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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 350TH INFANTRY
(88TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT MOUNT BATTAGLIA, SOUTH
OF BOLOGNA, ITALY, 27 SEPTEMBER - 1 OCTOBER 1944.
(NORTH APENNINES CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION CAPTURING
AND DEFENDING A KEY TERRAIN FEATURE IN MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2d Battalion, 350th Infantry, 88th Division, in the battle of MOUNT BATTAGLIA, ITALY, 27 September - 1 October 1944, during the late fall offensive.

To clarify the reader's concept of this operation, it will be necessary to briefly recount the major events of military significance which led up to this particular encounter.

First, let us consider the mission of this campaign. The primary objective was to contain as many of the enemy forces as possible, in this theater, thus eliminating their possible use on the eastern and western fronts. In addition, these forces were to be destroyed and disorganized to prevent them from occupying probable defenses in NORTHERN ITALY and SOUTHERN BAVARIA. (1)

The campaign, up to the present operation was conducted in three major phases. Phase one was the successful landings at SALERNO and TARANTO by the American Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army, (2) (See Map A) By 1 October the port of NAPLES was established and by 1 January 1944, the enemy had been driven back to his first prepared defenses which were just north of the GARIGLIOANO and SANGRO RIVERS. (See Map A)

(1) A-4, p. 1
(2) A-3, p. 36

Phase two, the capture of ROME, its surrounding air-fields and the port of CIVITAVECCHIA was completed by the Fifth Army on 2 June 1944. (3) (See Map A) It was during this phase that the ANZIO BEACHHEAD was established. Here too, was where the German Fourteenth Army, the major opposition of the Fifth, received its greatest setbacks and heaviest losses. (4) Phase three, from ROME to the GOTHIC LINE, enemy opposition was continuous but less severe. In this one hundred thirty mile advancement no major pockets of resistance were encountered. This was due largely to our air superiority and the weakened condition of the German Fourteenth Army. By 25 August enemy forces of all large units were withdrawn and concentrated behind their last well prepared position, the GOTHIC LINE. (5) Units opposing the Fifth Army were the 16th SS Armored Infantry Division, 65th Infantry Division, 362d Infantry Division, 334th Infantry Division, and the tough 4th Parachute Division. (See Map B)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The GOTHIC LINE, the main line of German defense in NORTHERN ITALY, extended one hundred miles east from VIA-REGGIO on the west coast to RIMINI on the ADRIATIC side. (See Map B) It was constructed to take maximum advantage of the rugged APENNINE MOUNTAINS and the few roads that passed over them. This formidable fortress was by no means continuous or strong in depth. Likely approaches were fortified with every conceivable weapon from anti-personnel mines to tank traps.

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- (3) A-2, p. 81
(4) A-3, p. 271
(5) A-4, p. 57

The first plan of Fifteenth Army Group in July 1944, to attack the GOTHIC LINE, had to be cancelled because of canny and rapid shifting of enemy defense units. The final plan adopted on 16 August 1944, called for the Eighth Army on the right to attack in force along the ADRIATIC, while the Fifth made a secondary attack toward BOLOGNA. When the Eighth Army's attack showed progress, the main effort would be made by the Fifth Army north of FLORENCE.

The Fifth Army plan to breach the LINE called for a coordinated attack in which all three Corps would participate. (6) The main effort and critical zone was assigned the II Corps, commanded by Major General Geoffrey Keyes. II Corps employed three divisions, the 34th, 91st and 85th in the attack with the 88th in reserve. (See Map C)

By 17 September the 85th Division had captured MOUNT ALTUZZO and at this point enemy resistance generally collapsed all along the front. The GOTHIC LINE had been breached. In a matter of hours, II Corps controlled a seven mile stretch of the GOTHIC LINE on each side of IL GIOGO PASS. (7)

Phase two of II Corps plans called for a continuation of the attack. The line of advance was to follow HIGHWAY 65 northward toward BOLOGNA. Bad weather and enemy resistance was bogging down the Eighth Army advance on the right. General Clark, Fifteenth Army Group Commander, ordered the II Corps to change direction and attack to the northeast along HIGHWAY 6528 toward IMOLA. (8)

On 20 September General Kendall, Commanding General of the 88th Division, received Corps orders to assemble his troops

(6) A-1, p. 39
(7) A-3, p. 322
(8) A-3, p. 332

near MOUNT ALTUZZO and pass through the right elements of the 85th Division and attack down the SANTERNO VALLEY. (9) The 88th Division had been held in reserve since early August just south of FLORENCE. Here they were trained and briefed on the operations that were soon to follow. Plans were made and executed to familiarize all units with the front line situation. Officers and NCO's were sent forward to observe the action of the front line companies in the other three divisions.

Morale in the division was high. The men were becoming impatient for the eventful blows that were soon to come. All felt that now was the time to jump-off, it was good fighting weather and the Germans were tiring. Division strength was about normal and supplies and equipment were all in good condition. The main German opposing forces, the 362d and 44th Infantry Divisions were badly beaten and poorly supplied. However, inclement weather was greatly aiding the Germans in their defense. And too, General Kesselring's masterful handling of what troops he had, made further progress difficult. Efficiency of both forces was considered good. Both had experienced a year of heavy fighting and numerous casualties. Our greatest morale factor was our continued success.

The Division plan of attack called for two Regiments abreast and one in reserve. The right boundary would be the boundary between II Corps and XIII Corps; the left boundary adjacent to the 85th Division would be approximately one and a half miles west of and parallel to HIGHWAY 6528. (See Map D) The first objective was to capture the high ground southeast

(9) A-5, p. 130

of the SANTERNO RIVER. These high ridges were necessary to control the highway and the valley below. Fighting here would present tremendous supply problems, but the ground was critical and had to be taken. On 19 September, General Kendall issued orders committing the 349th Infantry on the left and the 350th Infantry on the right, keeping the 351st in reserve. D-Day and H-Hour were designated as 0500 hours, 21 September. (10) The attack was launched at the appointed time and favorable gains were made immediately. The 349th Infantry soon took MOUNT LAFINE and the 350th MOUNT FAGGIOLLI. (See Map D) At this point enemy resistance stiffened appreciably and heavy losses were inflicted on both sides. It soon became evident that MOUNT PRATOLUNGO, MOUNT CARNEVALE and MOUNT BATTAGLIA had to be taken to relieve this continuing resistance. (11) II Corps assisted by reducing the Division frontage and allowing concentration on these points. The 349th was assigned MOUNT PRATOLUNGO and the 350th MOUNT BATTAGLIA. (See Map D)

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 350TH INFANTRY

On the 25th of September the 350th Infantry, commanded by Colonel Fry, was attacking in a northeasterly direction in an effort to capture the high ground between the SANTERNO and SENIO RIVERS. (See Map D) Leap-frog tactics were being used constantly in an effort to gain each high objective. One battalion would take a hill, consolidate it, and then another would pass through to take the next one. To seize MOUNT BATTAGLIA the regiment planned to use the 2d Battalion. The

(10) A-6, G-3 Log

(11) A-1, p. 93

1st Battalion was to protect the right flank and the 3rd Battalion was to be held in reserve at MOUNT ACUTO and follow to MOUNT CARNEVALE, which was the 2d Battalion's first objective.

THE BATTALION SITUATION

On 25 September, Colonel Fry, Regimental Commander, ordered the 3d Battalion to take MOUNT CARNEVALE and the 1st Battalion PUNTALE. The 2d Battalion was to be held in reserve on MOUNT ALTO, and be prepared to pass through the 3d to take BATTAGLIA. Orders were changed at the last minute, assigning MOUNT CARNEVALE to the 2d Battalion, thus making it the first objective on the way to BATTAGLIA.

When Lt. Colonel Corbitt Williamson, the 2d Battalion Commander received the Regimental Order to take MOUNT CARNEVALE and MOUNT BATTAGLIA, he assembled the battalion in the vicinity of MOUNT ACUTO for a day's rest prior to the jump-off. That was all the time that could be allowed for preparation. Here men were ordered to strip down to the barest essentials. Three days "K" rations, 3 bandoleers of ammunition, 3 grenades, first aid packet, full canteen of water, halozone tablets, entrenching equipment, knife and fork, and raincoat were the only items to be carried. Blankets, overcoats, shoe packs and pup tents were not available. (12) Attached to the Battalion for supply transportation, were 27 mules from the Regimental mule group. These were placed under the direction of the A & P Platoon Leader and would be supervised by Battalion S-4, who was to remain with the Regimental Supply Train. It was impossible for any type vehicle to move in this ter-

(12) A-9

rain. Only one mule trail led to the top of the mountain from the south. (See Map E)

Because the entire regiment was moving forward at such a fast rate, prior reconnaissance by foot patrols was impossible. The tops of CARNEVALE and BATTAGLIA could be seen from MOUNT ACUTO. That was all the terrain information known. Maps were unavailable, old and very inaccurate. Photos could not be obtained. (13)

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The line of departure was to be the mountain trail 20 yards left of VILLA DI VALMAGGIORE on HILL 698, which was forward of MOUNT ACUTO, about 700 yards. H-Hour was to be 0600, 27 September 1944. (14)

The plan of attack called for the battalion to attack in a column of companies, G Company leading, followed by F Company, E Company, and Headquarters Company. The Heavy Weapons Company had only two 81 mm mortars and six light machine guns. The mortars were attached to E Company and the machine guns to G Company.

The Battalion Commander with a radio operator was to move forward with the leading company, while the Battalion Executive Officer would bring up the remaining headquarters elements in rear of E Company.

Enemy strength or disposition on MOUNT BATTAGLIA was unknown. Most of the enemy activity had been observed about five miles to the west in the vicinity of CASTEL DEL RIO, the important road junction on HIGHWAY 6528. This was in the

(13) A-9
(14) A-9

sector of the 351st Infantry.

The first objective was to be MOUNT CARNEVALE, where a hurried reorganization would take place. The battalion would then move on to BATTAGLIA. G Company was to make a frontal attack, and if delayed considerably, F Company would deploy and make a flank attack on the right.

Radios were to be used for communication. Up to this time the SCR 300 had proved very efficient and each company had at least two good sets. The Communication Platoon in Headquarters Company built up a good stock pile of extra batteries and disregarded the wire laying equipment and wire.

The mule train was to be fully loaded and follow the last company in the attack. In case the battalion was held up, the loads would be dumped and the mules returned immediately to MOUNT ACUTO for resupply.

Men would be given their last hot meal at 0400 hours, 27 September and be ready to march by 0500. (15)

NARRATION

THE ATTACK ON MOUNT BATTAGLIA

Company G, led by Captain Robert E. Roeder, crossed the line of departure in a column formation at about 0600 hours, 27 September 1944.

He was accompanied by Lt. Col. Williamson, the Battalion Commander, and Lt. Vergot, the Artillery Liaison Officer. When about 700 yards from the top of MOUNT CARNEVALE, the leading patrol of G Company was fired upon, but it was only small

(15) A-9

arms. It was not voluminous or accurate. In fact, the leading patrol by fast action and immediate machine gun fire, drove the few scattered Germans back toward the summit. G Company moved quickly and upon reaching the only good trail to the top, Captain Roeder deployed the 1st Platoon and ordered them to make a frontal assault. The 60 mm mortars and light machine guns took positions where they could support the attack with overhead fire.

In less than three hours MOUNT CARNEVALE and fifty prisoners were captured. The speed of the attack was the big factor in this success. The Germans did not have time to dig in and there were no artificial obstacles or buildings to afford them protection. Partially dug fox holes and deserted entrenching tools were the only remains of the battle. A small number of the enemy fled along the trail toward MOUNT BATTAGLIA. Our losses were minor, one killed and six wounded.

As G Company was reorganizing on MOUNT CARNEVALE a band of renegade partisans, about 25 strong, appeared and informed Col. Williamson that there were no Germans entrenched on MOUNT BATTAGLIA and that they, (the partisans) knew the only trail leading to the crest. They argued that there were many Germans in the vicinity and that the sooner we moved forward the fewer casualties we would suffer. This information was radioed directly to the Assistant Division Commander, General Ramey, who warned Col. Williamson of probable sabotage. After considerable discussion, Col. Williamson decided to follow the partisans along the narrow mountain trail, which supposedly led to the top of BATTAGLIA. For security, patrols were sent to

the front and the flanks and close surveillance was kept over the partisan leader and his cohorts. He was warned that any unusual actions on his part would bring immediate death. (16)

The battalion moved slowly forward in a column of files. This was necessary because the ridge was so narrow. At intervals of about two hundred yards, baskets full of enemy anti-personnel mines had been piled. These were quickly destroyed. No enemy fire or resistance were met anywhere along the route.

THE FIRST DAY AND NIGHT ON MOUNT BATTAGLIA

The leading elements of the battalion reached the peak about 1500 hours. Upon arrival, the mountain was found to be "Y" shaped, very barren in most places and deeply indented on the east by the fingerlike tributaries of SENIO CREEK. From the summit and from a spur extending to the northeast, the mountain slopes steeply to the northwest. The eastern and southern slopes are more gradual. The only route from the south was the hog back ridge which the troops had just come over. Since the mountain was surrounded by peaks of almost similar height, enemy observation was obtained from HILLS 602, 621, 620, 592 and 575, which were on the left, front and right. In the vicinity of HILL 575 a German self-propelled 88mm started firing from a concealed position into the battalion area. This fire proved exceedingly troublesome and later made supple movements to the front extremely dangerous.

As soon as G Company had closed on MOUNT BATTAGLIA, Col. Williamson assigned them the summit, which included an old stone castle with a large retaining wall, running about 100

yards along the topographical crest. It was evident that whoever held the castle, controlled the mountain. The CG Co. commander was ordered to make immediate plans for all-around security, because intermittent mortar fire was beginning to fall.

F Company followed shortly and they were instructed to occupy the northeast spur as far forward as possible, keeping in contact and coordinating their boundaries with G Company on the right.

F Company could not satisfactorily cover the entire spur, so a platoon from Headquarters Company with two additional light machine guns was sent down to assist them. They were assigned the left sector. The partisans were told to stay with F Company, but as soon as they learned the battalion did not carry a large supply of food, they immediately started to desert our ranks, and by night fall of the first day, all had vanished. (17)

Upon arrival, E Company was assigned a large sector to the right of G Company leading back along the ridge. They were ordered to dig in immediately and by nightfall have a patrol in contact with the Headquarters Platoon on the left flank.

The Battalion Command Post was originally located in E Company's area because it contained the only other stone building on the mountain. It was a two story structure with a dirt floor. The lower section was given to the medics as an aid station while the upper floor was used as an operations room. It was located about 1200 yards to the right rear of

the castle.

Lt. Vergot, the Artillery Liaison Officer, went to the crest upon arrival to start registrations for artillery concentrations in front of, and to the right of the battalion position. This was quick to prove its value, for no sooner had he finished, four concentrations, by name, Becky, Mary, Susie and Daisy, than the first German counterattack started to materialize. Initial indications of the attack were volleys of harassing mortar and artillery fire. These lasted for about thirty minutes and then the very sky began to erupt with bursting shells. To add to the utter confusion a heavy rain began to fall and by 1600 hours, visibility was limited to a few yards. As soon as the preparation was lifted large numbers of advancing Germans from the 44th and 715th Grenadier Divisions assaulted the G Company position from the northeast and east. They moved hurriedly up to the east slope of the mountain firing machine pistols and other automatic weapons as they advanced. One light machine gun squad managed to infiltrate to the crest of the hill and for a short while laid deadly fire all along the rear slope. Suddenly out of nowhere, Sergeant Beni Mazzarella of G Company charged the enemy position from the left rear and with one well placed grenade silenced the menacing killer forever. On the forward slope the attack was not successful, because reinforcements were dispersed by the artillery concentrations. The assaulting elements suffered numerous casualties attempting to get through the deadly fire of the front line BAR's that were dug in on the forward slope. In the first real test the battalion held,

but already the ammunition was diminishing and the aid station was soon over-running with casualties. Emergency requests were being sent to regiment for additional ammunition, medical supplies and litter bearers. To assist the cause, ammunition from our dead and wounded was immediately gathered and redistributed. (18)

The mountain was an eerie sight. Darkness, rain and fog engulfed the area and dead were strewn all about. The eight litter bearers originally assigned the battalion suffered two casualties and the remaining six were called to the battalion aid station to assist Captain Stoner, the Battalion Medical Officer.

Officers and NCO's were busily engaged in trying to reorganize their positions and assist those who needed medical help. Everyone knew by now that Jerry was very determined to regain this strategic height.

All through the night the enemy shelled the mountain. Artillery rounds were coming in from the north, east and south, which was positive proof that our adjacent unit on the right was many miles to the rear. Contact with them had been lost days before. The thought of a surprise attack on the right flank or the right rear was an additional hazard.

About midnight the patrol from E Company captured 15 Germans in the vicinity of their company area, who confessed they were lost. They stated that the afternoon counterattack was supposed to have been a coordinated assault with their group attacking from the vicinity of HILL 602, simultaneously with the effort in front of G Company. (See Map - F)

SECOND DAY AND NIGHT ON MOUNT BATTAGLIA

At 0530 hours, 28 September another terrific mortar barrage descended upon the mountain. It ceased in fifteen minutes and the Jerries struck again. The main effort was again directed at G Company. The forward outposts were soon overrun and the attacking troops were beaten back only after they had reached within a few yards of the crest.

Again the artillery played a tremendous part in repelling the effort. The heroic actions of Lt. Vergot who defied all risks and dangers stayed at his observation post and directed the deadly fire on all the critical areas.

Several minor attacks continued during the morning and small groups of 25 to 30 attempted unsuccessfully to penetrate the outer lines.

By now it became evident that the men in G Company could not stay in their prepared positions on the forward slope, because the constant mortar and rifle grenade shelling was making their positions very dangerous and costly. Captain Roeder consulted Lt. Col. Williamson and they decided to develop the rear slope for daylight occupancy, which would afford protection from enemy observation to the front and right.

Everyone knew by now when the Germans would assault -- immediately following the cessation of preparation fires. It would be a case now of beating the Krauts to the hill top and occupying positions, so that grazing fire could meet his desperate rush.

Casualties were so numerous that the command post was moved into a large defiladed area in the open and the entire

command post building was turned over to the medics. Plasma, bandages, and drugs were getting very low. The Battalion S-4 had sent a ten team mule train forward from ACUTO on the morning of the 27th, but as yet nothing had arrived. Litter bearers and the walking wounded were scattered all along the ridge to the rear. Morale and spirits were very low and the mud drenched soldiers still wallowing in their flooded fox holes were a discouraging sight. Rifles were becoming dirty, machine guns needed new barrels and the mortars were useless because they had no ammunition. Only dauntless courage and bull dog tenacity kept the men at their posts. (19)

In the afternoon, the enemy attacked in force. Commencing at 1400 hours, artillery and mortars to the front and right rear began a concentrated shelling of the summit which continued without let up until 1700 hours, when a force of approximately three battalions from the 715th and 44th Grenadier Divisions launched a coordinated attack. An estimated battalion attacked from the open right flank in the sector in front of Company E, while the remainder struck at G Company positions in front of the castle. Carrying pole charges, flame throwers, and knee mortars they fought their way to the very crest, but before they could surge across they were thrown back. It was in this attack that Captain Roeder was killed. During the morning attack he had been knocked unconscious and wounded by a shell fragment, but had refused to go to the aid station. Previous to this, he had been all over the hill, constantly checking his men, pointing out targets, outlining new strategy, never sleeping and getting little rest. During

the afternoon counterattack he dragged himself to the castle door and braced against the sill. He had two dead men's rifles, which he continued to fire at the approaching enemy and meantime shouting encouragement and orders to his men. He fought until a knee mortar shell burst a few feet away and that was the end. His men would not allow him to be removed until the hill was securely held. Even in death his presence was felt. Every man seemed to absorb strength from his nearness. The Medal of Honor was awarded him posthumously.

The flanking attack directed toward the E Company sector was very successful at first, because the large spur running toward the front, on the east side of the mountain, could not be covered by small arms fire since all the company positions were on the rear slope. Mortar fire normally assigned this position was not available. This allowed the Germans cover and protection, until they made their assault. At first it appeared as if the Krauts might overrun Company E's position. It became so apparent that Captain Cussans, the company commander asked that artillery fire be brought down only 25 yards in front of his own troops. This proved to be extremely effective and was very instrumental in stopping a reinforced rush over the hill.

On 27 September the Regimental Commander had sensed the importance of holding MOUNT BATTAGLIA. The fanatic and continuous efforts of Jerry made it obvious. To help alleviate the situation, he ordered all supporting artillery be given the 2d Battalion. Also K Company from the weary and battered 3d Battalion was ordered forward to the embattled position.

They were to be reinforced with all the possible men and mules in Regimental Headquarters Company. The mules were to be packed with ammunition, especially hand grenades, K rations and additional medical supplies. At least one hundred SCR 300 radio batteries would be carried. The Battalion S-4 knew that to attempt a full scale carry to battle positions was futile. The A & P Platoon that attempted this on the previous run had lost a great deal of their vital cargo to enemy mortar fire. It was therefore planned that the mules would go as far as the high knoll behind HILL 664* where they could not be observed, unload, and return for additional supplies. K Company, and the Headquarters elements would hand carry as much of this load forward as was possible, the rest would be guarded. The Headquarters Company men were to make an immediate return trip carrying litter cases. By now the battalion had received over one hundred and fifty casualties and the aid station was a bedlam of human suffering and frustration. The wounded could not be properly cared for even though the battalion medics had worked unceasingly and tirelessly ever since their arrival. Their determined efforts seemed to be beyond all human physical capabilities. The call to the rear for aid had not yet been fulfilled. The four miles to the Regimental CP, where the wounded were being evacuated still presented a grotesque and horrifying problem. The wounded all seemed to fear and dread the torturous trip.

At 1930 hours, K Company arrived at the battle positions. Ammunition was so badly needed that it was immediately distributed. A few individuals were sent back for the remainder that

* (See Map E)

had been left at HILL 664. Lt. Col. Williamson committed K Company in the G Company sector, which was receiving the heaviest poundings. These reinforcements greatly relieved the situation and morale seemed to perk up at the sight of assistance. (21)

Shortly after the counterattack was repelled, Captain O'Hara, FO of the 338th Field Artillery Battalion arrived. He immediately started firing concentrations in areas which Lt. Vergot of the 337th could not cover. This, coupled with some Corps artillery firing to expected assembly areas well forward greatly enhanced the battalion's position.

Enemy artillery fire continued throughout the night of 28-29 September while the battalion and Company K worked at improving their positions and evacuating the wounded.

THIRD DAY AND NIGHT ON MOUNT BATTAGLIA

Dawn approached with the sky enveloped in fog, heavy clouds and a drizzling rain. At 0700 hours a terrific preparation of enemy artillery plastered the entire mountain. It lasted for approximately thirty minutes and then the Germans hit again. The force was estimated to be about a regiment in strength. This time they came up the steep northwestern slope, aided considerably by the enshrouding fog. By 0900 hours the attack had carried to the crest of the hill. A few Jerries actually reached the entrance of the castle, before they were driven back by hand grenades. The attack on this side caught the battalion a little off balance, because most of the artillery concentrations had been placed

(21) A-9

to the front and the right of the mountain. However, the FO's and the batteries themselves, were acclimated to the situation by now and in short order an accurate and deadly barrage was falling on the enemy attacking from the new direction.

The story of this attack was the gruesome proximity of the entire affair. The last hour was all hand to hand fighting. After it was over practically every soldier had German blood dripping from the tip of his bayonet. It was in this melee that Lt. Vergot, the 337th Field Artillery Battalion FO was badly wounded and his radio operator killed. Regardless, he refused to leave his post and in a hole up near the castle wall, he continued to direct artillery fire on enemy concentrations. His undauntless courage greatly aided in beating off the relentless surge. The most vital saviour in this attack was the timely arrival of the ammunition brought forward by K Company the previous day. (22)

Many examples of intrepid actions were displayed in this counterattack. Sgt. Leo Beddow, who was partially blinded by a mortar shell, while manning a position in the castle, was the soldier most responsible for keeping the Germans out of the stronghold. With blood streaming down his face and his left arm mangled, he placed himself behind a partially blown out inner wall and every time a Kraut got to the door, he let him have it. After the counterattack was over, nine dead Germans were found lying within fifteen yards of the castle entrance. (23)

The battalion situation was so serious now, General

(22) A-9
(23) A-9

Kendall ordered Colonel Fry to move the entire regiment onto BATTAGLIA. To protect the right flank and the established supply route on the ridge line from CARNEVALE an armored infantry unit of the CCA was ordered forward by the Corps Commander. Two days prior to this Colonel Fry had made arrangements to move his command post to BATTAGLIA. Shortly after noon on the 29th, he arrived and found Lt. Col. Williamson in a defiladed area on the west side of the mountain. The tiny command post group was a sight to behold, several days growth of beard was on their faces, eyes were sunken, uniforms soaked with mud and blood, spirits down-trodden and nearly broken. Few words were spoken; the ghastly surroundings told the entire story. Lt. Col. Williamson, a very brave and able soldier, was obvious glad to have the responsibility of this trying ordeal shared with his immediate superior.

Colonel Fry, after a hasty estimate, ordered the 1st Battalion and the remaining elements of the 3d Battalion to the mountain. He radioed regimental command post rear and informed the executive officer to move the command post forward to CARNEVALE and to send every available man from Cannon Company, Anti-tank Company, Service Company and Regimental Headquarters Company forward to the battle position with supplies. They were to bring small arms ammunition, grenades, plasma, bandages, drugs, dry socks, blankets, shelter halves, and flame throwers. The movement forward was to be expedited and controlled by the 2d Battalion S-4, who knew the route forward. The Regimental S-4 was directed to contact Division G-4 for immediate resupply of all these critical items. (24)

(24) A-7, p. 6

About 1300 hours another concentration of mortar fire rained steadily on all position areas. It ceased as suddenly as it had started. This was the same old signal of death; the defenders knew the Germans would soon materialize out of the smoke and fog as soon as the shelling stopped. Muddy, disheveled, determined soldiers rushed from the cover of the rocks and scrub-brush on the battalion side of the hill to beat the Germans to the crest and start firing from positions along the ridge. Our men laid a deadly barrage of small arms fire to the front, which evidently broke the spirit of the attackers for they quickly withdrew. The battalions fire dwindled as human targets disappeared, to conserve precious ammunition. Miraculously now the sun came out and in less than fifteen minutes an artillery liaison plane appeared close overhead. The observer looked down into the enemy positions and promptly adjusted our artillery fire on these areas close within the enemy lines. Our men in their holes could sense how exposed the Jerries must feel.

In a very short time the fire from their lines ceased. This was the weakest charge made by the enemy up to date and the men began to feel that maybe the enemy's will had been partially broken. Clear skies allowed the liaison plane to stay up until dark. The artillery worked with such thoroughness that any immediate attack by the enemy was considered very improbable. All during the night Becky, Susie, Mary and Daisy were fired intermittently.

Elements of the 1st and 3d Battalions arrived in the battle positions late in the afternoon and were assigned sectors

within the already dug in positions. A Company, under the leadership of Lt. Scott was placed in the center of G Company's sector to give badly needed strength to that point.

Throughout the night things were rather quiet. Harassing artillery was all that either side could offer.

FOURTH DAY AND NIGHT ON MOUNT BATTAGLIA

At dawn the Germans struck again. This time, with the aid of a flame thrower a few Germans made it to the castle but were unable to hold their advantage. In this attempt both sides took their toll. Colonel Fry, the Regimental Commander was wounded, another key artillery observer was killed and three more company officers were seriously wounded. A flame thrower that greatly aided the German attack was neutralized by Sgt. Lewis Hamm, about forty yards from the castle. He let the operator get close enough to inflict severe facial burns, but he stuck it out long enough to kill the operator and his assistant. After receiving two critical small arms wounds, he somehow managed to kill the three flame thrower protectors. Another legendary hero was Sgt. Manuel Mendoza, in this encounter he ran to the ridge with his old reliable tommy gun and as 200 Krauts came charging up the forward slope he raised up in full view of the attackers and fired point blank into their midst. Ten were killed out right, about fifteen more wounded, but the wave came on. Mendoza grabbed a dead comrades carbine, emptied two clips into their ranks and as a flame thrower licked at him, he killed the operator with a pistol shot. Running slightly to his right

rear, he jumped into a machine gun dugout and pushing aside the dead gunner, sprayed the surviving attackers until the guns jammed. He then threw hand grenades until the enemy withdrew from his position. He was credited with killing at least thirty Germans before he was seriously wounded and evacuated. (25)

By 0945 hours, after fighting at ranges so close that supporting artillery could give little aid, the Germans were again beaten back. For the remainder of the day they proceeded to plaster the regimental position with little fear of artillery retaliation, because of continuous fog and rain. Our FO's could not see 200 yards and sound echos were too unreliable for counterbattery. Our men still held the mountain, but only at great cost of American lives. Enemy high angle fire took its toll one by one. At 1000 hours G Company with only thirty five men left had to be relieved by A Company. Cases of exhaustion were becoming alarmingly numerous. The only gratifying factor was a good supply of ammunition and C rations that were now plentiful thanks to the tireless efforts of those operating the supply lines. The real administrative problem was the evacuation of the wounded. The enemy were still shelling the ridge route to the rear and one litter party of fifteen wounded was caught in a barrage just 100 yards from HILL 664, which was out of enemy range. Ten of the wounded managed to crawl to cover but the other five were killed outright. (26) Litter stations were set up by the night of the 29th and hauls stretched from two to ten miles. (27) Somehow the medics kept going, they were as de-

(25) A-7, p. 7

(26) A-9

(27) A-7, p. 8

terminated as their comrades on the hill and with little help from higher units they delivered their precious burdens to the rear stations, ambulance points and hospitals.

LAST DAY OF FIGHTING ON MOUNT BATTAGLIA

The last major counterattack on 1 October came as all the others had, right on the heels of a heavy preparation, and early in the morning, so the attackers would be protected by the heavy fog and the semidarkness of the early hours. This appeared to be a final effort for in the attack were Grenadiers, Armored Infantry, and newly arrived paratroopers. Their success was premature and of very short duration. Some of the paratroopers managed to get near the castle, but those who did, never lived to tell how, for they were all killed in their last fanatic rush. The intensity of this assault waned rapidly and in less than an hour Jerry realized that his attack had failed. His artillery and mortar fire dropped on the hill to cover the withdrawal of his few remaining survivors. With clear skies in the afternoon our artillery really pounded the German positions and for the first time our threat of counterbattery fire reduced the volume of enemy shelling to nil.

Now that the 1st and 3d Battalions were firmly in position and with the British moving up to protect the right flank, the Germans realized that to recapture this prize terrain feature which they so unwisely failed to defend, would be an impossibility.

A few minor encounters occurred the following day, but

the big news was the fact the Cold Stream Guards of a British Brigade were on their way to relieve the regiment. By afternoon of 3 October, the 2d Battalion was relieved and on its way to the rear for its first hot meal in seven days.

To sum up the results of this battle: The 2d Battalion, 350th Infantry through surprise, speed and determined effort captured a very critical terrain feature without the loss of a single man. It's importance was very significant in that it forced the Germans to reshuffle their entire front and in so doing weakened other strong points along their defensive line. On 2 October, the 350th Infantry was able to positively identify elements of the 334th Grenadier Division brought over from the 34th Division front, the 44th Grenadiers from opposite 10th Corps, elements of the 715th and 305th Grenadier Divisions from the 13th Corps, one large unit of the 98th Grenadier Division from the ADRIATIC coast, plus paratroopers who were brought forward from positions deep in enemy territory.

The Germans fully realized the importance of keeping us off the last heights before BOLOGNA and the PO VALLEY. To lose them might mean a mass break through that could never be stopped. Our own Army and Corps Headquarters watched the 350th spearhead with anxiety, for all felt the fate of the APENNINE drive depended on this success. Everyone realized the importance of holding BATTAGLIA.

Enemy losses were unknown, but it was estimated that at least a thousand were killed and two thousand wounded. Our losses, in the defense, were extremely high. Seven company

7
12
2

grade officers were killed, twelve were wounded seriously and three others were psycho cases. The toll of enlisted men was about three hundred killed and five hundred wounded during the eight day occupation. These losses were nearly as large as the entire II Corps for this period. Ammunition expenditures included 6000 hand grenades, 15,000 rounds of artillery, 3000 rounds of 60mm mortar, use of three flame throwers, and about 1,000,000 rounds of small arms. (30)

It was now the "Battle Mountain" Regiment. (English translation of the Italian "MOUNT BATTAGLIA") This hard-won and well-earned nickname will ever be proudly worn by the outfit that stormed the portals of the PO RIVER VALLEY.

For its gallant and historic stand the 2nd Battalion, 350th Infantry was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation by General Mark W. Clark, Commanding General of the Fifth Army, on 17 January 1945.

ANAYLSIS AND CRITICISM

1. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

The greatest difficulty in holding BATTAGLIA was the poor facilities available for supply and evacuation. Mules were the only means of transport and due to enemy fire on the only trail forward, it was necessary to hand carry all supplies approximately two miles. Advance plans could not be made be-

(30) A-6, G-4 Log

cause enemy and terrain information was practically nonexistent. Had it been known in advance that the enemy did not occupy, CARNEVALE and BATTAGLIA in force, a large supply train could have been sent forward with the leading echelons on the first day. 81 mm mortar fire which would have been very helpful, could never be used because ammunition was never available. The ammunition supply was so critical before K Company's arrival on the night of the 28th, that had the Germans been able to launch one more counterattack the 2d Battalion would probably have been thrown off the mountain. Previously every dead or wounded man was stripped of every available weapon and round of ammunition. Had it been possible, airplane drops would have been the ideal thing for supply; however, fog, rain and cloudy weather would have limited this type of operation. Water and food in sufficient quantities was never adequate, this greatly reduced the fighting efficiency of all the men. Evacuation could not possibly keep pace with casualties. Few of the dead could be removed from the forward area. Many died because there was inadequate personnel and means to properly care for them. The dead had to be piled along the trail for future evacuation, which had a very definite effect on the morale of the troops. Many of the walking wounded were lost trying to reach the rear. Normal collecting points could not be established. The medics available did save many lives, but only through inhuman efforts of all concerned. The Battalion Medical Officer, Captain Stoner worked steadily without sleep for four consecutive days and nights.

2. . FAILURE OF ADJACENT UNITS TO ADVANCE

The failure of the unit on the right, the XIII Corps, to keep abreast of the battalion, caused a long-nosed salient. On this point, all available enemy artillery and mortar fire was placed without fear of counterbattery or observation. The enemy was looking into our position from three sides. Shifting of their fires was hardly necessary because all our troops were concentrated in such a small area. Nothing interfered with their fire, observation, maneuverability or communication. In addition to receiving this deadly fire from the adjacent sectors, the troops that were initially intended for units on our right and left were moved into our area to assault the battalion's position.

Had adjacent units stayed abreast of the 2d Battalion, the enemy never could have concentrated these fires. However, these movements and shifts of enemy personnel and weapons, materially weakened other sectors of the enemy line and caused a noticeable strain on his fighting efficiency.

3. CONDUCT OF THE BATTALION DEFENSE

Factors that are universally accepted as necessary in prepared defensive positions, did not exist. Covering forces, reconnaissance elements, flexibility of fires, deception, mobility and combined secrecy, were an impossibility. This was a fault of higher headquarters. They continually ordered this unit forward, never fully realizing its limitations or capabilities. Only the courageous tenacity of the occupying troops and the flexibility of the supporting artillery, kept the Germans off the MOUNTAIN. Fire support of regimental

weapons was nonexistent. The troops never had adequate tools or engineering equipment to organize their positions for a defense. Foxholes were very difficult to dig due to the rocky ground. Explosives would have been a great aid in this task.

There was no such thing as a Final Protective Line. It was a question of who would survive the high angle fire barrage and then be able to man his weapons and fire it effectively. Reserves were only a term. Every available man filled a front line position.

4. SUPPORTING WEAPONS

Supporting weapons are absolutely necessary in mountain fighting. Mortar, artillery and grenades are needed to keep the enemy out of a battle position. The sharp relief of mountains affords the enemy protection from small arms fire and in most cases allows them to approach in large numbers within very close distances before making an assault. Horse or mule artillery would be a great addition to any mountain fighting unit. The howitzer is the best, for the 75mm and 105mm used by the 337th and 338th Field Artillery Battalions were indispensable. Effectiveness of enemy counterbattery is diminished, due to the difficulty of locating batteries. Lack of 4.2, 81mm and 60mm mortar fire in this operation cost the battalion many lives and much anxiety.

Observation posts must be manned immediately and where practicable concentrations registered in advance.

5. THE BATTALION OBJECTIVE

For unknown reasons the Germans never occupied MOUNT

BATTAGLIA. Had they done so, with a reinforced company, the battalion never could have taken it. Under normal circumstances it was not too large for a battalion to hold. The fact that adjacent units on both flanks and the front were free to fire all their weapons on this point was the main reason for its vulnerability. Its steep slopes and lone ridge line made approach very difficult. If the battalion had been at full strength and had the use of its supporting weapons, the situation would never have been so critical. The regiment was such a protruding salient all elements should have been kept close together. Mutual support is imperative. Therefore assigned objectives should be more limited. Because our units were so scattered, the Germans could have worn down the 2d Battalion by artillery and mortar fire, and then, by means of a coordinated attack plan, cut the ridge trail, which was the only life line to the rear, and eventually annihilate the entire occupying force.

Had the 3d Battalion been able to move to the assistance of the 2d Battalion on the first day all around security could have been built up and forward patrols could have been sent forward to keep in touch with the enemy. This would have been invaluable in knowing when and where he would counterattack.

6. ENEMY ASSAULTS

Enemy positions around BATTAGLIA were constantly changing. Assembly areas were usually made on the bottom of the eastern slope in heavily wooded sectors. Assaults always followed the heavy barrages and most of the attacks were made up the eastern side. This slope was more gradual and seemed

to afford greater ease of movement and control. Coordinated attacks were tried on two occasions but lack of necessary planning or preparation caused them to fail. Their fine observation points all around the battalions position made their high angle fire very accurate. Practically every round fell in the battle position.

Assaults were made in waves of thirty to forty men at a time. This piecemeal method was never changed. It was an asset to our defense because once the enemy gained the rear slope our fields of fire were limited and ejecting is more difficult than stopping.

7. ENEMY INFORMATION

Lack of enemy and terrain information, caused this battalion considerable uneasiness, surprise, and vulnerability to enemy attack. Determined aggressiveness by higher headquarters is understandable, but adequate information should be furnished front line troops, especially that regarding enemy strength and disposition. The 2d Battalion was ordered forward by commanders who were uninformed of the capabilities or limitations of the enemy or their own attacking force. In mountain warfare essential elements of information should be gathered well in advance and given to the attacking troops before any operation.

LESSONS

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

2. Where possible, air support should be given to all attacking units to aid in supply, fire power and observation.

3. Speed and surprise are the most vital and essential elements in an attack.

4. Reverse slope defense is desirable in mountain areas, because it denies the enemy observation; it protects troops from small arms fire; it is easier to control units; and it allows greater freedom of movement.

5. Mutual support should be afforded front line attacking units, especially along the flanks.

6. Pack artillery is needed in mountain warfare.

7. All front line units should be supplied with up-to-date accurate maps.

8. Radio is adequate communication if sufficient sets and batteries are on hand.