

LIBRARY
USA ARMOR SCHOOL
FORT KNOX, KY 40121-5200

ADVANCED OFFICERS CLASS #1

1 MAY 1948

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: An Infantry Battalion Defends at Anzio.

SCOPE: This monograph presents a description of the defense of an Infantry battalion, reinforced, on the Anzio Beachhead, Italy, during the general period 1 February to 1 April 1944. The situation, terrain, tactics and lessons are evaluated in view of the principles and doctrines of defensive combat as prescribed in our military texts and Field Manuals.

41-16

Prepared by: F. W. BOYE, JR.

LT COL CAVALRY

INTRODUCTION

This account might concern almost any battalion with the Allied Forces that landed on the beaches of Anzio and Nettuno early in 1944. It is about the Third Battalion, or Blue Battalion to use the common code. Since the purpose of this monograph is to evaluate the defenses at Anzio in the light of our current teachings, the description of the defense will be interspersed with the principles and doctrines as they are taught. It is considered that in this manner the lessons that might be learned will be more obvious.

GENERAL SITUATION

The arrival of winter in Italy in 1943 found the Fifth Army before the entrance of the Cassino Corridor to Rome. The weather, cold, rain and especially mud were becoming as formidable enemies as the Germans.

On the 22d of January at 0200 the 3rd Battalion landed as part of a larger force on the beaches just south of the small Italian town of Nettuno - "to disrupt communications in the rear of the German forces in the Cassino area". The landing was very successful, having achieved tactical if not strategic surprise. After the initial beachhead was established the Battalion moved inland as part of the force to cut the main lines of German communication. By the 29th of January we were approximately eight

miles inland.

OPERATIONS INLAND

On the 29th of January the Division attacked to capture the town of Cisterna di Roma which was situated on Highway 7, one of the two main north-south highways leading from Rome to Cassino. The Battalion was assigned the mission of following the 1st and 3rd Ranger Battalions and then moving to the east of Cisterna. Due to stiff enemy resistance the mission was never accomplished. The capture and decimation of the two Ranger Battalions is history. By nightfall we did reach Femminamorta (Isola Bella) which was then behind the enemy lines. The next day the 2nd Battalion and the 4th Ranger Battalion pushed forward and made contact with us.

On the night of 30-31 January we made one more attack, little thinking that it was to be our last for months. This attack, still part of the overall effort to capture Cisterna, took us in the general direction of our original objective; our mission was to seize the "March" Road Junction. By 0400 31 January we had accomplished this mission with the usual confusion present in night attacks. (See Figure 1)

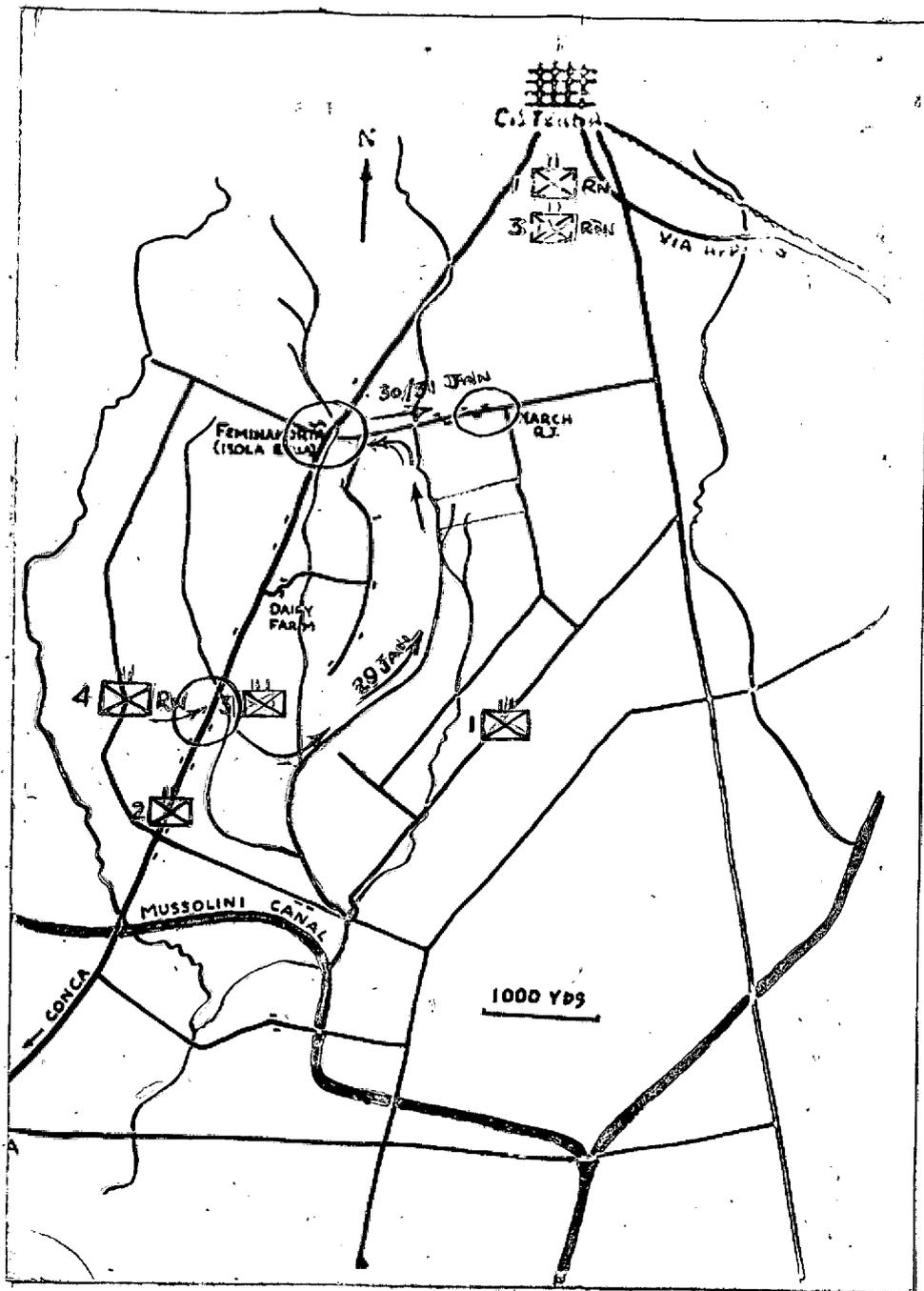


Figure 1

ASSUMING THE DEFENSIVE

Daylight 31 January found the 3rd Battalion sitting on "March" Road Junction, licking our wounds and trying to reorganize and prepare for the inevitable orders that would be coming at any time. We were by now woefully short in men, particularly key personnel, officers and noncommissioned officers. We were covering a frontage of not over 500 yards and about 1500 yards in depth, facing almost due east. The last attack had been launched with two companies up and one in support and they were still in that formation. Our left rear (northwest) flank was protected by the 2nd Battalion which was still attacking astride the Conca-Cisterna Road on Cisterna. Our left (north) and right (south) flanks were open and therefore our responsibility for security. The 1st Battalion to our southeast was still having considerable trouble and never did reach the general line of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. We had no orders.

At first light the 1st of February a company sized counter-attack was launched from the east, astride our road. The attack of about one hundred men was preceded by accurate mortar and artillery fire and lasted sporadically all day. Our reorganization of the previous day stood us in good stead, enabling us to more readily withstand and repel the attack.

For the next few days, still lacking the order to continue the attack, we snuggled closer to the ground and sent out normal patrols to see just where we stood. On the 4th the order came to

defend.

THE DEFENSIVE

Division Field Order #6, dated 4 February 1944, prescribed the mission of regrouping and organizing a defensive sector in depth. Thus, for the first time in its combat experience in this was the Division was to organize following the seizure of an objective and hold a defensive sector.

The 3rd Battalion was directed to maintain a reinforced company on each of two outpost lines of resistance (OPLR) and to organize and occupy the main line of resistance (MLR) with the remainder of the Battalion. (See Figure 2) Specifically, the present position was to be prepared and manned by one company as the first OPLR. A second OPLR was to be established about twenty-five hundred yards to the rear in the vicinity of the "Dairy Farm" and manned by another company. The third company and the remainder of the Battalion were to move behind the Mussolini Canal, approximately twenty-five hundred yards further back, and prepare the MLR for the entire Battalion. The MLR was to be organized in keeping with our defensive doctrine which contemplates "---the organization of battle positions to be held at all costs, and the use of covering forces to delay and disorganize the advance of the enemy and to deceive him as to the true location of the battle position".

"The mission, situation and terrain limit the choice of localities where defense may be offered." As is so often the case,

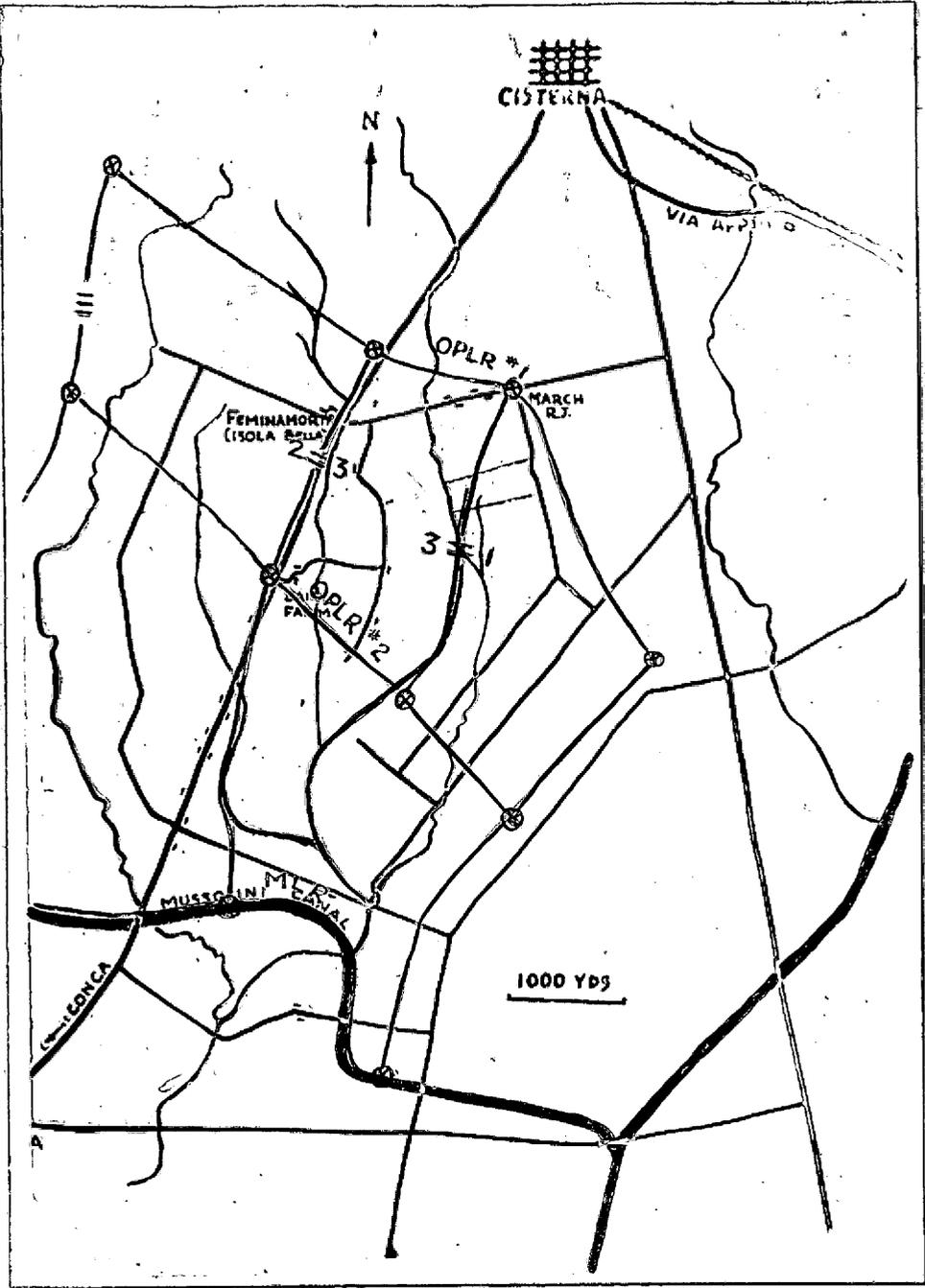


Figure 2

we had little or no choice as to the location of the defensive lines. However, from the above general mission and the rather fluid enemy situation it appeared that a thorough terrain analysis could be effected for all except the first OPLR position.

TERRAIN

"Reconnaissance of the position is as detailed as the situation permits. It includes a study of the principal routes of hostile approach. --- The character of the terrain exercises a decisive influence on the selection of positions."

The main characteristic of the terrain that confronted us was that it was flat, gradually rising to the hill mass known as the Colle Laziale which was in the hands of the enemy. The enemy thus had perfect observation from which he could and did deliver persistent, accurate artillery fire throughout the entire beachhead and against the ships near the shore.

The whole Anzio beachhead was little more than one hundred square miles; its greatest dimensions being about ten miles deep and fifteen miles wide. The eastern boundary of the Beachhead was generally the Mussolini Canal, a wide, shallow, man made canal measuring as much as one hundred and twenty feet across at the top. The water gap was only about six feet. About six miles inland the canal branched, one branch continuing northeast toward the mountains behind Cisterna. The other branch extended west and north for six or seven miles and then petered out. It was this western branch

which was designated as the critical feature on which the MLR was to be built by the Blue Battalion. (See Map)

North of the canal the terrain is perfectly flat, except for a criss-cross pattern of drainage ditches which varied from small scratches in the ground to canals thirty feet wide by twenty feet deep. Within the Battalion sector there are three of these canals of sufficient size to be considered as enemy avenues of approach. We had used most of them in advancing north and thus could expect the enemy to do likewise in any advance to the south. They are numbered on the Map as one, two and three. Number one was the most important, being thirty to forty feet across with built up banks and wide enough at the water level to permit the movement of two columns of single file troopers. It will be noticed that all three join the Mussolini Canal within the assigned area.

The Mussolini Canal was originally built to drain the area and reclaim the marshy ground for farm land. The result was that a series of model Italian farms dotted the area. It was discovered that the change from marsh to tillable soil did not extend too deep. Normal foxholes and gun emplacements struck damp soil within a foot or two of the top and when properly constructed ended with a pool of water in the bottom. This meant obvious discomfort and ill health to the men who were later to be confined to these holes for ten and twelve hours at a time. Also, mortar base plates had to be reinforced to keep them from sinking out of sight. It was soon discovered that the 4.2 Chemical Mortars could only be placed in battery in certain locations.

The road from Femminamorta to "March" RJ was hard surfaced, crushed rock, one-and-a-half to two-way road. It crossed two of the important canals or drainage ditches in the Battalion sector. The road was lined intermittently with the stone houses that characterized this model farm area. These houses were to play an important part in our defense. The enemy had previously learned the value of the masonry farm houses, barns, silos and outdoor ovens by digging into the floors and fortifying the interiors. By the time we had reached our present positions we had learned to respect these houses of Mussolini and did our utmost to out-do the Nazis in making them strong fortified centers of resistance. Although the houses were eventually almost completely destroyed by tank and artillery fire, the debris falling on top of the bunkers served to increase the camouflage and protection.

Femminamorta (Isola Bella) was apparently a grain storage center. It consisted of five or six large buildings with thicker walls which afforded much more protection. It, like all the other buildings in the area, was to be pounded to a pile of rubble, but nevertheless did serve a purpose.

The "Dairy Farm" was an elaborate farm consisting of about seven buildings, silos, pig pens and barns and was situated on the only firm foundation in the zone.

The woods at "March" RJ were really no more than scattered trees and bushes. Just west of the RJ the ground rises ever so little; but the rise of a few feet was important at that particular place. Further into enemy territory was "Kraut Woods", a thick



Two views of the "Dairy Farm" showing the typical Italian stone houses.

group of trees from which we were constantly harrassed by self-propelled guns and mortars. When we finally captured this area the trees had in fact disappeared, so intensive was our artillery.

The Conca-Cisterna road was the only useable road into the Battalion position from the rear. It was a two-way macadam road which crossed the Mussolini Canal over one of the key bridges. There is one lateral crushed rock road just north of the canal which connected with the supply routes of the 1st and 2d Battalions. Behind the canal the road net was more extensive including many lateral roads. The same pattern of scattered houses existed along these roads.

The second OPLR, situated in the general vicinity of the "Dairy Farm" buildings, had a fair secondary road net with slightly higher, more solid ground. These buildings were so grouped to afford platoon positions some protection in the houses as well as some protected observation.

The MLR, of course, had the Mussolini Canal as its main obstacle. The one bridge in the sector was already impassible to armor due to previous demolitions. The large drainage ditches which ran north through the OPLRs acted as partial obstacles to this position. There were only a few houses in this area that could be fortified.

The main avenues of enemy approach to the position were the Cisterna-Conca Road, the "March" RJ-Femminamorta Road, and the pattern of drainage ditches, of which Canal No. 1 was the most formidable. The roads were considered the main avenues of tank

attack since the soil was too soft for cross-country armored attack. To repeat again, the terrain was absolutely flat and except for the drainage ditches there were no outstanding avenues of approach as such.

TACTICAL ORGANIZATION

The initial defensive positions as directed by Division Order with its two OPLRs and the MLR along the Mussolini Canal will be covered briefly since they were only occupied for a short period. There was little doubt in our minds that these positions utilized the best terrain for the defense. It also allowed us some leeway in picking the most advantageous terrain. We did have some time to prepare a majority of the positions and stock the necessary supplies.

"The defense is built around a series of tactical localities--". In our case, as has been previously mentioned, these defensive areas were centered around the groups of stone houses and the canals with their built up banks and reinforced sides. Both OPLRs were organized as defensive positions.

Organization of the first OPLR was difficult because of the ever present enemy observation. Regrouping and the preparation of positions outside of the houses could only be accomplished at night. Company K, which initially occupied the position, had a frontage of a little over a thousand yards. Attached heavy weapons company machine guns were prepared positions in houses, outdoor ovens and in drainage ditches where ever necessary fields of fire could be

obtained. Likewise the 37 mm anti-tank guns from the Battalion Headquarters Company were sited and dug in to cover the possible tank approaches. The platoons were situated, generally, two in the eastern edge of the woods at "March" RJ and the support platoon and weapons platoon in the vicinity of canal No. 1. Since the main threat was from the east and northeast the strength of the Company was concentrated on that flank. Also the woods and the numerous ditches necessitated covering this portion of the front with troops. The left half of the sector was readily covered by fire. "March" RJ was thoroughly mined with both anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. (See Figure 3)

The second OPLR was prepared in a similar manner by Company L. The frontage on this line was a little greater as will be seen by examining the map. Again the stone houses formed the basis for the preparation of the position. Here a little depth was afforded the company. From positions prepared in or near the houses the machine guns of the heavy weapons company found excellent fields of fire covering the entire front and primarily the gaps in the forward position. Anti-tank protection was initially provided by the attachment of a platoon of 37 mm guns from the Anti-Tank Company of the Regiment. The platoon areas were generally in the vicinity of the "Dairy Farm" proper, one in the middle of the area and one further back in support. The platoon on the right flank was responsible for an outpost on the main avenue of approach, Canal No. 1.

Simultaneously with the preparation of the two OPLRs, the

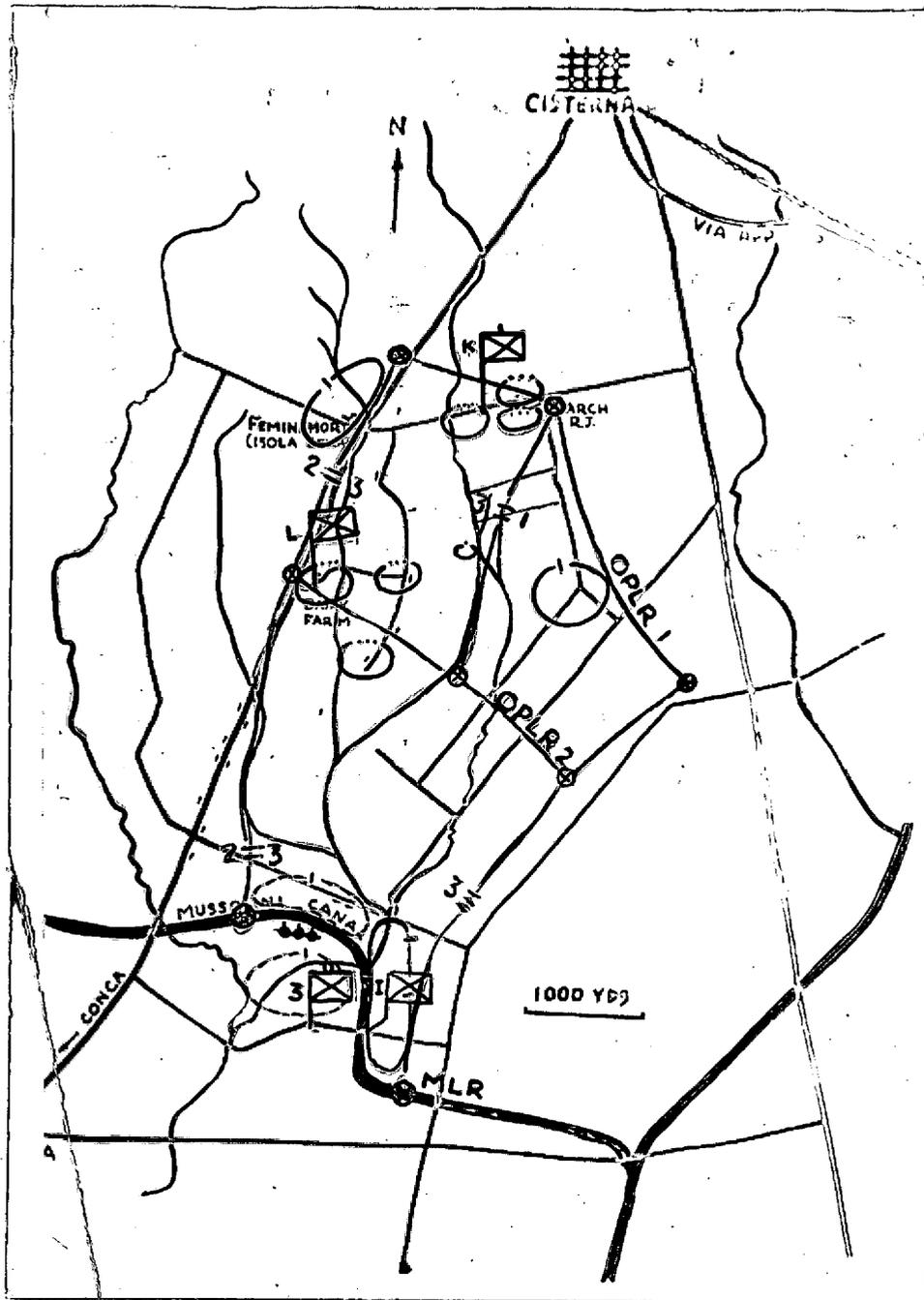


Figure 3

remainder of the Battalion moved back to the line of the Mussolini Canal to start work on the MLR. Here work could be conducted with a fair degree of safety in the open. Fox holes, gun emplacements and obstacles were thrown up by all available personnel. As has been previously mentioned there were fewer houses on which to build the position but there was the canal as the main obstacle. Machine gun positions were prepared, fields of fire cleared and final protective lines of fire sited and coordinated with adjacent units. Positions were camouflaged, connecting trenches prepared, laterally, as well as to the rear through the canal embankments. The anti-tank defense was to consist mainly of tank destroyers in hull defilade behind the canal.

The artillery, from positions further to the rear, prepared defensive fire plans for all positions, supplemented by the battalion 81 mm mortars from positions immediately behind the cover of the canal. The company 60 mm mortars were dug in good firing positions within each company area. The same canals that were the main avenues of enemy approach afforded excellent cover for the company mortars.

As rapidly as it could be made available, ammunition was piled by each gun position. In order to economize on the expenditure of ammunition, certain weapons were rationed on the number of rounds that could be fired daily under normal circumstances. This was the beginning of a procedure that was to become standard throughout our stay.

Ever present during these few days of activity was a feeling of apprehension, dislike of the uncertainty of the defense and the

See

feeling that we were too scattered out. As is evident from the above description of the preparations of the two OPLRs, they were not real outpost lines in the sense that we are taught. The manual states that the OPLR and the ground between it and the MLR are prepared for delaying action to the extent permitted by time and labor. In the true sense of the word I suppose that ours were delaying positions but there was a strong feeling of permanency and none of us looked forward to the day when we would have to evacuate those positions under fire.

Explicit instructions were issued to the forward companies regarding their withdrawal if and when it became necessary. In keeping with our principles of the delay, they were to pull back only if forced to and then only as an organized group and on battalion order. It was difficult for them to understand how this withdrawal was to be accomplished, especially across that flat terrain.

By the 6th of February the basic defensive positions were nearing completion. The Battalion was fairly well established in its first real defensive position in depth. On the night of the 6-7 February, Regiment directed that the forward OPLR be immediately established as the MLR. It had been decided on a much higher level that we could ill afford to give up the intervening ground between the first OPLR and the MLR. The move forward was made that night with a feeling of relief to once more get the companies within at least supporting distance of each other.

REGROUPING

The order to regroup placed the Blue Battalion in the position that it was to occupy most of the remaining time spent at Anzio. Of the three lines of resistance prepared, only one was abandoned, the Mussolini Canal position. The Battalion displaced as indicated in Figure 4. The frontage was the same and the MLR was now to be held by one company with two in support. The Battalion held this position from the 7th to the 9th of February when it was moved to Regimental reserve, and then on the 18th of February reoccupied the same position. This monograph is intended to cover only that part of the defense wherein the Battalion held a portion of the MLR so the nine day period as reserve will be omitted.

The defensive position had overnight changed from one with outposts a minimum of five thousand yards in front of the MLR to one with no outposts. It will be recalled that enemy action prevented a thorough reconnaissance of the newly established MLR. Further, our brief terrain study has shown that this ground is not the best suited for defense. In reestablishing the forward company position, which we will call the K Company position, it was deemed advisable to pull back from the "March" RJ about a hundred yards to more favorable positions on slightly higher ground. Since this company was defending in two directions, east and north, it was definitely the "hot corner" of the Battalion. The companies were rotated weekly to avoid exposing one too long in that position.

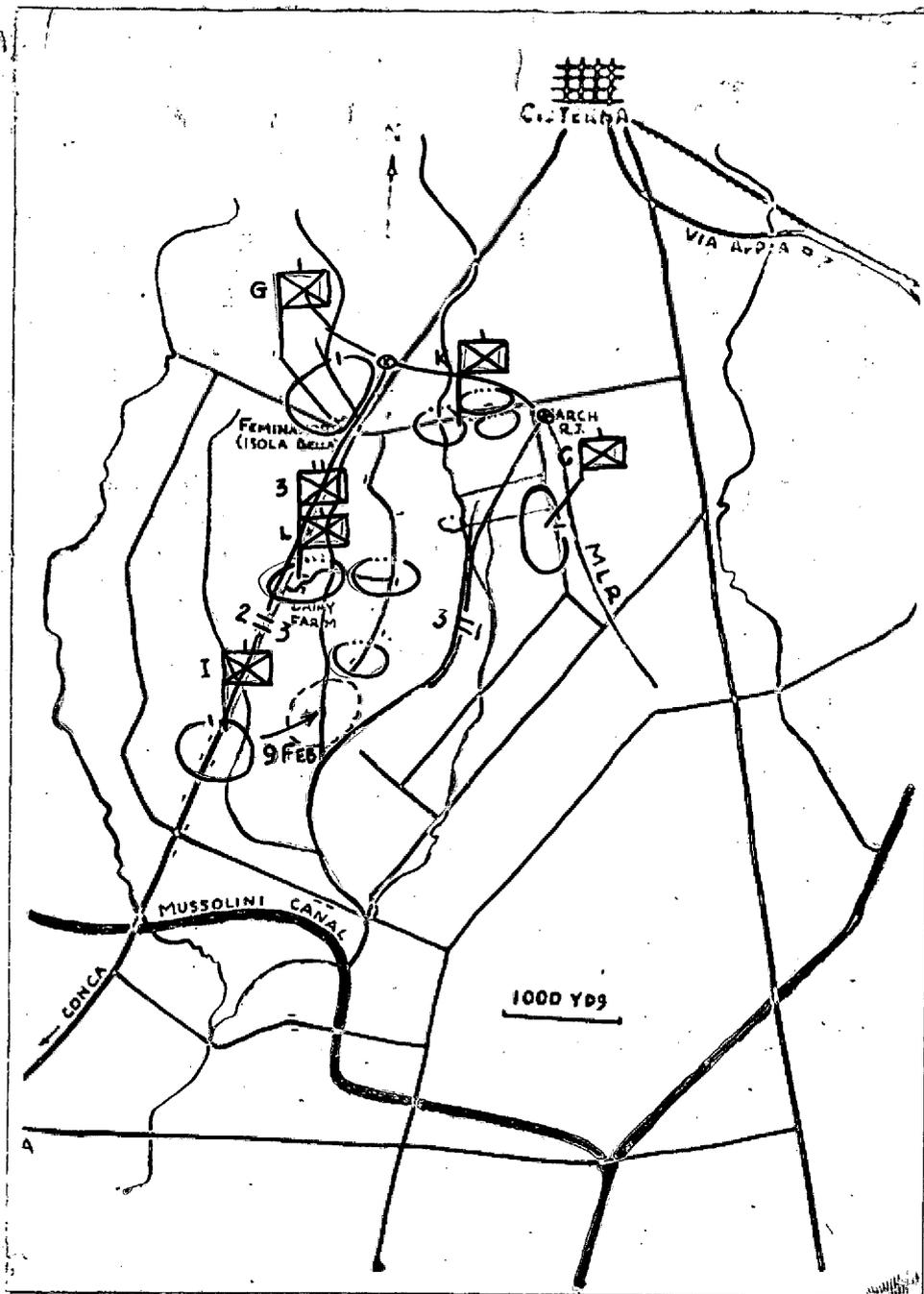


Figure 4

The other two company positions were changed occasionally to conform to a closer knit pattern of defense. The L Company, or middle company position, was moved forward slightly to afford closer fire support to the forward company. The rear company was not only moved forward but also took over the responsibility of the outpost on Canal No. 1. By the end of February the dispositions were generally as indicated in Figure 5.

ORGANIZATION OF FIRE

"The organization of systematic flanking fire by machine guns supplemented by other small arms constitutes the basis of defensive dispositions." The machine guns of Company M continued to form the frame upon which the remaining small arms of the companies were built to make up the final protective line. Initially a platoon of Heavy Machine Guns was placed in position in the sector of each of the forward companies. These guns were immediately supplemented by an equal number of light machine guns which the Battalion had used on the initial landings at Anzio. An additional provisional machine gun platoon was organized from available personnel in M Company and they too were placed in positions strengthening the network of fire. Further, as they were made available, additional machine guns, heavy and light, were added to the then existing organizations. Weapons crews were limited to the barest minimum to allow more weapons to be placed in the line. Upon this frame which now extended throughout the entire Battalion were placed the

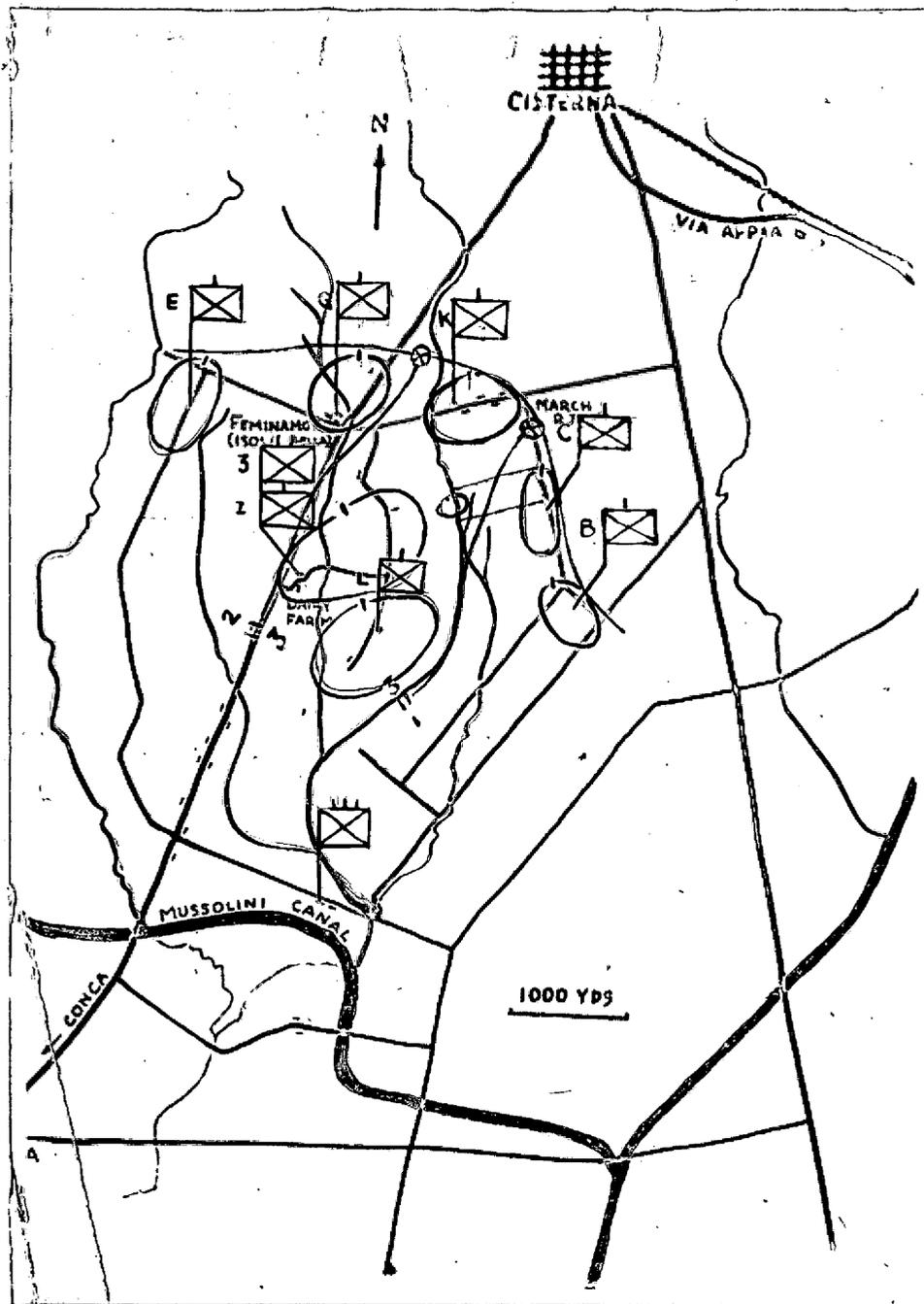


Figure 5

machine guns organic within the companies and of course the rifle-
men to afford protection and to fill in gaps. Flanking fire was
exchanged with adjacent companies and between platoons. The salient
which characterized the K Company position was especially difficult
to cover with flanking fire. While in these positions the Battalion
acquired some 19 or 20 additional machine guns and they were all
used. Organic mortars, 60 mm and 81 mm, were used to cover close-
in gaps in the fields of fire of the machine guns. Also mortar bar-
rages were prepared and fired to cover the most impressive avenues
of enemy approach.

Shortly after regrouping, two platoons of 4.2 Chemical Mortars
reported to the Battalion Command Post at the "Dairy Farm" to take
up firing positions, one platoon in direct support of each the 2nd
and 3rd Battalions. It was discovered that the "Dairy Farm" was the
only ground in the area that could support the base plates of these
big mortars. These weapons added tremendous weight to the close-in
fire support available to the companies.

As an expedient means of massing battalion mortar fires, the
Commander of Company M established a Fire Direction Center from
which he controlled the fire of his own 81 mm mortars, plus two
additional ones he had acquired, plus the eight 4.2 Chemical Mortars.
This worked extremely well not only for the 3rd Battalion but also
made available to the flanking Battalions concentrated mortar fire
on immediate call.

The normal artillery fires were available to the Battalion
through the Liaison Officer and the Forward Observer. The Artillery

new 57 mm guns supplemented the 37's. Immediately after regrouping, the normal attachment of a platoon of tanks and tank destroyers was made to form the real network of anti-tank defense. The tanks were placed in depth throughout the Battalion position. They took up posts behind houses from which they could move into firing positions. One tank was always in the K Company position. Due mainly to their more effective weapon and less armor protection, the tank destroyers were only attached during periods of threatened armored attacks. Positions were prepared within the Battalion reserve companies from which they could cover the tanks and also add depth along the possible routes of enemy armor. Bazookas and rifle grenades continued to be the personal anti-tank defense of the individual soldier and were placed where they could be readily available.

ORGANIZATION OF THE GROUND

The organization of the ground has been touched upon in describing the initial defensive positions. Although it is true that the existing structures were used to the greatest extent possible as a basis for the platoon and squad strong points, it was obviously impossible to place all men within the cover of houses. The majority of individual riflemen were in fox holes. Initially these were the normal type of fox hole that a man learns to dig whenever he stops. It was found advisable to encourage the men to build two-man fox holes affording some companionship during the tedious daylight hours. Sandbags were made available to increase

the protection and the comfort. When these were fairly well established, connecting trenches were constructed to some extent. The same general procedure was followed for the weapons positions. During our entire stay in these positions work on individual protection never ceased.

One of the first defensive measures taken by the Battalion was the laying of mine fields and tactical wire. As soon as possible every effort was made to completely wire in the entire front with double apron wire reinforced by concertinas. It was found necessary to use Engineers to supervise the laying of wire, due mainly to the high percentage of replacements within the Battalion. The progress thus was very slow. In addition to the obvious necessity of covering the wire with fire, numerous booby traps and trip wires were laid within the obstacle. The effectiveness of these devices was unfortunately illustrated later when our patrols occasionally wandered into their own wire.

The laying and marking of mine fields, both anti-tank and anti-personnel, presented even greater problems. The basic plan was to cover all tank approaches and all main infantry approaches with mines. The actual mine laying job was at first, of necessity, accomplished by the Infantry. It was found that although a mine field can be deliberately laid, marking it and locating it at night under fire is a most difficult job. The confusion which resulted from working in the darkness often meant that fields were not properly marked and that locations which were reported were often unreliable. The system finally arrived at was to reverse the usual

procedure by first marking the field, secondly locating the marked area and finally laying the mines.

Few demolitions were accomplished within the Battalion area. Two small bridges were prepared for demolition by the Engineers and the necessary primers maintained by the Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Officer. Instructions for their demolition were to come from Regimental Headquarters. Actually one bridge, right behind the K Company position, was hit by enemy artillery fire, detonating the prepared charge. Although this was now an effective anti-tank obstacle, it was behind K Company with its one tank.

The maintenance of communications within the Battalion and to adjacent and higher headquarters was one of the biggest problems that confronted us. We moved into position initially with the authorized six or eight EES Type field telephones plus two sound power phones per company. When the Battalion was relieved at the end of March we had by count, 36 EES telephones, six sound power phones per company plus innumerable German telephones and we used them all. We felt that it was imperative that immediate communication be available to all companies, important outposts and observation posts. This great number of telephones involved an even greater network of wires to make the phones effective. As many as four different lines were run to the forward company using different routes. More often than not, all lines would be broken during a days operation. Repairing the wire lines was a nightly task of the greatest importance.

The SCR 300 radio net was the main alternative to the tele-

phone system and it was standard operating procedure within the Battalion to switch on the radio once the telephone went out. The artillery fire direction net and the supporting tank radio nets were used as a last resort if everything else failed. Pyrotechnics were used occasionally but were not found too effective because of the fact that the enemy used them so consistently.

By the end of February the Blue Battalion was well established to take what might come. Thousands of sandbags, artillery shell casings and timber had been well used to increase the available natural cover. A minimum of ten thousand rounds of machine gun ammunition was stacked by each gun. Although critically short, each 60 mm mortar had at least twenty rounds of Illuminating Shells. Despite the severe rationing, M Company had an adequate supply of 81 mm mortar ammunition.

CONDUCT OF THE DEFENSE

Having now established a defensive position with no outpost line to warn us of any enemy activity it became our main mission to move out and seek that information. Practically all patrolling was done at night and it was carried on throughout the entire front every night. It is not considered necessary, nor is there room, to relate in any detail the activities of these daily patrols. They varied from two and three man listening posts to well organized and specially trained thirty to forty man combat teams. Generally their missions were accomplished with a fair degree of success. In a

defensive situation where the initiative has passed to the enemy, the importance of aggressive patrolling to confuse him, throw him off balance, and take prisoners can not be over emphasized. As the situation stabilized, that taking of prisoners of war presented a very difficult problem. As the combat efficiency of the Battalion decreased through the loss of experienced personnel, the efficiency of the patrols decreased proportionately. Soldiers not trained to work as a team will not turn in good patrolling jobs.

In a frantic effort to overcome the deficiencies in patrolling related above and to maintain the effectiveness of our crew served weapons and communications, a definite plan of "in place" training was instituted. M Company conducted actual schools behind the Mussolini Canal. The rifle companies conducted what training they could while in the rear positions.

Several enemy reactions to our patrols are interesting and similar tactics were employed by our troops later. Frequently the enemy allowed our patrols to pass his forward elements without molesting them, and attempted to cut them off from the rear. Also our patrols often found outpost positions occupied one night and unoccupied the next night. It became apparent before long that this was a system habitually employed by the enemy and our troops were quick to take advantage of it. When a known enemy position was found unoccupied it was immediately booby-trapped with hand grenades.

During the daytime "no movement" was the by-word. Obviously the necessary alerts were maintained on all positions and the observation posts were most active. Any visible movement during daylight

hours brought immediate enemy artillery. Needless to say the same held for the enemy. Our artillery was so effective and accurate that often concentrations would be called for against a single German moving across a field. This was a waste of fire power and strict instructions were issued that artillery would only be employed if the target was out of range of the other weapons.

Weekly relief of the forward K Company position was soon accomplished with the minimum of confusion. Relief of any unit actively in contact with the enemy will always be a delicate operation because of the resulting vulnerability during relief. The relief was generally effected by platoons moving individually and actually physically relieving the occupying troops. The relieved troops then moved back to a predesignated assembly area prior to taking over the relieving units old positions. Often diversionary patrols were sent out from the unit being relieved. Crew served weapons and all communications were left in position.

Supply and evacuation were accomplished in the normal manner and with little or no difficulty. Supplies of both ammunition and rations were delivered to each company at night by jeep and trailer, normally one to each company. The Battalion Rear Echelon was back behind the Mussolini Canal where some movement was permitted during the day. To my knowledge only one incident of interest occurred regarding supply. The night after the 29 February Counterattack when the supply route to the K Company position was still under small arms fire and the bridge had been blown, due to poor staff liaison the supply sergeant made his normal run forward. Much to

everyones surprise the jeep got through without as much as a round fired, only to end up in the bottom of the bridge crater.

Similar to supply, evacuation was accomplished only at night except in emergency. Casualties were usually evacuated to the Battalion Command Post by stretcher or supply jeep where the Battalion Surgeon met them with ambulances and evacuated them to the aid station behind the canal. At the time it was felt that more could be accomplished with the aid station behind the canal where some movement during daylight was permitted. In emergency ambulances and jeeps were driven up to the "Dairy Farm" during daylight.

Initially C and K Type rations were issued to the troops. The inadequacies of this type ration over extended periods were soon discovered and whenever possible "10-in-1" rations were substituted. All of the above rations were made more palatable by the use of the single burner Coleman stove issued to each squad. This means of heating the food was later supplemented by requiring each company to bring as many heating units from the kitchens as could be accommodated inside the houses within the company area. These units served the dual purpose of heating food and affording some means of warmth to the men. Later as the situation became more static hot meals of some sort were served the companies whenever possible.

The life of the soldier in this position was still at best very bad. Battle casualties were abnormally high, mainly from enemy artillery fire. Non-battle casualties were even higher due mainly to the weather. Malaria, trench foot and respiratory diseases took the highest toll. In an effort to reduce the trench foot, orders

were issued that each soldier would massage his feet daily and put on the clean socks that were issued with his rations. Short marches were conducted around the area at night to revive the circulation in the feet.

The psychological aspect of service in Anzio was probably the most unhealthy, although we didnt know it by that name then. The replacement after receiving a minimum of orientation behind the canal was led forward at night and placed in a wet hole in the ground. He was told which way the enemy was, instructed that he was in such and such squad, platoon and company, warned not to stick his head up during daylight and left. Usually he was placed in a hole with a more experienced man, which helped. It was not uncommon for a man to join one night and be evacuated the next as a casualty without having even seen his squad and platoon leader in daylight. The psychological aspect was never completely overcome due mainly to the urgent need for men.

THE COUNTERATTACK

At about midnight the 28th of February that Battalion and in turn the companies were placed on special alert against a possible enemy attack the next morning. Standard operating procedure within the Battalion included alerting each company just before daylight, but this was special. At about 0500, first light, the 29th, the last large scale German attack was launched from behind an extremely heavy artillery preparation. The preparation seemed more impressive

because about ten minutes before our artillery had opened with a counter preparation in anticipation of the enemy attack.

Within the Blue Battalion the impact was immediately felt by K Company which was occupying the forward position. That company was completely smothered with enemy fire and was at once temporarily out of communication. Immediately following the artillery the enemy attacked in about battalion strength from the east on the "March" RJ part of the company position. The German attack overran one platoon, pushed the other leading platoon back about one hundred yards and then was forced to swing to the south of the company position. The stand of K Company in stopping and repelling the enemy attack was nothing short of heroic. Of the original German battalion that had started the attack less than a company continued the attack between K Company and the 1st Battalion.

Although veered off its track, the enemy attack did continue. It overran the L Company outpost on Canal No. 1 and continued west into the I Company position. (See Figure 6) Here the attack as directly affected the Blue Battalion was stopped about noon.

Early in the morning when the canal outpost was reported captured, the situation on the Battalion front coupled with that confronting the 2nd Battalion seemed serious enough to commit the reserve, Company L. Orders were issued for L Company to move up to Canal No. 1, recapture its outpost and reinforce the Battalion front by moving into position south of K Company. This counterattack by L Company was almost a complete failure. Although by far the most outstanding company in the Battalion, and the most ably commanded,

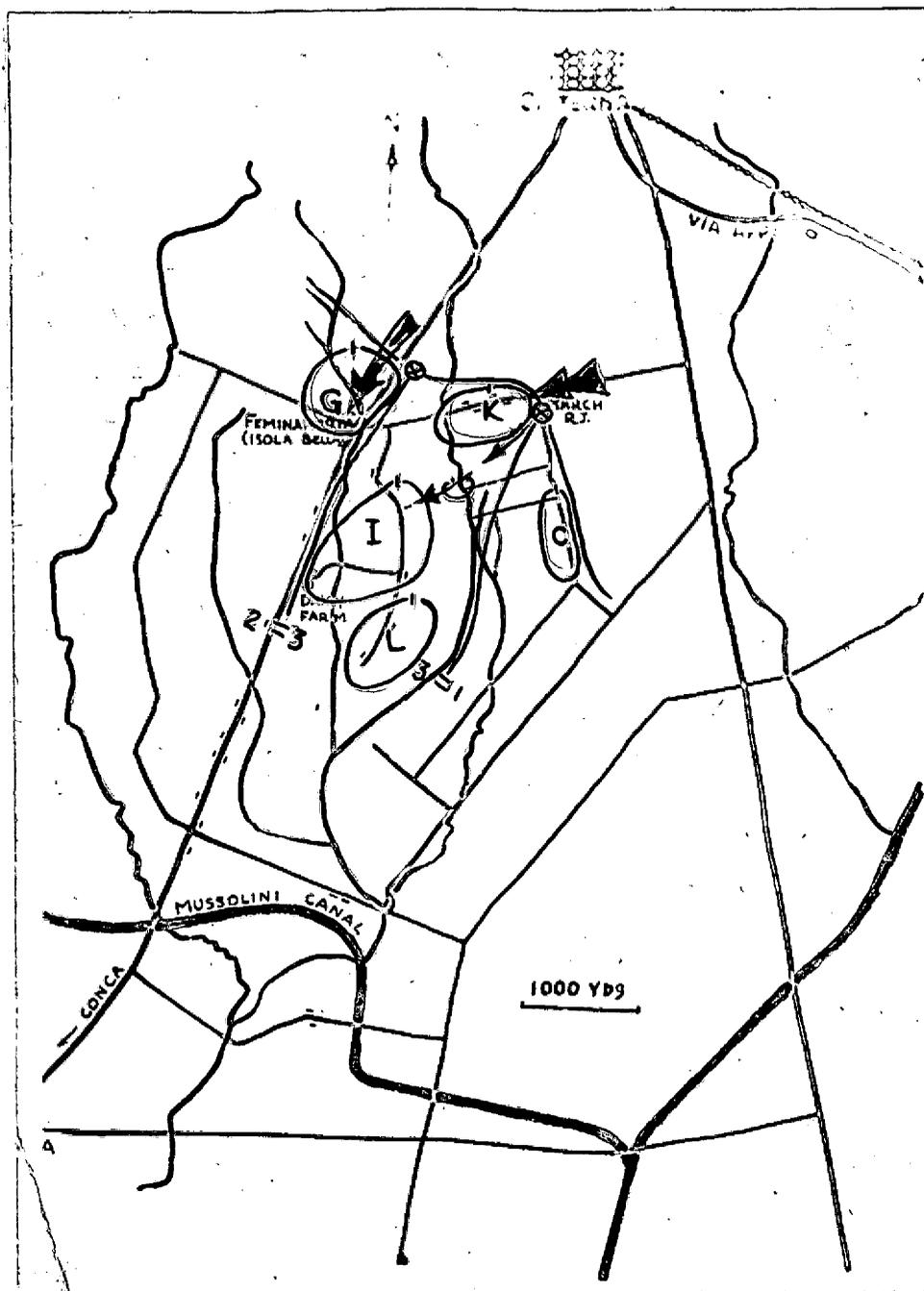


Figure 6

under the conditions of intense artillery fire, open flat terrain, and confusion, the company could not be assembled, organized, and briefed sufficiently to conduct any kind of an effective counter-attack. The canal outpost was regained and there the company attack bogged down.

The 2nd Battalion situation at Femminamorta was of just as serious proportions to the 3rd Battalion as the attack against K Company. Simultaneously with the attack against K Company the enemy attacked with both infantry and tanks astride the Cisterna-Conca Road against G Company. The company was actually forced back to the south side of Femminamorta where the enemy attack was finally halted. The adjustment of Corps artillery by Blue Battalion observers played a considerable part in stopping that enemy attack. During the afternoon F Company was moved forward from Regimental reserve, attacked from the west and restored the Femminamorta position. In the interest of continuity F Company was then attached to the 3d Battalion and the Battalion sector was extended to include Femminamorta.

The enemy attack continued with much less intensity throughout the Regimental front for the next three days but no ground was lost. By the 4th of March the enemy apparently gave up trying to fulfill Hitlers demands that the Beachhead be erased and retired to his prepared positions. During the counterattack and the few days that followed the 3rd Battalion had not only taken severe punishment but also had been jolted abruptly out of the serenity of the somewhat static positions. All positions were restored as

soon as possible and the laying of defensive wire, mine fields, communications and the construction of more defensive works was continued with renewed vigor.

Starting about the middle of March, one company at a time was relieved for forty-eight hours and sent back to the beach for a rest. This was accomplished by reactivating the Regimental Provisional J Company, made up of cooks, mechanics and clerks. On about the 23rd of March orders were received relieving the entire Battalion. By the 25th the entire Regiment was assembled on the beach in Corps Reserve.

CONCLUSIONS

"The general objective of the defense is to gain time ---." We will defend in future wars, that is assured. Whether we will defend overnight or for months at a time is a matter for conjecture. A brief summary of the lessons we learned at Anzio is presented for what use it may be in the future.

The Blue Battalion was assigned a defensive mission when it was least expected and when we were least prepared for it. Preparedness for the defense must be considered at all times.

We assumed the defensive while in close contact with the enemy and were not able to choose the ground and establish warning systems. In fast moving operations this situation is apt to be the rule rather than the exception.

Terrain analysis and utilization can not be substituted for.

In any prolonged defensive action each item of the terrain must be used to our advantage.

In the defense it is likely that weapons will be plentiful but ammunition will be rationed. This must be expected and proper use be made of all weapons.

The proper organization of the ground is of paramount importance. It is a task that should never end. The aim of proper organization of the ground should be twofold, a proper and effective position and a position affording some comfort to the men. Proper utilization of mines, tactical wire and demolitions can strengthen a position immeasurably, improper use can cause grief.

Communications in the defense is also of utmost importance. The commander of all echelons must know what is going on at all times within his unit.

The need for good, active patrolling has been mentioned. With or without outpost lines, patrols are the main source of information of enemy activity.

The main lesson we learned is that the defensive position is no stronger than the men who make it up. Great effort must be directed to the proper reception, orientation and utilization of these men. Further, all men, especially the leaders must be kept from acquiring the natural lethargic attitude so readily assumed when in a static defensive position. Although defensive in name all thoughts and actions must be offensive.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Academic Division, The Cavalry School
Defense Terms and Definitions
T-101 (1940-41)
2. Bulletin of the USA Medical Department
The Prevention of Trench Foot
April 1945
3. Chief of Staff, U. S. Army
The Winning of the War in Europe and the Pacific
Biennial Report, 1 July 1943 - 30 June 1945
4. The Command and General Staff School
Aids to the Study of Terrain
5. Headquarters Third Infantry Division
G-3 Periodic Reports
22 January 1944 - 1 April 1944
6. Headquarters Third Infantry Division
Miscellaneous Operation Orders, Field Orders and Training
Memoranda
7. Headquarters Third Infantry Division
Notes on the Defense from Experience Gained on the Anzio Beach-
head
8. Headquarters Fifth Infantry
Proposed Unit Citation
6 November 1945

9. Headquarters Fifteenth Infantry

The Record

10. Headquarters TSFET

Blue and White Devils

GI Stories of the Ground, Air and Service Forces in the ETO Series

11. Infantry Journal Press

History of the Third Division, World War II

Edited by Don G. Tarrart - 1947

12. Mauldin, Bill

Up Front

New York, Henry Holt and Co., Inc. - 1945

13. Military Intelligence Division, WD - GMDS

The German Operation at Anzio

14. War Department

Infantry Battalion, FM 7-20

1 October 1944 - U. S. Government Printing Office

15. War Department

Field Service Regulations - Operations, FM 100-5

15 June 1944 - U. S. Government Printing Office

LIBRARY
USA ARMOR SCHOOL
FORT KNOX, KY 40121-5200

