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OPERATIONS OF THE TENTH MOUNTAIN DIVISION
ON MONTE BELVEDERE, 18-26 FEBRUARY 1945
(NORTH APPENINES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Regimental Adjutant)

Type of operation described: MOUNTAIN DIVISION
IN A NIGHT ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the Tenth Mountain Division in its attack and capture of the Monte Belvedere-Monte della Torraccia Ridge in Northern Italy, 18-26 February, 1945.

During the latter part of the year 1944, the attention of the world was focused upon the war being waged in Germany both on the eastern and western fronts. Italy had become known in the newspapers and magazines as "The Forgotten Front". To the men there, however, it was a very real and dirty war of snow, mud, mountains and mules.

By Christmas, Fifth Army lay like a sleeping giant. It was the sleep of exhaustion. In the preceding six months it had fought its way from positions in the rugged mountain area south of Rome and from the desolate plain of the Anzio Beachhead to a point but a few miles south of Bologna, gateway to the broad, fertile valley of the Po. Rome and Florence had fallen and the Gothic Line had been erased from the map of Italy.

The Army had fought hard and continuously and with but little respite. Thousands of battle tested men had fallen in the drive up the Peninsula. Many thousands more had been withdrawn for the assault in Southern France. Supply lines were long and severely strained. (1)

By the first week in November, 1944, the going for the troops in the main effort, struggling against the Germans and the severe weather conditions, became so difficult that all thoughts of "Bologna by Christmas" had to be abandoned. (2)

The Fifth Army, therefore, in order to regroup, rest, and reequip itself for the coming Spring Offensive settled down in makeshift

(1) A-1, p. 5-a; (2) A-2.

shelters to wait out the winter. Winter clothing was issued along with skis and snowshoes where most needed. Activity was mainly restricted to that of containing the enemy in Italy by means of constant patrolling, feints and jabs at his defenses. The enemy held the commanding ridges and peaks from the narrow Ligurian coastal plain on the West to rugged Monte Grande on the East where the Fifth Army rubbed shoulders with the British Eighth Army. (3)

Amid the deep snows and punishing winds, the Fourth Corps consisting of the 92nd Infantry Division, Task Force 45, and the 1st Division of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, burrowed in for the winter and dedicated itself to the task of keeping the enemy in a constant state of anxiety along the 57 mile front for which it was responsible. (4)

A welcomed addition to the Fourth Corps occurred in January when the first Regimental Combat Team of the Tenth Mt. Division was released from the staging area and began its combat indoctrination by relieving units of Task Force 45 in the Cutigliano sector. The remainder of the division followed promptly and the converted British and American anti-aircraft units comprising Task Force 45 were gradually relieved. (5)

In the planning for the Spring Offensive, it was decided that before any main effort was made, certain preliminary operations were to be carried out, designed to keep the enemy off balance by threats at various widely separated points and to secure commanding terrain for use as a springboard in launching the Spring Offensive. It is about one of the latter operations that we will concern ourselves with in this monograph. (6)

Early in 1945, it was directed that the Tenth Mt. Division, under Fourth Corps, would move to the Poretta Terme area and clear the enemy

from the dominating Monte Belvedere-Monte della Torraccia Ridge which had thus far held firmly against the attacks of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force. This Ridge dominated the tactical situation in the North Apennines at this time. As long as the enemy held these peaks he protected all routes of approach to his supply and communication line, Highway 64 (The Pistoia-Bologna Road). They were also the highest terrain features remaining in his hands for his defense of the Po Valley. Beyond them the terrain gradually slopes away until the Po Valley is reached forty miles away. The capture of this vital terrain would deprive the enemy of most of his observation on our portion of Highway 64 and would provide us with more room for the future operation to the North. (7)

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

In considering the terrain features, the Belvedere sector, in general, afforded the enemy the advantage of strategic heights which afforded him magnificent observation and fields of fire. Monte Belvedere itself, a broad, sprawling mountain, is the first of three major peaks which form a ridge some 18,000 meters long running generally northeast. These mountains from south to north are: Monte Belvedere, Monte Gorgolesco, and Monte della Torraccia.

To the west of Monte Belvedere and running generally parallel to it is a very precipitous and rugged escarpment called the Monte Mancinello-Pizzo di Campiano Ridge, which will be referred to hereafter simply as the Campiano Ridge. This chain of summits rises from the very deep canyon of the Dardagna River to heights varying from 3,175 feet on the north to 6,030 feet at the south end. The summits from north to south are: Pizzo di Campiano, Mte Cappel Buso, Mte Serrasiccia, Mte Riva, Mte Mancinello, Serra Dei Barchetti, Cingo Sermidiano,

(7) Personal observation, self.

Mte Spigolino. The Dardagna Canyon varies from 1,600 feet on the north end to some 2,500 feet at the south end. The Campiano Ridge flanked Belvedere and afforded excellent observation of the valley floor as well as of Belvedere itself.

The floor of the valley between the Campiano Ridge and Monte Belvedere was covered with gullies and draws which were sharp and sudden. The road net was inadequate and in many places consisted of merely steep and rough trails. Numerous stone and masonry buildings dotted the entire area and were used to advantage by the Germans. (8)

THE ENEMY AND HIS DEFENSES

The known enemy positions in the Belvedere sector extended from Monte della Torraccia down to Belvedere, thence to Rocca Corneta and up and along the Campiano Ridge. From there the line ran to Monte Spigolino thence to Castelnuovo. The estimated enemy strength holding the area was four battalions of the 232nd Division. The bulk of his artillery was centered in the town of Montese. Our reconnaissance, of inestimable value in planning the subsequent operation, had further indicated that the total number of guns capable of being brought to bear upon our route of attack was 83. In reserve the enemy held four battalions of varying strengths. In previous operations on the slopes of Monte Belvedere, the Germans had shown considerable power in repulsing local action. Further, well remembered were three previous unsuccessful Allied attacks against the same objectives. Therefore, the probability of a strong defense and counterattacks at any time were emphasized. In our previous encounters with the enemy, it was evidenced that though the percentage of young men was limited, the defense potential for the German organization was fairly high. And, as in all mountain warfare, the elements holding the ridgelines and dug in along

(8) Personal observation, self.

the crests were to have the advantage and such was the enemy's position at this time.

Since little action had occurred in the Monte Belvedere region since last November, it was also expected that an intricate system of mine fields would have been developed by the enemy. North of Querciola probable fields ranged along the passable trails, covering thereby all logical routes of approach. North of Gaggio Montano were located heavy minefields in the Brazilian line of attack. (9)

PLANNING

The tactical effect of the terrain made the capture of the Campiano Ridge highly advantageous for by so doing we could have better observation for the future development of the attack and, perhaps more important, deprive the enemy of this strategic height which he used to an advantage as an observation post for his artillery.

It was evident that this ridge would have to be secured before any successful attack could be launched against Belvedere itself.

Routes of communication promised to be extremely difficult in that they would have to follow either the steep trails or pass along the roads which would make them vulnerable to motor movement. Snow was also to be taken into account, a slowing feature to motorized movement. Further, the nature of many of the sharp draws and gullies rendered tanks and heavy vehicles almost useless.

Since all routes of approach to the Belvedere sector could be observed by the enemy, it was evident that it would be necessary to make all movements into the area under cover of darkness. As to the attack itself, the hazards of launching a daylight attack by an inexperienced division across long, open slopes against a strongly defended mountain position were carefully weighed against the losses that would result from a night attack. The final plan directed a bold,

surprise night attack of five-battalion strength. (10)

Detailed warning orders were issued some two weeks prior to D-Day and intensive training was initiated involving the detailed study of maps, photographs, rehearsals over comparable terrain, and aerial reconnaissance in L-5 Liaison Aircraft by unit commanders. (11)

THE PLAN

On 15 February, 1945, the attack orders were issued. The 86th Mt. Inf., less the 3rd Battalion, was assigned the missions of securing the Campiano Ridge on D-Day minus 1, protecting the left (West) flank of the Division and assisting by fire the advance of the 87th Mountain Infantry in its attack on D-Day. The 3rd Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry was to relieve the left battalion of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force on the right of the Division and thus be in position to protect the right (East) flank of the Division. It would further maintain contact with the BEF on its right and the 85th Mountain Infantry on its left.

The 85th Mountain Infantry with the 604th Mountain Field Artillery Battalion and Company B, 84th Chemical Battalion in direct support would attack with two battalions abreast and seize the highest peak of Monte Belvedere and upon its capture swing north to take Monte Gorgolesco, thence up the ridge to Monte della Torraccia.

The 87th Mountain Infantry with the 616th Mountain Field Artillery Battalion and 1 platoon, Company B, 84th Chemical Battalion in direct support would attack on the left of and parallel to the 85th Mountain Infantry to seize Corona initially, and then split off--the 2nd Battalion turning left toward Rocca Corneta and securing the little towns of Polla and Florio; and the 1st Battalion passing through Corona, turning right and moving up to assist the 85th Mountain Infantry in taking the summit of Belvedere.

(10) A-3; (11) Personal knowledge.

The line of departure for the attack ran from Grecchia northwest to Querciola and from there in a northerly loop to Il Palazzo, following the road nets.

The 10th Mountain Anti-tank Battalion with the 10th Mountain Reconnaissance Troop attached was to be prepared to relieve the 86th Mountain Infantry on the Campiano Ridge on order.

The missions of the Engineer and Signal units were also outlined. Their problems of maintenance of the axes of communication and supply prior to and during the attack would be their most formidable tasks.

The Division Artillery was to support the 1st Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry in its attack on D-1 and thereafter each battalion would support its normally supported Infantry Regiment. The fires of the Division Artillery were to be supplemented by the following attached units: The 175th. FA Battalion, Battery A, 1125th FA, Battery A, 1127th FA, the 84th Chemical Battalion, Company A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion. The following additional Corps Troops were to participate in the attack, coordinating closely with our needs: the entire 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 751st Tank Destroyer Battalion, and Battery C, 360th AAA Battalion. (12)

THE MOVE TO THE FORWARD ASSEMBLY AREAS

The movements of the various elements of the Division to their forward assembly areas were started on the night of 17 February and were all completed by daylight on the morning of 18 February. I will not go into the move of each unit but I do feel that the move of the 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment was typical and is worthy of mention here.

On 16 February, the Regimental S-2 established the forward command post at La Ca and, with the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, was selecting and establishing observation posts for the operation. From the windows of the ancient stone dwelling which he had selected

as the command post proper, one could look directly up at the enemy manning his observation posts on the ridges which formed a semi-circle around the narrow valley. By 1550 hours, 17 February, the main body of troops had cleared the rear area in the vicinity of Lucca and was moving up.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions detrucked in the vicinity of Castelluccio and moved out immediately. By midnight, the long lines of trudging doughboys of the 1st Battalion had cleared Vidiciatico. Above their heads, piercing the darkness, the powerful searchlights from positions near Silla played on the slopes of Monte Belvedere and the Campiano Ridge. Between the columns of men rolled a steady column of trucks, as supplies, ammunition and equipment moved up. Even though blackout precautions were strictly enforced, it seemed incredible that the Germans, watching from the surrounding ridges, did not know what was transpiring below them. A captured German officer remarked afterward that they had heard noise in Vidiciatico but, "We failed to take note of it because we were accustomed to hearing the roar of American vehicles". At 0055 on the morning of 18 February, the 3rd Battalion had completed the occupation of its positions on the right flank. An hour and a half later, the 1st Battalion opened its command post at Farne and shortly thereafter, the 2nd Battalion was in place with its command post at Torlaino.

(13)

The 85th Mountain Infantry had closed into its area with its command post at Road Junction 635 and the 87th Mountain Infantry had closed into its area with its command post at Vidiciatico. The command post for the Division and the Division Artillery was at Lizzano In Belvedere.

(14)

As a result of extensive reconnaissance and pin point planning, every man of the Division was in a house or other similar shelter prior

(13) Personal knowledge, self; (14) A-3.

to daylight on 18 February, and the day was spent with the entire division concealed right under the noses of German outposts on the ridges above. Weapons were checked, ammunition issued, equipment inspected, and every man was rehearsed over and over again as to the part he was expected to play in the operation.

THE CAPTURE OF THE MTE MANCINELLO-PIZZO DI CAMPIANO RIDGE

The capture of the Campiano Ridge by the 86th Mountain Infantry was a feat of sound planning, physical endurance and mountaineering. The plan, based upon weeks of reconnaissance, intensive map and sand table study, was for the 1st Battalion with Company F attached to assault the ridge in five columns using five different trails.

The companies of the 1st Battalion had been organized into forces, each of which had selected as assault platoon of its best mountain-trained men. This platoon was to be preceded by a trail party of from three to four men who would select the trail and fix ropes where required. The following is a breakdown of the forces and their respective objectives.

Force A - Objective, Pizzo di Campiano

- 1 Rifle Platoon from Company A
- 2 Litter squads
- 1 Forward Observer party

Force B - Objective, Mte Cappel Buso

- 1 Rifle Company, Company B
- 1 Machine gun Platoon equipped with light machine guns
- 2 Sections of 81 MM mortars
- 2 Litter squads
- 1 Forward Observer party

Force C - Objective, Mte Serrassicia

- 1 Rifle Company, Company C
- 1 Machine gun Platoon
- 1 Section of 81 MM mortars
- 3 Litter Squads
- 1 Pioneer Squad
- 1 Forward Observer party

Force D - Objective, Mte Mancinello

- 1 Rifle company less one platoon, Company A
- 2 Litter squads
- 1 Pioneer Squad
- 1 Forward Observer party

Force E - Objective, Le Plage

1 Rifle Company, Company F
1 Machine gun Platoon
1 Section of 81 MM mortars
2 Litter squads

Company F, reinforced, had found a trail from Madonna Del Acero up to the high ground south of Mte Mancinello called Plage. They were to go up this trail and once on top, they would protect the left flank of the 1st Battalion. When the entire ridge had been secured, Company F would rejoin its own battalion and the 1st Battalion would assume responsibility for its own left flank.

In addition to the above listed organic and attached personnel, a specially organized "Porter" platoon of thirty men from the Regimental Service Company was attached which was to follow Company B to Cappel Buso carrying four .50 caliber machine guns and ammunition in addition to mortar ammunition. Also attached was the 256th. Quartermaster Pack Company which was to supply the forces on Mte Mancinello and Serrassiccia.

The supporting fires consisted of the following: Three battalions of field artillery in direct support, seven .50 caliber machine guns firing direct fire on Campiano and Cappel Buso from positions in the vicinity of La Ca and Plinardo. Battalion anti-tank guns (75 MM Pack Howitzer) to deliver direct fire from positions in vicinity of La Ca, one platoon Tank Destroyers and one platoon medium tanks in positions for direct fire on Campiano, Cappel Buso, and Serrassiccia, and one platoon chemical mortars. These supporting units were all in position the night of 18-19 February and were subject to fire on call from the Battalion Commander. No registration fires were desired so as to keep the element of surprise.

The attack "jumped off" at 1930 on the night of 18 February and before morning all forces, having climbed the steep, icy trails in pitch black darkness, had reached their objectives without a casualty.

The enemy had fired upon the columns several times but the fire was not returned and it is believed that the enemy did not become over alarmed.

During the early morning of 19 February, a very heavy fog settled over the whole ridge, an extreme advantage as it concealed the movements of our forces and allowed more time for the digging in and preparations for defending. At 1100, the fog began to lift and the supporting fires were registered. From that time until the battalion was relieved on 23 February, counterattacks of diminishing strengths continued along the ridge. These counterattacks were of patrol size of ten men to company size of seventy to eighty men. At no time did the enemy get into our positions although on several occasions the illegal use of the Geneva Red Cross flag was effected by him.

The objectives on Campiano Ridge were taken without a casualty but the subsequent counterattacks resulted in 17 killed, 38 wounded, and 3 missing. None of the wounded were lost due to the timely use of plasma, although, in some instances, it required from 6 to 12 hours to pack a casualty down from the ridge.

The difficulties encountered by supply agencies during this attack were many. Almost all supply was effected by the use of mules and on human backs, though "weasels" were used to a limited extent in some localities.

It was learned from prisoner interrogation that the ridge had been held by the 7th Company, 1044th Regiment of the 232nd Fusiliers and that this unit was scheduled to be relieved by two companies of the 4th Mountain Battalion (Separate) on 19 February. The attack caught the enemy during this relief and came as a complete surprise. At no time did the enemy expect an attack on this ridge because it was believed

that it was an obstacle too rugged for a large unit to attempt. (15)

Now, with its left flank secure, the Division was ready to launch its main attack upon Monte Belvedere itself.

THE CAPTURE OF MONTE BELVEDERE

At 2300 on 19 February, the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 85th Mountain Infantry pushed out across the line of departure and began the ascent of their first objectives. The 3rd Battalion on the left climbing the slopes of Mte Belvedere and the 1st Battalion on the right advancing to Mte Gorgolesco. To the left, the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 87th Mountain Infantry, 2nd Battalion on the left, had attacked simultaneously in the direction of Corona. On the right of the 85th Mountain Infantry, the 3rd Battalion of the 86th Mountain Infantry attacked up the south slopes of Monte Gorgolesco toward San Filomena. (16)

In the attack by the 85th Mountain Infantry, the 1st Battalion was the first to encounter resistance; at about 0100 it ran into heavy machine gun, machine pistol, mortar and artillery fires, but continued to advance against constantly increasing resistance. At 0410, Companies I and L had achieved a partial encirclement of the summit of Mte Belvedere and reported receiving heavy artillery fires. At this time the Commanding Officer of Company I was killed, and after advancing beyond his company on a limited reconnaissance the Commanding Officer of Company L was pinned down by enemy fires and was unable to return. The resulting confusion caused a short delay but the Executive Officers of both companies soon had the attack under way and by 1015 the battalion was in possession of the objective, and reported it was in fair condition but undergoing extremely heavy artillery and mortar fire. Later investigation disclosed several 120 MM Mortar positions on the

(15) A-5; A-7; (16) A-4; A-3.

outer slope of Belvedere which had inflicted heavy casualties upon the battalion.

On the left, the 3d Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry, had advanced without incident until 0300 when it received heavy mortar fires. It is believed that these fires were the protective fires of the German position that had been brought down when the movement had been detected. No apparent adjustments were made and, although they caused heavy casualties, particularly in Company C, they were not sufficiently effective to halt the advance. By 0440 Company C had surrounded the objective, Mte Gorgolesco, and by 0500, both companies C and B were assaulting the objective. By 0610, the summit was in the hands of the 1st Battalion.

(17)

Let us now look at the zone of the 87th Mountain Infantry on the left. By midnight, the attacking companies of the 1st Battalion were fired upon by machine pistols, machine guns, and artillery fires and were neither able to obtain fire superiority nor advance until after 0300. By 0430, however, Companies B and C, having breached the wire and passed through mine fields in front of the enemy positions, were on objectives on the western summit of Mte Belvedere. These two companies had bypassed the town of Corona which was later mopped up by Company A. At 0600 the town of Valpiana fell to the 1st Battalion.

On the left, the 2nd Battalion's attacking companies encountered minefields in the area east of Polla shortly after midnight. Almost simultaneously, they began to receive heavy artillery, mortar, and small arms fires and were unable to advance until after daybreak, at which time the towns of Polla, Florio, and Pianello were stormed and taken with the aid of artillery and fire support from the elements of the 86th Mountain Infantry on Campiano Ridge, as well as air support.

As planned, the 87th Mountain Infantry at this time occupied a

(17) A-4; A-3.

line extending through the towns of Florio, Polla, to a point at Valpiana, and on to the peak of Belvedere. The 1st Battalion of the 85th Mountain Infantry would later be relieved of its positions on Belvedere and the 87th Mountain Infantry would then extend its zone of responsibility northeast to Mte Gorgolesco.

From this time until the 87th Mountain Infantry was relieved a week later, there were no major developments. With the mission of defending the battle's gains, positions were steadily improved tactically. By midnight 20 February there had been 18 deaths and 91 wounded in the regiment during the preceding twenty-four hour period. Shell fire during the following eight days took its toll, killing 16 and wounding 44. Only when our planes were in the air were the men sure of respite from the artillery and mortar fire. Counterattacks occurred with decreasing frequency and all were beaten back with heavy loss to the enemy and with little loss to ourselves. (18)

On the extreme right of the division sector, the 3rd Battalion of the 86th Mountain Infantry had progressed in its attack successfully, countering all enemy attempts to disrupt the development. By 0345, it had taken San Filomena and was preparing to defend its gains. (19)

THE CAPTURE OF THE SECOND OBJECTIVES

The offensive actions to take place during the daylight hours of 20 February fell mainly to the lot of the 85th Mountain Infantry Regiment. With the 86th Mountain Infantry holding the Campiano Ridge on the left, the 87th Mountain Infantry the gap between the ridge and Mte Gorgolesco, and the 3rd Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry securing the right flank, the 85th Mountain Infantry was now ready to push its attack from Mte Gorgolesco up the ridge toward della Torraccia. The need to do so immediately was apparent; hostile artillery, only, was now being received, and, for the moment, the German was pulling back.

(18) A-3; A-6; (19) A-5.

The 1st Battalion, therefore, at 0730, committed Company A which until this time had been in reserve. It crossed the ridge but was held up for almost an hour by heavy enemy fires which now, in broad daylight, were carefully aimed and adjusted. By 0830, however, the attack was well on its way. Companies B and C, after mopping up along the Belvedere-Gorgolesco Ridge, followed in a column of companies. At this time, the 2nd Battalion in reserve, was ordered onto the ridge and soon followed the attack of the 1st Battalion. The 3d Battalion was occupied in consolidating its own positions on Belvedere and in sending its reserve company to take over the positions on Gorgolesco vacated by the 1st Battalion.

Shortly after 1000, the attacking companies of the 1st Battalion succeeded in repelling the first enemy counterattack, which came from the northeast. This counterattack, the first indication that the enemy had been able to reorganize to any appreciable extent, indicated that he would also overlook no opportunity to regain his losses. In the vicinity of Hill 1053, Company A entered heavy woods to be met with the strongest resistance thus far encountered. The enemy had occupied very strong positions which had been prepared to meet an attack from the southeast. Here, the effect of observed artillery fires was made even more devastating by tree bursts. Our counter battery artillery fires were reasonably effective and with the close-in support by a group of P-47 aircraft equipped with 500 pound bombs and rockets succeeded in neutralizing the hostile fires enough to permit the attack to continue. Hill 1053 was captured by 1750. (20)

On the right, the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry had advanced to and captured the town of Mazzancana. (21)

THE FINAL OBJECTIVE

It had been planned that upon the capture of Hill 1053, the 2nd

Battalion of the 85th Mountain Infantry would pass through the 1st Battalion and continue the attack with the mission of taking Mte della Torraccia that night. Upon being passed through, the 1st Battalion would organize its positions and defend to the north. The 3d Battalion on Belvedere was to be relieved by the 1st Battalion, 87th Mountain Infantry and was to occupy defensive positions extending from Mte. Gorgolesco on its left to the left flank of the 1st Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry on its right. Its advance had created a gap of some 600 yards between itself and the right flank of the 1st Battalion which subjected the wire and supply parties to the hazards of attack by infiltrating patrols.

Just before 1800, 20 February, the 2nd Battalion passed through the 1st Battalion and immediately met such stubborn resistance that after reaching the first high ground, some 500 yards beyond, it was ordered at 2100 to hold up for the night and prepare to continue the attack at daylight on 21 February. Almost immediately, the enemy launched a counterattack of three company strength which was successfully repulsed.

— At 0430, 21 February, the battalion began to receive a heavy shelling by the German artillery. At this time, the battalion occupied an area heavily overgrown with large pine trees which greatly increased the effectiveness of enemy shells by causing a great percentage of tree bursts. In addition to the severe shellings, the battalion had withstood five counterattacks during the night and was in a serious state; many casualties had been suffered. Company H suffered most heavily in the loss of leaders, having only one officer who was not killed or wounded. In addition, enemy activity had prevented supplies from reaching the battalion.

At this time, the Battalion Commander reported that his battalion was in such a serious condition that it could not continue the

attack as planned. He was ordered, nevertheless, to press his attack vigorously and was assured that every effort would be made to resupply him.

Upon receipt of these orders, reorganization of the depleted battalion was immediately effected and, at about 1300, the battalion resumed its attack. During the renewed advance, the battalion was subjected to the fire of German direct fire weapons and casualties continued to increase. By 2000, the Battalion Commander reported that he was on Mte della Torraccia and was ordered to consolidate his positions. The next morning it was found that the report had been in error for the position was then determined to be 400 yards short. (22)

At this time, the Brazilian Expeditionary Force had reported the capture of Monte Castello. This made contact between the 2nd Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry, the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, and the BEF possible to the end of routing any enemy counter-measures launched in this sector. (23)

At 0700 on the morning of 22 February, the 2nd Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry launched another attack in an effort to seize della Torraccia but was met with such heavy resistance that little advance was made. Enemy shelling was even more vicious than it had been the preceding day and automatic weapons effectively covered all routes of approach. By that afternoon at 1700, the battalion, with now only 400 men and low on ammunition, weapons, food and water, was ordered to consolidate its position and prepare to receive reinforcements and supplies. This consolidation was still taking place at noon on 23 February. (24)

At this time, the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry which had been moving up to the right rear of the stricken 2nd Battalion of the 85th Mountain Infantry, was ordered to move through the 2nd Battalion

(22) A-4; (23) A-3; (24) A-4.

and prepare for an attack on Mte della Torraccia at 0700 on 24 February. (25)

Let us, at this time, take stock of the dispositions and accomplishments of the Tenth Mountain Division as on the night of 23 February. Starting on the left flank, the Tenth Mountain Anti-tank Battalion with the Tenth Mountain Reconnaissance Troop attached had relieved the elements of the 86th Mountain Infantry on Campiano Ridge. Down the ridge and in Rocca Corneta was a small group of Italian Partisans. To their right and extending up the western slope of Belvedere thence to Valpiana and Mte Gorgolesco, was the 87th Mountain Infantry. From Gorgolesco up the ridge to the position of their 2nd Battalion just short of Mte della Torraccia, lay the 85th Mountain Infantry. To their right was the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry maintaining contact with the BEF which was working its way up from Mte Castello and La Serra. (26)

In this attack, therefore, a definite spearhead had been thrust into the side of the German mountain defense. Positions overlooking his defenses on the road to Bologna were being seized. The enemy was being pushed off his anchor line.

THE CAPTURE OF MTE DELLA TORRACCIA

In the left and center sectors the early morning hours of 24 February were relatively quiet with the exception of limited artillery duels. The anticipated counterattacks had not materialized except in the cases of small ones in local areas. The attack of the 3d Battalion of the 86th Mountain Infantry against the last stronghold on Mte della Torraccia jumped off as scheduled. The expected air support did not arrive until 15 minutes later. As in the case of the 2nd Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry, the attacking companies of this battalion met heavy resistance but by vicious fighting and excellent

(25) A-5; (26) A-3; A-5.

use of the supporting air and artillery as well as its organic supporting weapons, the battalion captured its objective by 1500.

By 1600, the enemy had had time to recover from the loss of the most of Mte della Torraccia and the ridges immediately north and northeast of the mountain; a counterattack was in order. Twenty minutes later the enemy opened up against the west flank but by 1850, it appeared as if the thrust had been brought under control. Before midnight, however, new attacks had to be beaten off and sixty more rounds of enemy artillery fell. This attack was a heavy one and, though its main threat was repulsed at 0230, it continued spasmodically throughout the night, with mortar and artillery fires supporting. By 0700, 25 February, the attack was definitely over; the final objective had been secured and successfully defended. (27)

THE ROLE OF THE SUPPORTING ARMS

During the Belvedere-Torraccia action, the artillery supported the advancing troops by continually pounding the enemy with time fuze, time-on-target, and variable time firing. The coordination necessary for time-on-target firing was maintained at all times by the fire direction centers of the batteries. Our Division Artillery fired for their first time the variable time ammunition and in this extremely steep terrain where the angle of slope in respect to the angle of flight became less acute, the effect of the burst, 45 feet in the air, shattered the sides of dugouts ranged along the contours. It was found, however, that weather conditions in such a situation did condition its devastating results. Night firing of VT caught the Germans whenever they tried to move materials and men above ground. The constant combination of the three types of fire caused heavy enemy casualties and produced the desired softening-up effect.

Of tremendous effect in the attack was the use for the first time

in the Mediterranean Theatre of the complete resources of air power. Instead of oblique briefing from the ground, in which aerial observation is limited to the vision of the ground observation post, an L-5, Liaison airplane was used. This airplane is briefed first by the ground OP. It then investigates the target under consideration from a vertical position. As the fighter planes approach, the L-5 briefs the pilots as to the exact locations and nature of the target. Greater accuracy and more extensive observation were the rewards of this system. Close-in operations by aircraft were thus made less hazardous to friendly troops. (28)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The Tenth Mountain Division, in its first assigned mission, accomplished the following difficult tasks:

- a. Concentrated in a valley overlooked on three sides by the enemy, over an inadequate road net, without being discovered by the enemy.
- b. Seized by night assault the precipitous mountain range on the left consisting of mountains Mancinello, Serrasiccia, Capel Buso, and Pizzo di Campiano.
- c. Successfully assaulted by night the enemy strong defensive line including the strong points of Mt. Gorgolesco-Mt. Belvedere-Valpiana and the fortified towns of Corona, Polla, Florio and Rocca Corneta.
- d. Held the areas seized against counterattacks and captured the successive objectives northeast of Mount Gorgolesco to include the final objective--Mount della Torraccia. A total advance from left to right of some 18,000 meters.

In the accomplishment of the above missions, the division overran and defeated elements of eight different battalions (parts of two divisions, plus two separate battalions), from which approximately 400 prisoners of war were taken.

Having achieved tactical surprise, the division swept through the operation in less time than had been anticipated. The main effort had been made by the 85th Mountain Infantry. In a sense, it was a peculiar situation which the division met. The enemy was hit just when he was effecting a normal relief. The 741st was coming into the line from the Adriatic. That the Germans were caught off balance and poorly oriented as to the terrain in which they were fighting may be said to weigh in our favor. The fact, however, that a relief was in progress gave him more troops with which to maneuver against our force within a shorter radius of critical points. Where he lacked men, he struck with heavier artillery. The resistance which the Germans offered throughout the operation was not as great as anticipated, although his local counterattacks were launched in strength.

The following points will admit to criticism:

1. Lack of air bombardment and artillery preparatory fires prior to the main attack. It appears that the softening-up effect of such fires before the attack on Belvedere would have warranted the loss of surprise at this point. The all-important Campiano Ridge to the left had been taken and it is, I believe, safe to assume that the enemy was well aware of the probabilities of a further attack on Belvedere.

2. The 1st Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry is to be criticized for allowing the 600 yard gap to form between itself and the 2nd Battalion during the initial attack on Mte della Torraccia by the 2nd Battalion.

3. The Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry is to be criticized for his obvious lack of aggressiveness. It is believed that, had his attack been vigorously pushed out of the wooded area short of Mte della Torraccia, the effects of the artillery tree bursts would have not been as disastrous. He allowed his attack to bog down there and his first actions were to report that he

was unable to advance. He is to be further criticized for the erroneous report that his battalion was on its objective when this was not the case. This incident resulted in no serious complications but it is conceivable that it might have.

4. The failure of the supporting air to arrive on time to support the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry in its initial attack on Mte della Torraccia.

The success of the operation which was the prelude to the final breakthrough to the Po and to the Alps can be accredited to the following:

1. 70 percent of the personnel had been trained for mountain warfare in the American Rockies. They had no fear of rugged, precipitous and difficult terrain.

2. Early and complete reconnaissance of the objectives for routes of approach by officers and men who knew mountains.

3. A simple plan made easy by detailed orders, use of the sand table, aerial photographs, and complete orientation of every officer and man.

4. Aerial reconnaissance by the commanders of terrain that could be observed by ground reconnaissance.

5. An adequate period for preparation and formulation of plans.

6. Rehearsal over terrain which was as nearly as possible, comparable to the terrain over which the operation was to take place.

7. Night movement in the approach and attack phase.

8. Superior physical condition and stamina of all personnel.

9. High morale and esprit de corps of the men who knew that they were a specialized mountain unit.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Secrecy measures should not be enforced to the point of neg-

lecting preparatory fires when the advantages of their use would outweigh the disadvantage of the loss of surprise.

2. Units assigned contact missions should make every attempt to maintain that contact.

3. Unit commanders must be aggressive.

4. A unit that pushes its attack through a wooded area while under heavy artillery fires will, in most instances, sustain fewer casualties than will be sustained as a result of staying in the woods.

5. Close coordination must be maintained between supporting and supported arms.

6. Specialized training of units the size of a division is practical and yields great dividends in combat.

7. Timely warning orders, detailed planning, and adequate time for rehearsals do much to simplify a necessarily complicated plan.

8. The majority of men who have received specialized training as a member of a specialized unit will do their utmost to justify this training and the accompanying distinction.

9. A night attack of division strength is practicable if the time for preparation and orientation is adequate.