success. The Third Battalion attacked at 2000 against negligible resistance and coverage in the isolated unit. The enemy was gone except for the hundreds of dead that littered the borders of the city. He had left behind practically all of his heavy armorment, equipment, and supplies. The

First Marines then went eastward.

They were now ready for Seoul. The attack began. Successive road blocks consisting of earth-filled rice bags were stubbornly defended by enemy infantry supported by NKPA automatic, AT, and mortar fire from the rooftops. The Marines pressed forward methodically and by evening the Third Battalion, had penetrated about 2000 yards into the city to occupy positions on the western slopes of Hill 97.

The battle of Seoul took a sudden and unexpected new turn on the night of 25 September 1950. At this time, it was said that the enemy was fleeing the city of Seoul. The orders were given out and the jump off time was set at 0200, but at 0153 a dramatic interruption came in the form of a flash message from the Third Battalion. Lt.Col. Ridge reported that a heavy enemy attack supported by tanks and self-propelled guns was moving down the main avenue leading from the center of the city to the southwest in the zone of the First Marines.

The Division attack scheduled for 0200 was indefinitely postponed, of course, until 3/1, astride the principle avenue of approach, could deal with a large scale enemy counter-attack launched by an estimated battalion of infantry and approximately 12 tanks supported by self-propelled guns and mortars. High-angle Marine Howitzers and 81mm Mortar fire blasted the attacking column out of existence, and enemy infantry action was negligible afterwards.

CHOSIN

Shortly the Marines took over Seoul and the Third Battalion continued mopping up again. It looked like success for the Marines when suddenly they were hit from the flank by Chinese Communist. By the end of November 1950, the First Marine Division was surrounded and heavily outnumbered. They broke through the south so they could reach the sea. On this move, the Third Battalion guarded the rear as part of the First Regiment.

After a try at peace talks with the Communists, the struggle started up again. Hills were taken, retaken, lost, and finally secured again. This pattern prevailed until 27 July 1953, when the Korean War officially ended.

During the next 20 months, the battalion remained ready for any resumption of hostilities, training whenever the opportunity permitted. Finally, in early April 1955, the Regiment sailed for the United States.

CUBA

Back at Camp Pendleton, in San Mateo, the Battalion trained. The Regiment was ready as usual. Then it was announced that the missiles in Cuba threatened the safety of the United States. The Third Battalion boarded ships and steamed through the Panama Canal. These men were ready to fight. The members of the 3rd Battalion gazed at the shores of Cuba, wanting to land. The crisis eased and the Battalion came home again.

Back at San Mateo, transplacement battalions came and went. Liberty was good and the training was arduous and meaningful.

On 23 August, 1965, the 3rd Battalion was again aboard ship steaming for the Far East. On 12 September, 1965, the 3rd Battalion landed at White Beach, Okinawa and went to Camp Schwab where they awaited the call to assist in the quelling of disturbances anywhere in the Far East.

On 28 January, 1966, 3/1 landed in the Republic of Viet Nam, as part of operation Double Eagle, the largest amphibious landing since Inchon.

In the months following, the Third Battalion again proved itself on the battlefield, encountering both irregular guerrillas and North Vietnamese regulars in the I Corps area of Viet Nam.

After four months operating out of Chu Lai, the battalion moved to DaNang to rejoin the First Regiment.

Continued success in the counterinsurgency effort in South Viet Nam has again proven that the "Thundering Third" is equal to any challenge.

OKINAWA



At 35,000 ft. from the South looking north.



Rice (Kome) belt, Haneji Valley.

OKINAWA

Too small to show on world maps, the island of Okinawa is truly the Keystone of the Pacific. Okinawa is located 450 miles southwest of Shanghai, and halfway between Tokyo and Manila.

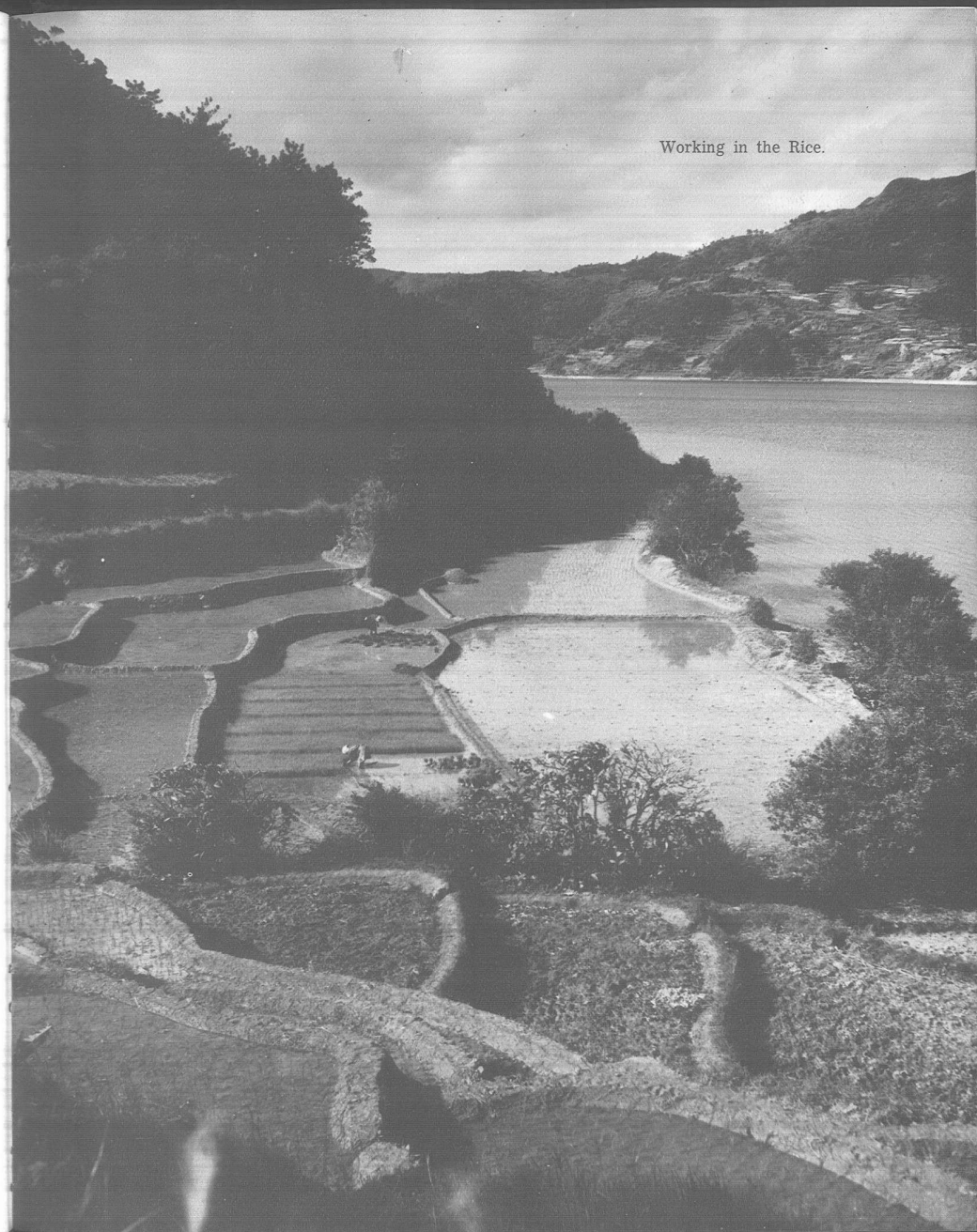
Okinawa was known as the crossroads of the Pacific as long as 600 years ago. Traders from England, Portugal, Spain, Holland, and China conducted business on the Island of Okinawa. Ryukyuan ships brought travelers and goods from India, Thailand, Malaya, and the East Indies. So it might be said that Okinawa has always been the

Keystone of the Pacific.

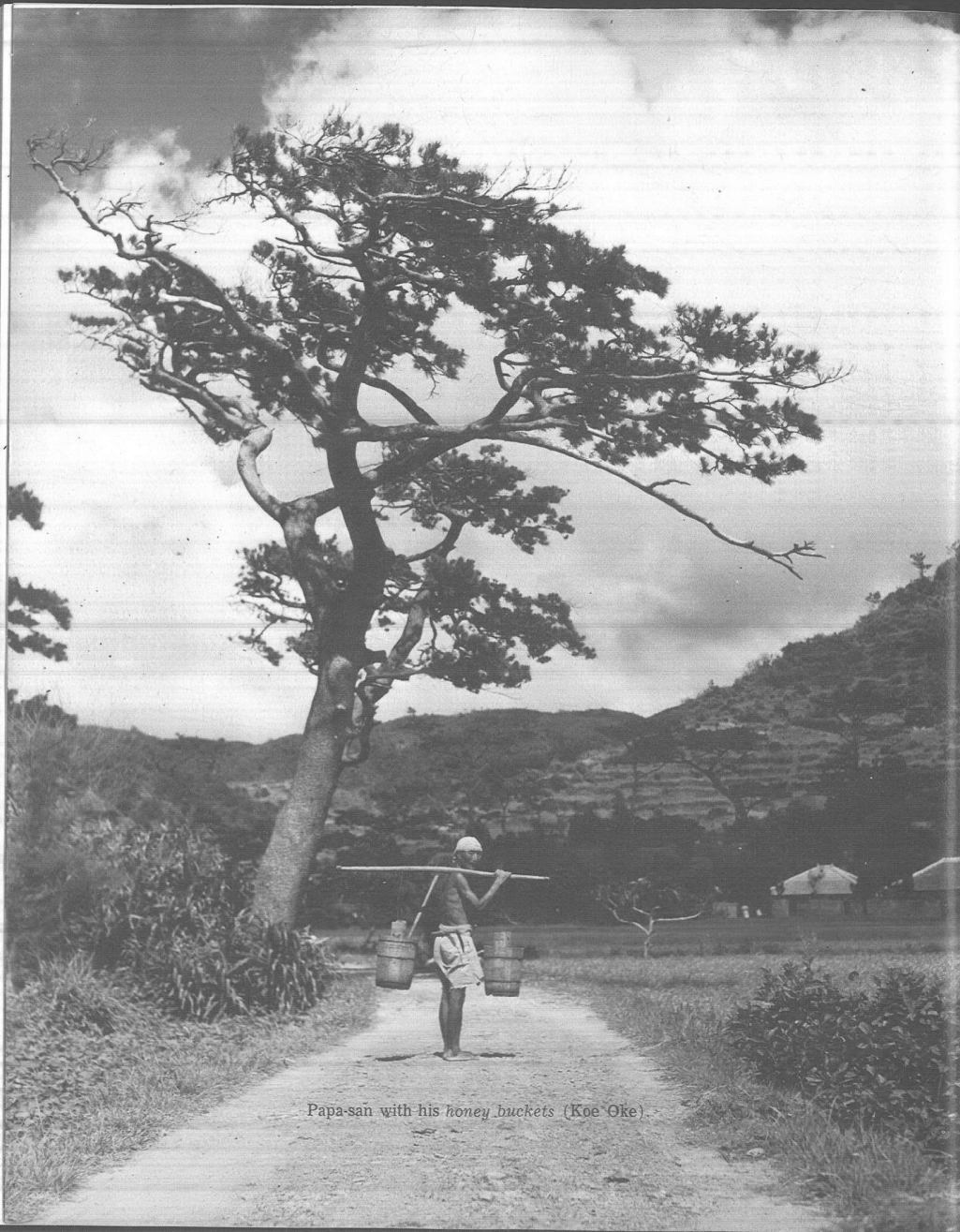
Okinawa has a population of over 890,000 people, 1,504 persons per square mile. This is the most heavily populated area in the world. The most important products of Okinawa are, fish, rice, sugar cane, and sweet potatoes. Most of the sugar is exported; the fish, rice and sweet potatoes are the food of the people.

In some ways the people of Okinawa are very primitive, their needs are few and their livelihood comes from the sea, the land and the sky.

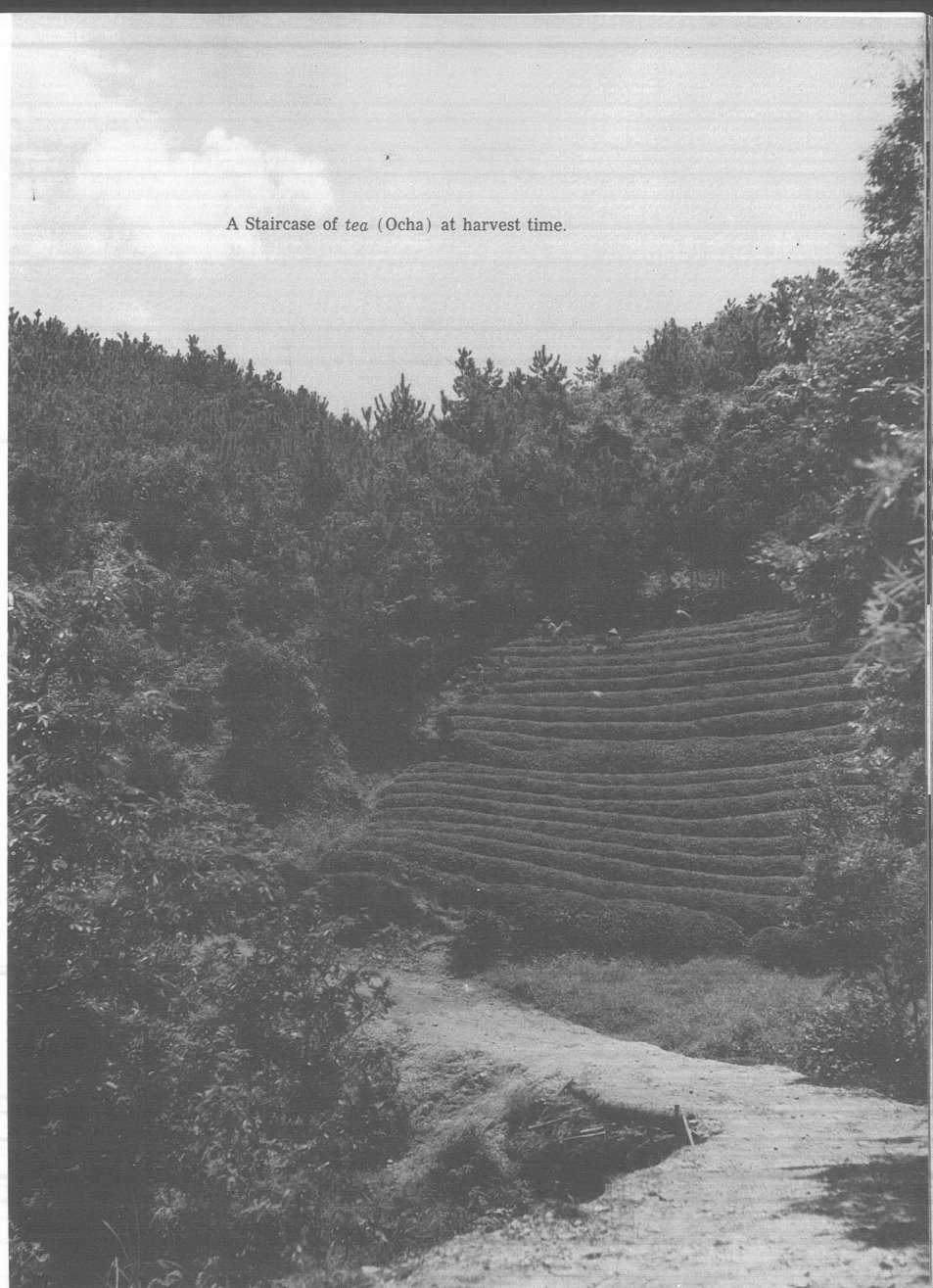
Rice harvest, a family job.



Working in the Rice.



Papa-san with his honey buckets (Koe Oke).



A Staircase of tea (Ocha) at harvest time.