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THE OPERATIONS OF C COMPANY, 180TH INFANTRY
(45TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT HILL 960,
NORTH OF VENAFRO, ITALY, 30-31 DECEMBER 1943
(NAPLES-FOGGIA CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of an Acting Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY COMPANY
ATTACKING IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

Captain Earl W. Buchanan, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. I

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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "C", 180TH INFANTRY
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company "C", 180th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division in the attack on Hill 960, South of Mount Molino, Italy, 30-31 December 1943 during the Winter Line Offensive.

Just as to how this operation fits into the larger picture of Division, Corps and Army activities makes it necessary to discuss briefly the events which led up to this action.

The Italian Peninsular was successfully invaded during early September by the US Fifth Army and British Eighth Army. (1) After their link-up constant pressure was applied against German rear guard action until the US Fifth Army reached the Volturno River on the West coast 6 October 1943, and the British Eighth Army reached Termoli on the Adriatic coast on the same date. (2) (See Map A)

The Fifth Army successfully crossed the Volturno River on the night of 12-13 October 1943. (3) The Fifth Army after this crossing began a series of mountain campaigns which did not end until the Germans officially surrendered on 2 May 1945. (4)

On 15 November 1943, after crossing the Volturno River and advancing more than 50 miles in the mountainous terrain,

- (1) A-3, p. 75; (2) A-9, p. 36-37; (3) A-9, p. 40;
(4) A-9, p. 438.

the Fifth Army arrived at the Winter Line. Likewise, the British Eighth Army advanced on the Adriatic Coast until the Army reached the Sangro River which was also a part of the Winter Line defenses. (See Map A) (5)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The subsequent fighting showed that the German Winter Line was one of two systems of fortifications. The purpose of the Winter Line was to halt the Allied Advance while the Germans gained time to complete the main defensive position called the Gustav Line. (See Map A) (6) Though the so-called temporary line was only meant to delay the Allies, the success of the enemy in stopping our advance units at its approaches during the first part of November, led to a change of orders by the German Command. Orders were issued to hold as long as possible before falling back to the main defenses. (7)

The Fifth Army plan to penetrate the Winter Line was divided into three phases. The first was a blow on the left of the Mignano Gap that captured the Camino hill-mass by 8 December 1943. This phase was accomplished by the British 10th Corps on the left and elements of II Corps on the right. VI Corps on the right of II Corps contributed to the success of phase I by limited attacks in the mountains between Mount Corno and Mount Mare. (8)

The second phase of the Fifth Army offensive included the capture by II Corps of Mount Sammucro, Mount Lungo, and San Pietro, a village in between two mountains. This was the Fifth Army main effort astride Highway 6 and was completed by

(5) A-5, p. 7; (6) A-5, p. 5; (7) A-5, p. 6-7; (8) A-5, p. 28-29.

19 December 1943. (9) This main effort by II Corps was accompanied by a full-scale offensive on the part of VI Corps in the mountains to the north. As in phase I of the Army plan, the main effort of VI Corps was made along the two east-west roads; that is Filignano-Sant 'Elia road and the Colli-Atina road. Ultimate objectives, to be reached as the offensive continued into Phase III, were the heights north of Cassino at the head of the Rapido River Valley. (10) VI Corps offensive started on the night of 14-15 December 1943, and by 21 December VI Corps held a line running just east of Viticuso and Casale and extending north to the south slopes of Le Mainarde. This line was held by the units that participated in this successful operation; 45th Infantry Division on the left to just east of Casale, and the 2d Moroccan Division on the right to the slope of Le Mainarde. (See Map B) (11)

180TH INFANTRY REGIMENTAL SITUATION

On the night of 17-18 December the second battalion, 180th Infantry, moved through the 179th Infantry, and occupied Mount la Posta without opposition, and succeeded in pushing along the Sant 'Elia road to a series of hills south-east of Casale. These hills were numbered 885, 935, and 830. (12) 1st Battalion moved into a Regimental reserve position South of Maestro Giovanni on 18 December 1943. (See Map C) (13) The 3d Battalion under 45th Division controlled ~~and~~ occupied Mount Corno. (14)

BATTALION SITUATION

On the morning of 19 December 1943, 1st Battalion from

(9) A-5, p. 67; (10) A-5, p. 69; (11) A-5, p. 77; (12) A-10; (13) Personal knowledge; (14) A-11.

positions south of Maestro Giovanni sent a reconnaissance party North to reconnoiter a night route to Hill 840. This party of 20 men led by Captain Milton Jarold, the Battalion S-3, not only succeeded in reconnoitering a route to Hill 840 but also greatly assisted the battalion by ambushing a party of Germans. These Germans would have caused the 1st Battalion many casualties and much delay. The result of this action led by the S-3 was nine dead Germans, eleven German prisoners plus the capture of five machine guns and four mortars. Interrogation revealed that the German force constituted an ambush which had been placed in position to waylay an American battalion, that was expected to move on that route on the night of 19 December. (15) (16)

The first battalion moved out on the night of 19-20 December and led by A Company, seized Hill 840 by daylight without suffering any casualties. B Company seized Hill 810 north-east of Hill 840 at 0900 hours. From these positions the next objectives of the battalion could easily be seen. Mount Molino to the right front and Hill 960 to the left front dominated the entire area facing the 1st Battalion. From Mount Molino and Hill 960 the enemy on clear days could observe all our supply routes to the rear and covered these trails by artillery fire. C Company was in a reserve position 800 yards south-east of Hill 840. The first battalion command post and aid station were in the gorge 400 yards south-east of Hill 840. (17)

From the 20th through the 29th December 1943, patrols

(15) A-7; (16) Personal knowledge; (17) Personal knowledge.

were sent out nightly to Mount Molino and Hill 960, and light action was encountered on both terrain features. (See Map C) (18)

A patrol from C Company on 25 December found Hill 970, south-east of Hill 840, to be unoccupied. Hill 970 was ordered by 1st Battalion to be occupied by 3d Platoon, C Company. Positions to be occupied by 2400 hours, 25 December 1943. (See Map D) (19)

On 28 December, C Company Commander, Captain Richard P. Blanks, and the executive officer moved out to Hill 970 to make a reconnaissance and to check on the 3d Platoon positions. The two officers reached Hill 970 at 1100 hours and were met by the 3d Platoon leader, Lt. Lucien F. Wilkins. The three officers went out on the forward (north) slope of Hill 970 and discovered another ridge to the front. This small ridge was a part of Hill 970 and was directly south of Hill 960. Captain Blanks decided that machine guns and 60 mm mortars in position on this ridge could support any attack made by C Company on Hill 960. It was also noted at this time that Hill 960 appeared to be unoccupied. (20)

Shortly after returning to C Company reserve area at 1430 hours, Captain Blanks was alerted to prepare his company for the coming attack. C Company would participate in the attack of the 1st Battalion on Hill 960 and Mount Molino. (21)

SITUATION COMPANY C

After Captain Blanks was alerted on 28 December, he didn't deem it necessary to make any more reconnaissance, having just

(18) (19) (20) (21) Personal knowledge.

completed one in the Hill 960 area. He ordered the Weapons Platoon to move out and occupy positions on the small ridge jutting out from the north slope of Hill 970. This platoon was to be in position by daylight, dig-in, and make any necessary reconnaissance to support C Company's attack on Hill 960. Probable time of the attack would be the morning of 30 December 1943. Captain Blanks also alerted all Platoon leaders to get ready for the coming attack. (22)

— IN ORDER 02 DEC —
On 29 December 1943 Captain Blanks and his executive officer were ordered to report to the Battalion C.P. and receive the attack order to be issued by the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Daniel K. Ahearn. The 1st Battalion's plan of attack was with two companies abreast. Company B. on the right with 1st Platoon, A Company attached would attack and capture Mount Molino. Company C. on the left would attack and capture Hill 960 and protect the left flank of B Company. A Company (minus) from positions on both Hills 840 and 810 would be in Battalion reserve but support the attack by fire. D Company with two platoons of heavy machine guns and two .50 Cal. machine guns in position on Hills 840 and 810 would support the Battalion attack. D Company 81 mm Mortar Platoon was given the mission of supporting the attack from a position 200 yards east of Hill 840. 1st Platoon, Company C, 84 Chemical Battalion, would be in direct support of 1st Battalion with one observer with C Company. Tanks from Company A, 755th Tank Battalion, would support the attack of 1st and 2d Battalion by firing on Mount Molino, Hill 960 and Mt. Raino from the village of
(22) Personal knowledge.

Casale. Seven battalions of artillery would support the attack with prepared fires at H minus 15 to H plus 15, thereafter on call. One forward observer with B Company and one at Battalion O. P. on Hill 840. The LD located in a draw 200 yards south of Hill 960 and Mount Molino. Time of attack 0630 hours 30 December 1943. Battalion Commander to be located at Battalion O. P. on Hill 840. Battalion C. P. and Aid Station on south-east slope of Hill 840. (See Map C) The 3d Bn. would attack Mount Raimo, Hill 1000, and Mount Rotondo at 0630 hours on the 1st Battalion's right. 2d Battalion to be in reserve on Hills 885, 830 and 935. (22) (23)

~~COMPANY C PLAN~~

The plan formulated by Captain Richard P. Blanks was as follows: The company, minus 3d and 4th Platoons, was to move from its reserve area north-west along the supply route to Hill 840. Continue along the trail on the left of the Hill to a position in the draw north-east of Hill 970. This was to be the attack position of C Company and was to be occupied during the early hours of darkness on the night of 29 December 1943. (24)

The 3d Platoon would be relieved on Hill 970 by a Machine Gun Platoon from D Company 179th Infantry. The 3d Platoon would join the company in the attack area upon being relieved on Hill 970. (25)

After all three rifle platoons were in the attack area the 3d Platoon would lead the Company attack on Hill 960 leaving the position at 0600 hours 30 December. (See Map D) (26)

(22) Personal knowledge; (23) Extracts from copy of F.O. #33, RCT 180, 29 Dec 43 in possession of Author; (24) (25) (26) Personal knowledge.

The 2d and 1st Platoons would follow in column behind the 3d Platoon. Upon reaching the LD area, a short pause would be made until the column closed up. (See Map D) (27)

After the 3d Platoon reached Hill 960, it would move quickly to the north-west slope and capture the peak of Hill 960 and be ready to protect the Company reorganization against a counterattack from the reverse slope or north draw. (See Map D) (28)

The 2d and 1st Platoon would be committed as the situation developed probably to the left of the 3d Platoon. (29)

Company Headquarters group would follow the 3d Platoon. The Communication Sergeant would see that wire (W-130) was laid from the attack position forward to Hill 960. (30)

The 4th Platoon from positions on the ridge just east of Hill 960 would support the Company attack by fire at H-hour on observed targets and be prepared to fire on call. (See Map D) (31)

The MG Platoon, D Company, 179th Infantry would support the company attack from positions on Hill 970 by observed fire and on call. (32)

After formulating the above mentioned plan, Captain Richard P. Blanks asked the Company Executive officer if he could carry it out. The officer replied yes as he had already heard how the Company Commander was to leave on 30 December 1943 for the rest area. The Company Executive officer thus became the acting Company Commander on the evening of 29 December 1943. The Communication Sergeant, Sgt. Casey, after orient-

(27) (28) (29) (30) (31) (32) Personal knowledge.

ing a rifle squad leader, Sgt. Parris, was also to leave the Company once it reached the attack area. In fact the acting Company Commander discovered on the evening of 29 December, that he would be without the services of Sgt. Thomas Casey, a key man in matters of company communication, and the very able 2d Platoon Leader, Lt. Berryhill, as both would accompany Captain Blanks to the Rest Area in Naples, Italy. (33)

THE ATTACK ON HILL 960

At 0400 hours, 30 December 1943, C Company occupied its attack position without incident. It had wire communication with 3d Platoon on Hill 970 and with the 1st Battalion C.P. on Hill 840. The M. G. Platoon of D Company 179th Infantry had not arrived to relieve 3d Platoon, C Company; so the acting Company Commander ordered at 0400 hours, Lt. Wilkins' 3d Platoon to vacate positions and join C Company at foot of Hill 970 in the attack position. The 3d Platoon entered the attack position area at 0545 hours. At the same time the M.G. Platoon arrived under the command of a replacement Platoon Leader. He was told to hurry up to Hill 970 and fire on call of C Company Commander. (34)

At 0605 hours the 3d Platoon, (32 men) under command of Lt. Lucien F. Wilkins moved out toward the LD, followed by the acting Company Commander, and the remainder of the rifle platoons. (35)

The artillery was heard opening up at H-15 and the LD was still some 300 yards ahead with the nose of the 4th Platoon ridge to go around. (See Map D) The 3d Platoon

(33) (34) (35) Personal knowledge.

started up the north slope of this ridge rather than go around, so the Company Commander permitted this action to save time. (36)

At 0630 the 3d Platoon stopped to check its direction and the acting Company Commander moved forward to see what was wrong. Upon reaching Lt. Wilkins' position, the acting Company Commander pointed out Hill 960 ahead and ordered Lt. Wilkins to follow the artillery fire as closely as possible. With this information the 3d Platoon under Lt. Wilkins' vigorous leadership, moved forward and by 0635 was on the east slopes of Hill 960 closely followed by the remainder of C Company. (37)

As soon as the artillery moved forward, the 3d Platoon followed. Finally all supporting fires ceased and C Company was on its own. (38)

By 0700 the eastern half of Hill 960 was occupied by C Company with no enemy resistance. (39)

The 3d Platoon was ordered by the acting Company Commander to capture a machine gun nest on the north-west slope just below the western peak of Hill 960. (40)(See Map D)

The 3d Platoon eliminated the machine-gun nest and by 0715, the only enemy fire on Hill 960 came from the west peak which dominated the entire area. This machine-gun fire caused the 3d Platoon to take cover in the previously captured machine-gun nest, and along a rock wall which ran east and west along the north slope of Hill 960. (41)

The acting Company Commander with the four Platoon

(36) (37) (38) (39) (40) (41) Personal knowledge.

runners was located behind a rock wall that ran north and south about half-way up toward the west peak of Hill 960. Besides the runners, the acting Company Commander had his radio, SCR-511, and the operator. From this position the acting Company Commander could see the enemy machine-gun firing on the 3d Platoon and attempted to call the Battalion Commander on the radio for additional fire support. Radio contact could not be made, and at this time the wire had not been laid up to his position, so the acting Company Commander tried to contact his 4th Platoon by the SCR-536 radio. This radio also failed to work, consequently, he had only his remaining rifle platoons with which to attack. (42)

As the Company Command group took cover behind the north-south rock wall, the 2d Platoon following, halted in an exposed position behind them. When the enemy machine gun, on the west peak of Hill 960, opened fire on the 3d Platoon, T/Sgt. Bennie Quinton, 2d Platoon Sergeant, led his men off the exposed slope and they took cover on the southeast slope of Hill 960. (43)

The 1st Platoon under command of 1st Lt. Pusateri, took cover on the east slope of Hill 960 along a rock wall. (44)

Shortly after the enemy machine gun opened up, the enemy from excellent positions on the west slope of Mount Molino opened fire with a continuous mortar barrage. This barrage lasted from 0715 until 0730. This observed fire from the higher Mount Molino, blanketed the eastern half of Hill 960 and caused about twenty (20) casualties in the 1st and

(42) (43) (44) Personal knowledge

2d Platoon areas. About all a soldier could do for cover under this barrage was to hug the rock walls or to pile rocks around his position. (45)

As the enemy mortar fire lifted from Hill 960, it was followed by artillery fire on the draw east of C Company, and on the 4th Platoon position. (46)

Enemy artillery and mortar fire prevented the wire from being laid to the Company C.P. until 0815 hours. Finally at 0815 hours the acting Company Commander reported C Company's situation to the Battalion Commander. He informed the Battalion Commander that C Company could clear Hill 960 if assisted by artillery fire on the enemy mortar positions on the west slope of Mount Molino. This request was denied as B Company Commander reported his troops on the top of Mount Molino. C Company acting Commander did obtain, however, .50 cal. machine gun support from D Company. This accurate long-range fire from Hill 840 caused three German casualties in the machine-gun nest near the peak of Hill 960. (47)

During the lull in the enemy mortar and machine gun fire, the acting C Company Commander ordered the 2d Platoon to attack west along the south slope of Hill 960 and knock-out the machine gun on the west peak. This 2d Platoon received machine gun support from D Company initially, but this support suddenly ceased without orders by C Company Commander. The 2d Platoon started their attack and advanced along the barren slopes for a distance of 100 yards. As they advanced toward the west peak they were observed from Mount Molino. Suddenly

(45) (46) (47) Personal knowledge.

a previously unlocated machine-gun nest facing the 2d Platoon on the south slope of Hill 960 opened fire and halted the platoon. When the 2d Platoon halted, mortars from positions on Mount Molino opened up and the platoon was caught in a heavy mortar concentration. This enemy fire caused seven casualties in the 2d Platoon, leaving 15 men. This platoon withdrew and carried its wounded back to the south-east slope of Hill 960. It then took up its original positions. (48)

The acting Company Commander tried to use the wire communication after the last mortar barrage and found that it had been knocked-out. He ordered Sgt. Parris to go out and check the wire as the SCR-511 radio would not work. The SCR-536 radios would not work at this time, so the acting Company Commander sent a runner to contact the 4th Platoon to get fire support on the peak of Hill 960. After contacting the 4th Platoon, the runner was to proceed to Hill 970 and contact the 4.2 Mortar Platoon observer, and request fire on the two known enemy positions on the west peak of Hill 960 that were causing C Company so many casualties. (49)

The acting Company Commander noted at 0915 hours that his men were seeking cover and not firing on the two enemy machine guns. He started firing with his M-1 rifle and seemed to be accurately engaging the opening of the enemy nest on the peak of Hill 960. After firing two clips of ammunition a Red Cross flag of truce appeared atop of Hill 960. The Company Commander ceased his fire and German litter bearers came over the peak. The Germans were seen to evacuate four wounded.

(48) (49) Personal knowledge.

Three of these casualties were caused by the earlier D Company machine gun support from Hill 840. The German litter bearers returned with two soldiers on litters and these soldiers were seen to occupy the same above mentioned machine-gun nest. Knowing he wasn't doing much good as a rifleman the acting Company Commander had the 1st Platoon send up automatic rifle team. Pfc. Gazzetti came forward and took up a position as ordered behind the north-south rock wall and kept up a slow rate of fire throughout the remainder of the day. (50)

The acting Company Commander had one more automatic rifle team come forward and engage the enemy machine-gun nests from a position on the north side of Gazzetti's team. (51)

At 1200 hours the 4.2 Mortars did fire a concentration on the west peak of Hill 960 and the commander knew the messenger had gotten through, but the 4th Platoon never did deliver any fire support on the 30th of December. The 4.2 Mortar fire was accurate but the Company Commander did not have communication with the observer and could not control the fire. After a concentration of 20 rounds the mortar fire lifted and never fired again. (52)

At 1315 hours wire communication was again restored with the Battalion Commander. The acting C Company Commander was given permission to adjust smoke shells from one (1) 105-mm howitzer on the peak of Hill 960. After accurately adjusting this fire he made sure the artillery knew the location of all forward elements of C Company. He requested artillery fire on Mount Molino but was again refused as B Company Commander

(50) (51) (52) Personal knowledge.

reported his troops still on the top of Mount Molino. (53)
(See Map D)

C Company Commander started making preparations for the attack on the west slope of Hill 960. He sent a messenger for the 2d Platoon Sergeant and the 1st Platoon Leader, and as they reached the Company Commander's position they were joined by the 3d Platoon Leader. They were informed of the plan to take the west peak. The plan was that the 2d Platoon would attack on the left and the 3d Platoon on the right (north) as soon as the artillery was shifted to the west of Hill 960. Just as this plan was made known to the Platoon Leaders, the enemy started firing a mortar concentration that lasted from 1330 hours to 1345 hours. At the same time our own artillery concentration started on Hill 960 and the Battalion Commander stated over the telephone, "That's your artillery fire, now move out." The Company didn't move. The enemy mortar fire killed Lt. Wilkins, 3d Platoon Leader, Lt. Pusateri and wounded the 3d Platoon Sergeant, T/Sgt. Douglas. This enemy fire also knocked-out the wire communication to the Battalion Command Post. (54) (See Map D)

Previous enemy mortar fire had left only one Medic in the Company area. He was Pfc. Bailey who was knocked unconscious by the last mortar barrage. Until this excellent Medic was revived, Pfc. Voight, a runner from the 3d Platoon, took over the duties of a Medic and treated several wounded cases. By 1600 Bailey revived and although somewhat hazy, resumed his duties. (55)

At 1630, when enemy machine guns and mortars ceased fir-

(53) (54) (55) Personal knowledge.

ing, the acting C Company Commander received a strength report from the three rifle platoons. 3d Platoon had a squad sergeant in command and seven (7) men. 2d Platoon, under command of T/Sgt. Bennie Quinton, had eleven (11) men. 1st Platoon, under command of Sgt. Clemens, had nine (9) men. (56)

One of the walking wounded, a Company messenger, Private Pitt, gave the C Company strength report to the Battalion Commander. Accompanying this report was the information that C Company was reorganizing and intended to hold the east half of Hill 960 until further orders. (57) (See Map D)

At 1900 hours Sgt. Parris, acting Communication Sergeant, arrived at the Battalion C.P. for more wire (w-130). He was sent back to Hill 960 with the following message from the Battalion Commander: "C Company withdraw to positions on Hill 970. Support by fire from Hill 970, Companies "A" and "B" attack on Mount Molino 0650 hours 31 December." (58) (See Map D)

Sgt. Parris reached the acting C Commander's location on Hill 960 at 2130 hours after much delay, caused by enemy mortar and artillery fire. (59)

The Commander by this time had already ordered C Company to organize a perimeter defense on the eastern-half of Hill 960 and hold. This task was completed at 1900 hours. (60) (See Map D)

THE WITHDRAWAL TO HILL 970

The acting Company Commander assembled his three (3) rifle platoon sergeants and issued orders for the withdrawal at 2140 hours.

(56) (57) (58) (59) (60) Personal knowledge.

The company was to withdraw off the Hill in the following order: 1st squad, 2d Platoon, followed by the Company Command group, remainder of the 2d Platoon, seven (7) men from the 3d Platoon, and the 1st Platoon protecting and bringing up the rear of the column. The Company took almost the same route back to the attack position as used in the morning to go forward, except the Company utilized the draw east of Hill 960 at night. From the attack position the Company moved up a trail on the south-east slope of Hill 970 to its positions on Hill 970. C Company relieved the M.G. Platoon of the 179th Infantry at 0030 hours 31 December 1943. (61) (See Map D)

The acting Company Commander, having no officers, physically placed each squad of the Company in position to hold Hill 970. The Company organized a reversed slope defense with the 1st and 2d Platoons forward with the 2d on the right. 3d Platoon organized the rear of the Company area. Each Platoon placed four men on the forward slope to guard against enemy counterattacks during the hours of darkness.

At daylight the Company Commander hoped to find positions to support the Battalion attack on Mount Molino. Ammunition was redistributed among the Platoons.

At 0100 hours 31 December 1943 a messenger was sent to the 4th Platoon, still in positions on the small ridge jutting out from Hill 970 on the north. This messenger was to get their strength report and inform them to be ready to assist by fire from their present positions the Battalion's attack on Mount Molino at 0650 hours. (62)

(61) (62) Personal knowledge.

The 4th Platoon strength was given as twelve men and one officer. This Platoon had lost twelve men on the 30th of December by artillery fire and had four men evacuated because of trench foot. The latter illness was a bitter enemy to our soldiers during the Winter of 1943-1944. (63)

The weather at daylight 31st December made it impossible to support the attack of the remainder of the Battalion on Mount Molino. Rain and sleet made visibility zero. The Battalion attack was repulsed by 1600 hours 31st December and the Battalion was again forced to withdraw to its former positions. (64)

The 1st Battalion position was held along Hills 970, 840 and 810 by Companies C, A, and B respectively. This position was held until relieved by elements of the 3d Algerian Division on the night of the 3-4 January 1944. (See Map D) (65)

The only success of the entire 180th Infantry Regiment's attack on 30-31 December 1943 was L Company's capture of Mount Rotondo against light enemy resistance. (66)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The preparation and orders for carrying out the mission assigned C Company, 180th Infantry were good except for the following details. Proper consideration was not given in advance of the difficulties which were to be encountered in maintaining communication, especially between the company and battalion. The SCR-511 radio proved absolutely worthless, so the only chance to eliminate communication difficulties would have been to receive more help from the battalion wire section.

(63) (64) (65) Personal knowledge; (66) A-7.

Sgt. Casey, communication sergeant, should have remained with the company for the attack.

The Company failed to attack aggressively after the supporting fires lifted. The only ground captured at 0715 hours was due to the 3d Platoon, and the remainder of the Company, closely following the artillery fire. After knocking-out the first enemy machine gun, the 3d Platoon failed to press the attack on against the machine gun on the west peak of Hill 960. Once this platoon gave up its initiative, it could only hold what ground it had taken. In spite of the 3d Platoon failing to press on in the attack, the acting Company Commander should have seized the initiative, and attacked on the 3d Platoon's left with the 2d Platoon. This should have been done as soon as he saw that the 3d Platoon was capturing the first enemy machine gun. As it later turned out, the 2d Platoon was committed too late and against an alert enemy defense.

This attack was meant to be a coordinated attack by the 1st Battalion, but it turned out to be two separate companies each in an independent action. The Battalion Commander should have moved forward by 0800 hours in order to keep abreast of the situation, as the radios were not working and the wire lines had not been laid. C Company might have taken its objective if the Battalion Commander had known the situation on Mount Molino, and allowed artillery fire to be placed on the enemy mortars in position on that mountain. If he had known the situation, A Company could have been committed early in

the morning of the 30th December against Mount Molino, as this objective was too much for one company. Since this was a frontal attack all three rifle companies were needed in a coordinated attack to accomplish the Battalion mission. The proper coordination was not made to insure that the Machine Gun Platoon, Company D, 179th Infantry, would arrive in time on Hill 970 to support the attack on Hill 960. This was the fault of both the 180th Infantry's S-3 and the 1st Battalion's S-3.

The fire plan was poor after 0645 hours on 30th December. No artillery forward observer was assigned to C Company. Had one been assigned to the Company, artillery communication could have been utilized to obtain artillery fire or at least to contact 1st Battalion. With an observer along with C Company on Hill 960, a rolling barrage might have been laid, closely followed by troops.

B Company on the right (north) had poor leadership. This Company Commander stated his troops were on the top of Mount Molino when actually he didn't know. If he had checked his forward positions, it might have been possible to obtain artillery fire on the enemy mortars located on the west slope of Mount Molino.

The 81-mm Mortar Platoon, 4.2 Mortar Platoon and Weapons Platoon, C Company, failed to continuously support the attack. A forward observer from both Mortar Platoons should have accompanied C Company. Staying to the rear and observing is good only when there is communication between the assaulting

troops and the observers, or when the visibility is perfect. As an alternate means of communication wire should have been laid from the 4th Platoon position to the Company C acting Commander on Hill 960.

No Company Commander, Platoon Leader, or Communication Sgt. should leave the Company prior to an attack unless for Medical reasons. The acting Company C Commander did what he thought best at the time, but an old experienced Company Commander can usually get more out of his men. The same is true of the old Platoon Leader. The Communication Sgt. is too vital to the Company Commander to lose just prior to the attack except for Medical reasons. All these key personnel were needed as the acting Company Commander had only been in the Company eleven (11) days prior to the attack. Prior to this assignment he was 1st Platoon Leader in Company A, 180th Infantry.

Higher commanders in ordering this attack failed to take into consideration that all Companies and Platoons were under strength. The units had been either in the front lines or in a reserve front line battalion position for all but seven (7) days of the last 122 days spent in Italy since the landing at Salerno. To operate in the mountains and endure rain, snow, sleet and cold weather as well as enemy shelling, requires a rest period of 30 days for every 30 days spent in the line; more rest if possible. The higher commanders failed to estimate the enemy strength properly. The positions were held by a larger defensive force than the attacking force. One

battalion 134th German Grenadier Regiment held Mount Molino and Hill 960. An attack against a deliberate defense in the mountains certainly necessitated that the attackers outnumber the defenders.

Although this Company failed to capture all of its objective, it located several enemy strong points, and this information, together with information obtained by B Company, was of great value to the 3d Algerian Division in its attack on Mount Acquafondata which followed shortly.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. Key personnel of a Company should not leave prior to an attack except for Medical reasons.
2. Control is essential in any attack by all commanders.
3. Provide more than one means of communications for control.
4. Attacking infantry troops must follow closely their artillery or any supporting fires.
5. To influence the action of his Battalion, the Battalion Commander needs to ^{have} make an appearance at a critical place at a critical time.
6. Forward artillery and mortar observers are needed with assault Rifle Companies to adjust supporting fires.
7. The condition of the troops, physically and mentally, must be taken into consideration when a higher commander plans an attack.
8. A well organized forward slope position with mutually

supporting machine guns and mortars is a strong position; especially one similar to Hill 960 that was supported by fire from Mount Molino as well from its own mutually supporting positions.