

Staff Department
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

STUDENT MONOGRAPH
Advanced Infantry Officers Course
Class #1
1952 - 53

TITLE
COMBAT OPERATIONS OF THE 370TH
REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM, 92D
INFANTRY DIVISION

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PREFACE

The preparation of this monograph on the subject, "Combat Operations of the 370th Regimental Combat Team, 92d Infantry Division", was motivated by the desire to present a clear, unbiased and factual general picture of the combat actions of this organization, a regiment of a predominately Negro Division, the 92d Infantry.

Since the war there have been many generalizations and rumors associated with this organization as a whole. As one who participated in combat with the organization I feel qualified to express first hand observations and to provide factual comments on many of its operations.

I joined the 370th Infantry Regiment upon leaving college in 1944, as an Enlisted Man. After experiencing the "Louisiana Maneuvers" with this unit I went overseas with them in June 1944. As a Non-Commissioned Officer, I fought in the early operations of the Combat Team, was wounded in the battle for Mount Cauala ("Rocky Ridge"), and later received a Combat Commission. As an officer I served with the 370th Infantry Regiment until hostilities were terminated in Italy.

In order to limit the scope of this work the writing was confined to military and operational factors rather than complex social problems. In this treatise I will discuss a few of the operations, calibre of replacement, some of the problems encountered, and end with lessons learned and conclusions drawn. It is felt that the development of this monograph will enable the reader to answer the question, "Did the 370th Regimental Combat Team, 92d Division accomplish its mission?"

INTRODUCTION

The preparation of this monograph has been motivated by a desire to enhance the reader's and listener's knowledge on true facts about a regiment of the 92d Infantry Division, a unique division. My subject is Combat Operations of the 370th Regimental Combat Team, 92d Infantry Division. It is hoped that this work will accomplish the task of clarifying some of the mist and haze of legends, generalizations and rumors associated with this outfit. And also, there is the sincere hope that this contribution will do its bit to enrich the record of combat in rugged Italy.

I feel that the aim of my monograph is aptly stated in the words of Paul Goodman, in his study, "A Fragment of Victory", quote: "There is a belief in secular circles that if you can learn the history of an undertaking you can achieve its final and total explanation. This is a kind of intellectual arrogance that ignores the varied facets of human emotions, backgrounds and experiences. Although this work aims to provide perspective by developing a clear and evolutionary narrative of the military activities, all the time it was being prepared it was realized that a mere chronology of military events excludes the psychological and sociological factors. Such a report, it was recognized envelopes the issue of the aptitude of the men, and minimizes the effects of discipline, morale, esprit de corps, and efficiency - the important results of leadership and training." (1) Unquote.

(1) Goodman, Paul, "A Fragment of Victory", p. vii, Army War College, 1952, TIS Library.

"The 370th Regimental Combat Team was the first element of the 92d Infantry Division to arrive in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations in July 1944." (2) Thereafter it participated creditably in activities in connection with seizing and crossing the Arno River, the occupation of Lucca, Montecatini, and San Marcello, and the penetration of the Gothic Line. Battle indoctrination was gradual and progressive. With the arrival of the balance of the 92d Division in August through November 1944 and subsequent augmentation of the Outfit with the addition of other units the 370th RCT was a part of the diverse allied force that finally achieved victory in the Italian Theater. (3) "Action was seen from Pontedera on the Arno River in Central Italy, thence west and north along the length of the coast of the Ligurian Sea to the famous old Port of Genoa. From there the operations continued westward to Ventimiglia near the French border." (4) (See Map D)

Because the 92d Division was a Negro unit with a mixture of White and Negro Officers, and because, as the ravages of war continued, it came to include Japanese-American and White soldiers, this account becomes a human interest story of the moulding of heterogeneous elements to pass or fail the severe test of war. It reflects the achievements, the failures and the group accomplishments of the men who made their contribution to victory in Europe. For all who read, or hear, this monograph it is fervently hoped that there is enough information to provide a clear picture of the activities of the 92d Division, particularly the 370th Regimental Combat Team, so that an intelligent evaluation of its performance can be made.

(2) Ibid., p. 122

(3) With the 92d Infantry Division, p. 36, Information and Education Section, MTOUSA, 1945, Personal Copy.

(4) Ibid., p. 4.

Terrain

The peninsula of Italy looks like a boot, with a heel, a toe, and a broad kneecap. (See Map A) Mountains dominate the length of the Italian Peninsula. The Alps form Italy's northern boundary and extend down the entire length of the peninsula to the toe of the boot. The highways are few in number and generally bad except for a few satisfactory state highways.

For the most part Italy's rivers are not navigable. Many are torrential and impetuous, and become raging floods during the spring thaws. By and large, Italy's terrain overwhelmingly favors the defense, and is ideal for digging in and delaying actions. This is the type of terrain in which the 370th Combat Team received its battle indoctrination.

Enemy

By the time the 370th Combat Team arrived in Italy and began to take its place beside other front line units, the Allies had advanced to the southern bank of the Arno River. The Combat Team was assigned to the Fifth Army. About this time, when the threat of the Fifth Army to break through to Bologna was strongest, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the Supreme German Commander of Army Group Southwest in Italy, committed more than half of the available enemy front-line strength against the Fifth Army. "At this time thirteen of Kesselring's twenty-one divisions along the frontline opposed the Fifth Army." (5)

(5) "Operations in Italy and Sicily", p. 86, USMA Printing Office, Washington, 1945, TIS Library.

Early Operations

The first action assigned CT370 was on 29 August 44 when it was assigned the mission of driving the enemy from the area in which it was operating with the 1st Armored Division south of the Arno River, and of extending the line forward to the river. "The objective was seized within an hour by Company G and Company E with the support of the 598th Field Artillery Battalion." (6)

The first major engagement assigned was the crossing of the Arno River and seizure of Mt. Pisano, a major hill mass in the Arno plain which afforded the enemy excellent observation and fields of fire. With CCA and IV Corps units the Arno River was crossed at 1000 hours on 1 September, in spite of heavy enemy mine fields and intense enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire. (7) "Mount Pisano was taken by the end of 2 September and the Combat Team Command Post was moved...." (8)

In the face of increased pressure the enemy began a withdrawal to the Gothic Lines and the attack pushed northwest toward Lucca. By 5 September 2d Battalion occupied Lucca and set up a mobile perimeter defense around the city. (9) (See Map A)

Against strong enemy resistance CT 370 continued advancing up the Serchio Valley taking numerous key objectives and mountains, as the main infantry force of Task Force 92. (10) By the end of September such remarkable progress was being made until the Combat Commands of the 1st Armored Division were detached to be used in another sector. CT 370 was now thinly spread out covering a sixteen mile zone. (11)

(6) Ibid., p. 25.

(7) Ibid., p. 26.

(8) Ibid., p. 28.

(9) Ibid., p. 30.

(10) Task force 92, CCA, of which CT 370 was a part consisted of 1st Tank Bn., Troop B, 81st Recon Sqd and Co C, 701st Tank Destroyer Bn.

(11) Ibid., p. 37.

After continued success in this area TF 92 was ordered to take over the entire coastal sector extending from Forte dei Marmi, on the west coast, due east to the Brazilian Expeditionary Force boundary in the Serchio Valley.

"Forty-two days of combat were over for CT 370. There were 263 casualties. Nineteen men were killed in action, 225 were wounded, and 19 were missing. The Combat Team had moved forward almost thirty miles against resistance that included small arms and heavy artillery fire. The Gothic Line had been penetrated slightly. Highway 12, the enemy's main east-west route in front of IV Corps, was closed off; the troops had participated in three river crossings; and they had tasted the difficulties of operating in the Appennines." (12)

Mount Cauala "Rocky Ridge"

Up to this time casualties within CT 370 had been comparatively light. Morale was high and small units were still led by sergeants, lieutenants, and captains who had been with the regiment since its activation. But, as the battle continued to rage against a determined and able foe, strongly entrenched in his fortifications of the Gothic Line, the casualties began to mount. A good example of the cost paid in this penetration of the Combat Team into the Gothic Line was the battle for Mount Cauala, commonly dubbed "Rocky Ridge". This was a rugged mount over 1200 feet high. Here the enemy was strongly entrenched. "In order to advance towards the southern slopes of Mount Cauala the troops had to ford the swollen Seravezza River, with its steep and slippery banks." (13) (See Drawing B) The enemy had sighted mortar and machine gun positions in depth across the entire mountain, and all avenues of approach were heavily mined.

(12) Ibid., p. 38.

(13) Ibid., p. 44.

"The offensive along the coast got underway at 0600 October 44 with the first and 2d Battalions, 370th Infantry, attacking abreast against Mount Cauala.... An advance of slightly over 1 mile was made on the right, and slight gains were made near the coast, but heavy rains and insufficient reconnaissance hampered the troops. The next day the 2d Battalion, 370th Infantry was driven back by mortar and artillery fire when it reached the upper slopes of Mount Cauala.

The Battalion regrouped after dark. At 0300, 9 October, the troops moved forward again, scaled the steep rocks below the summit, and reached the crest without opposition. In the afternoon mortar and artillery fire forced a withdrawal....

For the next two days Task Force 92 made preparations to renew the attack on Mt. Cauala. Ladders were constructed for the assault against the cliffs, and crossings were sought over the Seravezza River, which was badly swollen by the steady rains. (14) After bitter fighting, and several attempts, bloody Mount Cauala was finally taken from the enemy on 19 October.

In the fighting to achieve this victory the regiment lost a number of its best Infantry Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers. The 370th, "during the first week of its assault,.... suffered over 400 casualties with 10 per cent killed in action". (15)

Naturally heavy fighting and high casualties as described required having replacements. The combat team didn't have a pipeline to the states to keep its strength up to par, nor did the segregation policy permit transfer of trained infantry replacements from other organizations within the theater.

(14) "Fifth Army History", VII, p. 172, Government Printing Office, Washington, TIS Library.

(15) Goodman, Paul, op. cit., p. 51

Finally the other regiments arrived and the unit "by order of IV Corps on the 4th of November,... began combat operations as the 92d Infantry Division". "On this date also, the 370th Infantry Regiment took command of the Serchio Valley Sector. The Division frontage now ran from the Tyrrhenian Sea east some 35 kilometers". (16) This did help the replacement shortage somewhat.

Calibre of Replacements - Piecemeal Use

"With the continued combat losses from piercing of the enemy's strong mountain defenses the 5th Army once again became concerned about a source of infantry replacements to maintain the 92d Division at effective fighting strength. This prompted finally the assignment of the 366th Infantry,... to the 92d Division." (17)

"The 366th Infantry, a unit of the organized reserves, had arrived in Italy in May 1944 for airbase guard duties, but shortly after its arrival Fifth Army considered it for an active role in the assault on Rome. An inspection of its equipment and its state of training however, led to its rejection because it was discovered that even though it had passed its combat firing tests, its dispersed and continued static duties had left it unprepared for combat... the Regimental Commander, Colonel H. D. Queen felt that three months of intensive training would prepare his regiment for combat duty." (18) However, this period of training prior to commitment merely proved to be wishful thinking. The 366th Infantry was immediately thrown into the 370th Infantry, and other units soon after arrival without the benefit of training, proper orientation or full combat equipment.

"But instead of bolstering the strength of the 92d Division, the presence of the 366th Infantry made it possible for some of the 92d Division units to be employed elsewhere on the Fifth Army front. The rationale was that in addition to providing further training for division units as a result of their contact with more experienced units, the 92d

(16) "With the 92d Infantry Division", p. 36, Information and Education Section, MTOUSA, 1945, Personal Copy.

(17) "5th Army History", VII, op. cit., p. 178

(18) Goodman, Paul, op. cit., p. 63

Division Units could ease the relief and rest problem for veteran white units in the line.

On 3 December, the 365th Infantry Combat Team^{moved} south of Bologna to be attached to the 88th Infantry Division.... The 3rd Battalion, 370th Infantry, moved to the east, where it was attached to the 6th South African Armored Division.... The 370th Infantry was left with only one of its own battalions, as its 2d Battalion was operating in the Goggio Montana Sector with the Brazilians.... This kind of mottled relationship came to be accepted in the 92d Division. Shifts were frequent, and distance between units soon came to be taken for granted". (19)

There was a degree of straggling and leaving of positions without authority around this time. Punitive measures were justifiably stiff, just as in other organizations. The press received information of this and the division was severely criticized in articles and distorted accounts.

The Enemy Christmas Attack

Indications of a build-up of German forces opposite the thinly held western sector of the Army front were detected and confirmed by the middle of December. German troop concentrations were reported as increasing in various towns. Prisoners spoke of a special program being planned for 26 or 28 December. "... the awareness of the numerical inadequacy of allied troops in the Serchio Sector, and the threat to the Fifth Army supply base at Leghorn, substantiated by the movement of the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division," (20) were intelligence indications which should have caused the Army Commander to take immediate measures to bolster our troop strength to meet this situation.

(19) Goodman, Paul, op. cit., p. 64.

(20) Goodman, Paul, op. cit., p. 72. (Enemy units are underlined throughout this monograph)

92d Division troops were thinly spread over the jagged hills and valleys with regiments mixed and units dispersed. (For general dispositions see Map C)

"That German commanders were also fully aware of the 370th sector is demonstrated in a post-war interrogation of Brig. General Fretter-Dico, the Commanding General of the 148th Infantry Division, who told American interrogators that, "The weakness of your deployment in the Serchio Valley in December 1944 were that your troops were deployed on a front which was too long for the number of troops available, and your reserves were too far in the rear areas which prevented their being deployed immediately." (21)

"The first evidence of a German attack along the six mile front, astride the Serchio River appeared at 0450 on 26 December, when Company "A", 370th Infantry reported that they were receiving heavy machine gun fire near Molazzano. While this fire continued, red and blue signal flares burst above enemy lines across the ridge on Lama di Soto Ridge. Simultaneously, the handful of troops in Sommocolonia began to receive unusually intense artillery fire.

Enemy foot troops made their appearance at 0530 in a draw north of Sommocolonia. ...a numerically superior force finally drove the defending force of less than a hundred men back into the town of Sommocolonia; and ^{by} 0730 they had surrounded them. Desperate hand-to-hand fighting began in the streets". (22) "Pressure was renewed in increasing strength on the east side where Austro-German mountain troops from the veteran Mittenwald Mountain Battalion joined the battle. Sommocolonia, Tiglio, and Bebbio were all occupied by the Germans before darkness.

(21) Hq Inf Center, 7769 Hq and Hq Co, "Special Investigation and Intelligence Report", prepared after the war by a group of German Officers representing (all staff sections of OB Suedwest and some of the subordinate commands), Army War College Library.

(22) Goodman, Paul, op. cit., p. 75.

Led by Italian guides, the enemy had outflanked the villages by climbing the ridge to the east and attacking southwest down the slopes into the town." (23)

Of sixty Americans fighting in Sommocolonia, only seventeen were able to withdraw. The others were killed or wounded during the fighting for the town. (24)

"At about 1500, General Crittenberger, IV Corps Commander, arrived at the 370th Regimental Command Post.... After being informed of Colonel Sherman's defense plan, he announced that reinforcing troops from the 8th Indian Division were enroute to take up defensive positions behind the 370th and 366th Infantry Regiment positions.... The 370th, sure that it could stand fast asked only that a motorized battalion of the 19th Indian Brigade be used on it's right flank, to prevent further encirclement. There was some controversy concerning control, and finally, when the matter was settled, it was too late to get the troops into position before dark."(25)

"To prevent the enemy threat from developing into any formidable threat to our supply lines, the 1st Armored Division,... was detached from II Corps and sent west to the vicinity of Lucca. The 8th Indian Division moved up beyond the 92d Division elements." (26)

The enemy had penetrated some six miles into the Serchio Valley sector, but the attack died a natural death and by the morning of the 28th the threat appeared to be over. The next day the Germans began to retire, and our patrols reported only slight contact when they moved forward to probe German dispositions on both sides of the Serchio River. (See Map C) "After XXII Tactical Air Command had hit the enemy on the 27th with more than 200 sorties, it followed up with 228 fighter-bomber and 24 medium

(23) "5th Army History", VIII, op. cit., p. 17.

(24) Goodman, Paul, op. cit., p. 75.

(25) Goodman, Paul, op. cit., p. 76.

(26) "5th Army History", VIII, op. cit., p. 12.

bomber sorties on 28th to assist our counter attack. In the next 2 days, 878 additional sorties were flown over the Serchio Valley and areas behind it." (27) Our troops continued their counter-attack and steadily recovered lost ground. At the end of the year the lost positions had been almost entirely reatored, and the Fifth Army frontlines were essentially the same as they had been for the preceding two months. This attack, coming on the heels of the enemy's unsuccessful Ardennes offensive, had created a tense situation throughout the Italian front, particularly in the 370th Infantry sector. The enemy had picked a propitious moment and had caused some excitement, but again his efforts turned out to be a frantic gesture by a disintegrating war machine.

Operations of January 1945

During the month of January 1945 active patrolling and raiding parties were the highlights. A system of weapons "shoots" was started. These "shoots" consisted of all heavy weapons, that had unrestricted ammunition allowances, being placed under division control, to fire simultaneously. These "shoots" were fired for five minutes, 15 or 20 times during a 24-hour period. Interrogation of Prisoners of War revealed that these "shoots" had a tremendous demoralizing affect on the enemy's morale and inflicted some casualties.

The matter of insufficient ammunition for offensive operations had been a serious problem with the 92d Division for some time. "Shortly before 1 December analysis of ammunition stocks indicated sufficient supplies were on hand to support a 13-day attack during December but that such consumption would result in inability to carry out further offensive action until after 28 January 1945.... Allotments of ammunition... were greatly reduced, and restrictions were imposed initially. Later in the winter the allocations were further reduced." (28)

(27) "5th Army History", VIII, op. cit., p. 20.

(28) "5th Army History", VIII, op. cit., p. 12.

Ammunitions for heavy calibre guns, as well as the guns themselves, were shipped from throughout the Italian front to the primary front in France and Germany. "A review of the 92d Divisions activities during January reveals that 166 prisoners had been taken. This was 70 percent of the total taken by the Fifth Army for the same period." (29)

The Final Drive

In April the once mighty Germany was groggy from the heavy blows of the Allied armies. In the West British-American armies were advancing steadily. It was clear, however, that before utter defeat of Germany could be accomplished, the German armies in Italy must be driven out of their strongly fortified positions, and defeated.

"At this time two new units were mixed with the Division forces.... the 473rd Infantry Regiment, composed of former "Ack-Ack" men and the newly attached 442nd Japanese-American Infantry Regiment.... When the plan for the Spring attack was completed, the 92d Division, as thus reinforced, was ordered to attack to create a diversion for the major effort to be made by Fifth Army forces in Bologna, and to seize dominating terrain in the west anchor of the Gothic Line, thus paving a way for a drive up the Ligurian coast. ?

The attack jumped off on 5 April 1945, after an intense artillery barrage. Initially only light resistance was encountered. "By the end of the first days fighting the 442d Infantry... had taken Mt. Carchio. The second day they occupied Mt. Belvedere.

"Meanwhile the 370th Infantry made gains up to 1000 yards, just east of highway No. 1." (30) Following this action, elements of the 92d Division began to roll forward against stiff enemy opposition like an avalanche.

(29) "5th Army History", VIII, op. cit., p. 89.

(30) "With the 92d Infantry Division", p. 51.

Between the 5th and 29th May, with hard fighting, 92nd Division troops seized many key enemy held cities such as Massa, Carrara, Casteluova, Sarzana, La Spezia, Chiavara, and Genoa. Following this we fanned out prongs to Alessandria, Turin, Cuneo, and to meet the French near the border at Ventimiglia. (See Map D) These gains were made with our troops initially suffering many casualties from enemy mines, artillery, and small arms fire, but killing and capturing many Germans and Italian Fascists as well as huge quantities of materiel.

After many dreary months the grinding Italian campaign had been climaxed by a final brilliant offensive that in twenty-four days had reduced two formidable enemy armies, firmly entrenched in mountain positions and behind river lines, to a fleeing rabble with neither defense, organization nor equipment.

CONCLUSIONS

Lessons Learned

1. Reserves

Lack of reserves to replace depleted and exhausted troops in an offensive can only lead to an inevitable loss of the initiative.

2. Training

Troops, if at all possible, should be trained in the kind of terrain in which it is expected they will be employed.

3. Weather and Terrain

In general, bad weather and difficult terrain favor the defense.

4. Logistics

The logistical support for attacking units, especially in mountainous terrain, must be adequate, well planned and flexible.

5. Speed and Surprise

Speed and tactical surprise are the most vital and essential elements in attack, and can effectively offset the attacker's lack of numerical superiority.

6. Defensive Line

There is no defensive line, hasty, deliberate, or permanent, that cannot be broken if the attacker is willing to pay the price.

Final Conclusions

On the basis of material presented in my discussion the final following conclusions are hereby presented:

1. The 370th Regimental Combat Team, 92d Infantry Division did accomplish it's mission of assisting in tying down and defeating 21 German divisions in Italy, which without question, would have prevented or at least delayed the victory in Normandy and Russia.

2. After the above presentation of facts about the 370th Regimental Combat Team, 92d Infantry Division, the reader should be able to clearly see through the mist of rumors and determine for himself actual contributions of the 370th Regiment during combat in Italy. If this is the case, the aim of enriching the record in rugged Italy has been accomplished.
3. In accomplishing its mission the 92d Infantry Division's effectiveness as a coordinated fighting whole was greatly reduced by the mottled system of command which was developed causing units to be detached and dispersed.
4. Due to the small number of combat divisions in Italy the organization was given too great a sector to cover. As a result the lines were thin and the reserves small or non-existent. Often the reserves were not motorized, as is mandatory when operating on an extended front. These factors facilitated the enemy's break-through when he attacked in force in December 44.
5. There was an inadequate replacement system for this segregated organization. Lack of combat trained replacements after the battle losses of Mount Cauala caused the 366th Infantry to be thrown into the line. Previous inspection of this unit had revealed that it was not combat qualified after its long assignment of guard duty. This resulted in the excessive loss of life, a poorer grade of combat replacement, and reduced the effectiveness of the organization. Similar replacements increased the degree of straggling and the number of courts-martials within the division.
6. Failure of the leaders to reach decisions quickly, and the lack of advanced planning and control in a "polygot army", as we had in Italy, can prove disastrous, and enhanced the loss of ground in the Serchio Valley.

Staff coordination and good liaison is essential to both operations when units of different nations are fighting together in the same army.

7. Ammunition and shortage of heavy artillery in the organization, and the theater as a whole, extended the duration of the war and increased the price paid for victory.

8. Men of different nationalities, races organizations, and training can be welded into a workable and successful fighting team.

9. The early part of the Italian War had many successful break-throughs, but few well executed pursuits. Though causes normally offered for these failures are many, the three which are predominate are: lack of means, lack of plans, and lack of determination on the part of the leaders and troops. In the final offensive of April 1945, not only were break-throughs of the 370th Infantry Regiment effected, but planning was made well in advance for the exploitation phase. And most important, the commanders and troops retained the will to destroy the enemy, despite the long and difficult months of fighting that had preceded the offensive.

"Finalmente la guerra e' finito". (Finally the war is finished).

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