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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 168TH
INFANTRY (34TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT HILL
473 (DJEBEL EL HARA), NORTHWEST OF SIDI NSIR,
TUNISIA, 26 APRIL - 28 APRIL 1943
(TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION
IN A NIGHT ATTACK AND SECURING A HILL OBJECTIVE

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph is written to cover the operations of 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, 34th U. S. Division, in the fight to capture an important outlying defense of the key fortress HILL 609, in the vicinity of SIDI NSIR, TUNISIA, 26 - 27 - 28 April 1943, during the first phase of the II Corps drive to MATEUR.

In order to fully orient the reader, it is necessary to discuss the events which led up to this action. For a strategic advantage; (1) the supply route in the MEDITERRANEAN would be cleared (2) the blockade of the AXIS would be virtually complete.

The Allies decided to occupy FRENCH NORTH AFRICA. (1) On 8 November 1942 the Allies (British and Americans) invaded successfully NORTH AFRICA. (See Map A) (2) By the 11th of November nearly all of FRENCH NORTH AFRICA was in Allied hands. (3) The stage was set for the Tunisian Campaign which followed and was to last six months.

On 1 January 1943, the II Corps was detached from Central Task Force and moved to southern TUNISIA. (4) The 34th Division minus the 168th RCT (which was part of the

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- (1) A-2, p. 3
(2) A-2, p. 8
(3) A-2, p. 13
(4) A-2, p. 24

Eastern Task Force) had remained in Scotland and Ireland. Now that FRENCH NORTH AFRICA was in Allied hands they immediately started to assemble in the area of ALGIERS, NORTH AFRICA. The 34th Division completed their move east to the front by the middle of February 1943. Under the command of various corps (British and French) the 34th Division engaged in numerous encounters with the enemy during the next 60 days. (5) With continued Allied pressure against the enemy it became evident with a general withdrawal to the north, that the Axis forces were intending to defend on the line ENFIDAVILLE - BOU ARADA - MEDJEZ EL BAB - SEDJANANE. (See Map B) Consequently a large scale regrouping of Allied Divisions was decided upon, also a plan which provided for a powerful drive in the center of the Axis held line with secondary attack on the enemy flanks to hold him in position and prevent him from concentrating to meet the main attack. (6)

When the British First Army issued their operational order, the II Corps was completing an action on the southern front. In order to be in position for the attack on 23 April, the II Corps moved 100,000 men over an average distance of 150 miles, crossing British First Army Communication Lines. The 34th Division left the British IX Corps and joined the II Corps on 23 April 1943. (7) (See Map C)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The line extending from the MEDITERRANEAN SEA, CAPE SERRAT - SEDJANANE - MEDJEZ EL BAB - BOU ARADA was a highly

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- (5) Personal knowledge
(6) A-2, p. 40-41
(7) A-1, p. 4; A-2, p. 40

organized terrain of hill fortresses 15 to 20 miles in depth which the enemy had had months to prepare. The remaining portion of the line from BOU ARADA to the GULF OF HAMMAMET was a belt of steep heights which had previously been prepared to be defended. The terrain at the center of the 110 mile defensive line between MEDJEZ EL BAB and BOU ARADA was the type which would allow free movement of armor, but even this area was strong-pointed by using isolated hills. In general the Axis line was strong and favored the defense. (8)

The plan for the coming offensive of the 18th Army Group, under General Alexander, Deputy Commander for General Eisenhower, was to strike first with the Eighth Army in the south. If enemy resistance was too strong to make rapid progress the attack would serve the purpose of holding the enemy force in that area. The main effort by the British First Army would be in the center of the line with the objective of penetrating and then exploiting with armor. The secondary efforts by the II Corps on the left flank of the main effort was to hold the enemy in position and endanger his flanks. (9) (See Map C)

In the II Corps boundaries for the secondary effort along the 40 mile front from the MEDITERRANEAN coast to the high ground south of the TINE RIVER was an area of a highly organized enemy position in terrain as difficult as could be found anywhere in the defensive line. A belt of rugged hills that was 15 to 20 miles in depth lay between the II Corps and MATEUR, the enemy's center of communications and

(8) A-4, p. 43; A-1, p. 9

(9) A-2, p. 41

the key to BIZERTE. The hills in this area formed a jumbled maze providing no broad corridors for advance. The TINE RIVER seemed to offer the only likely approach for armor, but before this could be used the high ground on both sides had to be taken. The 1st Division with the 6th Armored Infantry and 1st Armored Division was to attack the enemy in these hills. The flank north and south of the BEJA-MATEUR road was covered by the 168th RCT with the remaining units of 1st Armored and 34th Division in reserve. (10) (See Map D)

The 168th Infantry, 34th Division was in a forward position extending across the 34th Division front. The remaining elements of the Division were partly in the rear assembly areas northeast of BEJA and the rear elements were closing in from the division movement from the vicinity of MAKTAR in the final phase of the 18th Army ^{GROUP} regroupment.

Intelligence reports and information disseminated down to the front line elements indicated that the identified enemy units opposing the 34th Division sector were II Battalion, 755th Grenadiers, the 334th Engineer element of the 334th Infantry Division, the Barenthen Parachute Regiment less 1 Battalion, the Mantnefel Group and in addition two Marsch Battalions both of unknown identity, strength and composition. (11)

For the period of six months, with the exception of 40 days since landing in FRENCH NORTH AFRICA the 168th Infantry, 34th Division had been in offensive or defensive contact with the enemy. Casualty losses were tremendous. Of the 2,850 men lost in the division, the 168th Infantry had suffered

(10) A-2, p. 42

(11) A-4, p. 43; A-6, G-2

the bulk of the casualties, 2,160 men. (12) Many replacements had been received with the majority coming from the 3d Infantry Division. In the group were well trained Lieutenants and NCO's who readily filled the key positions of the smaller units. The general overall feeling of the command was relatively good because they were under an American Corps Commander who was well known for his superior generalship in the field, and also the majority of the command could see the beginning of the end and wanted to end it as soon as possible. Supplies were beginning to arrive more regularly as the supply lines to the south were discontinued and the line to the north shortened. During the period of regroupment the Class I supply was and continued to be until the end of the campaign, C Ration. In view of the all out offensive, ammunition and equipment became the number one priority. (13) The morale of the enemy was lowered considerably, their troops had suffered heavy losses in their recent encounters and received a series of reversals, defeats, and forced withdrawals. Their supply situation was becoming critical due to the loss of their dumps in the south and isolation of the battle field by the Allied Air Force and the Royal Navy. The largest share of their armor and a large portion of their guns were abandoned or destroyed in the withdrawal to the north. (14)

Generally the combat efficiency of the enemy was weakening and was a considerable degree below that of the Allied troops. The advantages that the Axis forces held were, (1) their familiarity of the area which they had held for months,

(12) A-2, p. 42

(13) Personal knowledge

(14) A-4, p. 42

(2) they had again demonstrated superior conduct of defense, automatic weapons positions were selected and dug into sheer rock and hidden, (3) their control of the high ground where trees and brush were scarce and the valleys offered little cover. (15)

THE 34TH DIVISION PLAN

In accordance with the II Corps plan the 34th Infantry Division was given the mission to: (1) protect the left flank of 1st Division by defending positions. (2) Maintain contact with 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions. (3) Prepare to assume offensive in zone of action. Complying with the first part of the mission the 34th Infantry Division ordered the 168th Infantry Regiment to take over the division sector, protect the 1st Division flank and prepare to assume the offensive. (16)

THE 168TH INFANTRY DISPOSITION AND PLANS

At 0925 hours 22 April 1943, the 168th Infantry Regiment, 34th Division closed into the area in the vicinity northeast of BEJA from their regroupment move. The 1st Division and 6th Armored Infantry were to attack as the main effort on 23 April 1943. Thus it was necessary to move the 168th Infantry immediately into position areas in order to accomplish their mission of protecting the left flank of the 1st Division. (17)

With the enemy's right flank anchored on HILLS 407-473-375 the regiment ordered the 1st and 3d Battalions to move

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- (15) Personal knowledge
(16) A-6 (1616 Field Orders)
(17) A-6 (1615, G-3 Journal)

to the vicinity of DJEBEL GREMBIL (HILL 489) and defend the left sector (northwest portion) of the division area and be prepared to assume the offensive. The 2d Battalion was ordered to move into the high ground in the vicinity of HILL 344 and defend the right sector (southeast portion) of the division area, establish contact with the 1st Division and be prepared to assume the offensive. (18) (See Map E) The 1st Division in the next two (2) days moved forward approximately 5 miles leaving a dangerous open flank on their left. The II Corps decided it was time to commit the 34th Division in a coordinated attack with the 1st Division. On 25 April 1943 the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 168th Infantry with the support of a heavy artillery barrage, launched their attack from HILL 489 upon the enemy-held hills. The attack was pinned down and stopped by heavy MG fire and mortars. The 2d Battalion moved approximately one mile east to more effectively protect the 1st Division flank. The following day, 26 April 1943, heavy artillery fire was again placed on 407 and 473 to soften them up. (19) On 26 April 1943 the Regiment decided that a flanking move was necessary to take and to reduce the right flank of the enemy. The 2d Battalion located in the extreme right sector of the Division was in the zone of action that the division decided was to be the area of the 135th Infantry.

The division the same day committed the 135th Infantry into the zone of action that was presently being occupied by the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry. The regiment coordinated with the 135th Infantry on the relief of the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, then ordered the 2d Battalion to

(18) Personal knowledge

(19) A-1, p. 18; A-2, p. 42; A-5

prepare for a night attack on the strongly defended HILL 473 to be launched on the nights of 26-27 April 1943. The 1st and 3d Battalions were to continue the attack on the morning of 27 April 1943. (20)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

The 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, 23 April 1943 had occupied a defensive position along the forward ridge of HILL 344. Coordinating with the movement of 1st Division the 2d Battalion moved two companies (G & F) east to HILL 533, and on the second day, 25 April 1943 moved one company (G) into the 1st Division zone to HILL 575. (21) (See Map E)

Outposts were put forward and small patrols sent out to secure the gap on the left flank of the 16th Infantry, 1st Division. On 26 April 1943 the battalion commander of the 2d Battalion received the regimental order for the offensive to be continued on 27 April 1943 with a flank attack by the battalion to be launched on the night of 26-27 April against HILL 473. The battalion being situated in the extreme right sector of the Division area had little information as to the enemy positions or the objective, and less knowledge of the obstacles or terrain between its position and the general objective. A map reconnaissance was made, an assembly area selected, and a line of departure defined as the BEJA-MATEUR ROAD. A patrol was sent out by the 2d Battalion to make a reconnaissance of the route to the line of departure to facilitate and speed the movement of the battalion to that area. Time was now becoming a factor due to the greatness of the distance the battalion had to move to reach its ob-

(20) A-6 (1620 168th Orders)

(21) Personal knowledge

jective. Since the regimental plan of attack called for the 2d Battalion to attack the night of 26-27 April, the 135th Infantry advanced elements started to close into the 2d Battalion area as quickly as possible to begin the relief of the Battalion. The relief of the designated assault company (G) on the extreme right was to be effected first in order to give them as much time as possible to prepare for the assault. The Battalion Commander and S-3 from positions on HILL 533 made as complete a reconnaissance as possible with maps and field glasses on the objective over three miles away. From these observations and the map reconnaissance it was noted that from the assembly area to the line of departure was approximately 2600 yards and to reach it would necessitate crossing very difficult rocky terrain and descending a very steep slope to the valley 600 feet below. It was also noted that 200 yards short of the line of departure was a railroad track. The distance from the line of departure to the objective was estimated to be approximately 2800 yards. It was determined that 200 yards past the line of departure lay the RIVER DISSA. It could not be determined as to whether it was fordable but due to the lack of rainfall in recent days it was not expected to be very deep. The ground from the line of departure to the base of the objective was rolling and covered with a type of vegetation estimated to be small grain. From the base of the objective to the summit appeared to be a steep slope approximately 300 feet high. From previous experiences against enemy defenses and his methods it was possible to determine his general location of weapons, and strength. The probable location was determined to be the forward slope of the ob-

jective with the base of the objective heavily reinforced with light machine guns well dug in and numerous mortar barrages registered on approaches. The position of the three HILLS 307 - 473 - 375 in line and their relative size indicated they would accommodate a battalion of infantry with heavy reinforcement of weapons. From the heavy concentration of artillery fired on the two preceding days it was reasonable to assume that the enemy had softened up a bit and had prepared supplemental positions. (23)

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

Upon receiving the regimental order on 26 April 1943 the Battalion Commander returned to the Battalion Area and issued to his companies preparatory orders for their relief by the 135th Infantry which would be started as soon as possible. The Battalion Commander made his map reconnaissance and directed his company commanders to report to the rear of HILL 533. The line of departure would be the BEJA-MATEUR ROAD, H hour 0200, 27 April 1943. (24) The 2d Battalion would move from the area to cross the line of departure at 0200 hours 27 April 1943. The battalion would furnish guides to the line of departure. Formation was to be in close column of two's, order of march G-F-H-Hq-E. When the 2d Battalion reached the line of departure the leading assault company (G) would guide the Battalion on to the objective by compass. G Company leading was to seize the center of the objective and immediately organize it to be held against counterattack. F Company was to secure the ground to the right base of the objective and

(23) Personal knowledge

(24) A-6 (1620 168th Orders)

E Company was to be prepared to assist G Company on the objective and protect the left flank of the objective from the enemy on HILL 407. H Company was to be prepared to move the machine guns onto the objective as soon as it was taken and to assist in holding the Hill against enemy counterattack. (25) Concentrations of artillery fire would be placed on HILLS 407 and 473 by the Corps and Division artillery from 1610 to 2330 hours, from 2330 it would start tapering off until 0130 at which time it would cease. (26) Communication would be by wire laid from battalion on its movement forward. Company communication to battalion would be by 536 radios. Silence would be maintained prior to contact with enemy. Identification would be a white rag tied on back of helmet. The battalion command post would be located at the base of the objective. Battalion commander would be with assault unit. Extra ammunition and 2/3ds of a "C" ration would be carried. Pack rolls would be dropped in the rear assembly area and moved forward when the objective was secured. Battalion aid station would be established along the river line 200 yards beyond the line of departure. Arrangements would be made to feed a hot meal in the rear assembly areas.

FINAL PREPARATION FOR ATTACK

(See Map F)

Reconnaissance was made by the company commanders from the vicinity of HILL 533 and they returned to their company areas to complete the relief of their units by the 135th Infantry. The relief was completed by 2200 hours and the Battalion was assembled in the area in the rear of HILL 533.

(25) Personal knowledge

(26) A-6 (1617 Artillery Diary)

General instructions were issued to all personnel, detailed instructions to key officers and NCO's. Packs were dropped and stacked by units; a hot meal was served to the troops. Guides from the reconnaissance group that the battalion had sent out previously returned to the assembly area and prepared to lead the battalion forward to the line of departure. After last minute checks the battalion moved out at approximately 2300 hours over the previously determined route to the attack position and they arrived on the line of departure at 0130 hours. (27)

NARRATION

MOVEMENT TO ENGAGE

(See Map "F")

The artillery for the past two hours had been steadily tapering off and as the last rounds were rolling their thunderous sounds down into the valley below, the leading elements of the assault unit arrived on the line of departure. At 0140 hours on 27 April the Battalion Commander reported to the Regimental Commander. The march from the rear assembly area to the battle positions had been extremely hazardous. It was a black night during the dark of the moon and the stars did little to lend their light. The men were constantly slipping and falling on the loose rocks that covered the steep slope they were descending. The heavy weapons company men were hand carrying all of their weapons and ammunition. As a result of all this the column became quite extended, trailing out far to the rear. The battalion commander held the head of the column at the line of departure until such

(27) Personal knowledge

time as the rear of the column could close in. It was far better to cross the line of departure late than to move on to the attack without supporting weapons of H Company. During this period the Regimental Commander and Battalion Commander made a last minute check of the assault unit, and gave a repeated briefing to key personnel. By 0230 hours the column had closed up and the battalion crossed the line of departure. The assault company's (G) formation from the line of departure was in a line of columns. The right column contained two platoons and a machine gun squad; the left column contained one platoon, a machine gun squad, the 60 mm mortar squads and Co. Hqs. The company commander led and controlled the base column while the platoon leader led the left column guiding on the right column for direction and maintaining the interval by connecting files. For approximately the first 300 yards up to the edge of the QUED BOU DISSA (RIVER DISSA) the route of advance crossed over a cultivated flat field of kneehigh wheat and the two columns advanced with very little difficulty. The two columns upon reaching the river which proved to be shallow proceeded to cross over. The ground on the far side of the river became very rolling with numerous ditches running approximately parallel with the line of advance. Control of the two columns almost immediately became a critical issue. Direction of attack was being lost by the inability of the left column to maintain their direction on the base column. The company commander stopped the base column and directed the left column to move to the right and rejoin his column in rear of the last platoon. The march was again begun and the formation consisted of a company column. During the halt for reforming the company the Battalion Com-

mander who was following in rear of the assault company came forward to investigate the delay. Upon learning the reason he directed the following companies to assume the same formation in order to keep the advance regulated.

Guided only by a compass the leading company commander continued to choose the route of advance. A constant check was made to insure the proper direction was being maintained. Numerous small detours were made to avoid obstacles and skylines. At approximately 0330 hours the column was halted for a brief interval to insure that the rear elements would have a chance to catch up. The climb was now becoming steeper and the vegetation had changed from the cultivated wheat fields to a type of undergrowth that tangled with the feet at every step. Progress became slower as the march continued. The physical stamina of the men began to decrease through lack of rest from the commitments of the previous three days. The Battalion Commander again returned to the head of the column and rechecked the direction of attack and expressed the opinion that the column was favoring a swing to the right. Direction was checked again and a correction to the left was made to once again put the column back on the objective. The Battalion Commander and leading unit commander at this time estimated that the battalion had moved approximately 1500 yards from the point of departure, the BEJAMATEUR ROAD.

ASSAULT

(See Map "F")

Movement of the battalion became more determined as contact with the enemy was anticipated. At approximately 0400

hours the first indication of the enemy's presence was heard. The banging of metal and the distinctive sound of voices was coming from both left rear and right front of the head of the column. The gray traces of dawn were beginning to show in the northeast and it was possible to distinguish the outlines of enemy personnel approximately 100 yards to the right front. To the left front and left rear it was impossible to distinguish any physical objects although from those directions were coming the distinct sound of voices.

The company commander of the leading company decided the time had arrived to release his platoons, for the assaulting action. The Lieutenant of the 1st Platoon who was leading, was directed by the company commander to deploy his men along the draw that extended right along a line running at an angle to the direction of attack. As soon as the platoon's deployment was complete he was to move in on the previously located enemy position. The machine gun squad remained with the platoon and followed directly in rear. The 1st Platoon passed by the company commander and the Platoon Sergeant of the 2d Platoon came up to the release point and was directed to deploy his platoon to the left along the draw and move in the direction of the objective which by now could be seen as it was outlined by the gray sky to its rear. The 2d Platoon passed the release point and moved into their deployment. It became apparent after a brief lapse of time that the Lieutenant of the 3d Platoon had not maintained contact with the platoon ahead and was someplace in rear on the line of march.

The Battalion Commander appeared on the release point and was acquainted with the immediate situation by the Company Commander. The Battalion Commander directed the Company Commander to go on with the two assault platoons and to keep battalion informed of the situation. The Battalion Commander turned about to rejoin the remaining elements of the march group and, as if it were a signal, the enemy machine guns to the right front and left rear positions opened up. The located gun position on the right that was the objective of the 1st Platoon was firing down into the valley along a final protective line that was running parallel to the battalion march column. The 1st Platoon had moved out from their deployed position and were approximately 25 yards short of the dug in enemy position. The platoon was still maintaining silence and were now moving very rapidly. There was a great deal of shouting from the machine gun position and almost immediately the crack and thump of the weapon could be heard which indicated the direction of fire had been changed. This indicated that the assault had been discovered. The men had been issued hand grenades to be used for just such an occasion as this, and they were well used. The enemy emplacement rocked from the explosion reports of the many grenades that found their mark. The machine gun was very effectively silenced.

The 2d Platoon had deployed and were moving in the direction from which voices had been heard. When the discovery of the 1st Platoon was made by the enemy and the loud shouting from the first gun position was heard, the enemy in front of the 2d Platoon opened up, firing directly down the small draw and parallel with the remaining battalion column.

The 2d Platoon had moved forward from their deployment line far enough so that two squads and part of the third squad were inside of the final protective line laid down by the enemy. The remaining part of the third squad that was on the extreme left was caught in the final protective fires and suffered heavy casualties. The 2d Platoon was approximately 50 yards from the gun that was firing when the reports of the grenades on the right were heard. Many of the men believing them to be mortars hit the ground and the attack started to bog down. Two or three grenade explosion reports were heard in the near vicinity of the firing gun. Another single report and the gun was silent. The guns to the left rear could be heard still firing but their firing now was only in occasional bursts. In a short period of time they ceased firing altogether. By this time mortar barrages began to fall in the area. The entire draw appeared to be on fire. The company commander moved to the area of the 2d Platoon in order to assist them to organize and continue on in the attack. As stated before, the attack had started to bog down and with the mortar barrages falling in the draw the entire platoon went to the ground. An attempt was made to reorganize the platoon, a few of the key men were found and ordered to assemble as many men as possible and hold the ridge they were on from attack from the left or front.

The company commander then went to the area of the 1st Platoon and discovered the platoon preparing to defend the area they had just taken. The machine gun squad with the 1st Platoon had taken over the enemy emplacement. The company commander was informed by a squad leader that the platoon

leader and platoon sergeant were killed and that several men were missing. The company commander directed the squad leader to take over and put the majority of his men on the left front of his area, the most likely point for a counterattack to be launched. He then returned to the 2d Platoon.

The 2d Platoon had assembled a few men and the platoon sergeant was having them dig in. The company commander attempted to communicate with battalion but the radio was dead, every effort was made to restore it but apparently it had been damaged beyond repair.

It was now becoming light enough for the company commander to see and locate his position. It was determined that his company was approximately 400 yards from the objective, and inside the enemy line. Rifle fire and machine gun fire were starting to come from the high ground 300 yards to the left front. (28) The company commander sent a messenger back to battalion stating, "Held up. Machine gun fire 400 yards from objective." (29)

THE MANEUVER TO THE FLANK

When the assault company went into contact with the enemy the remaining companies in the column had halted. The battalion commander had been with the assault company when this contact was made. By the direction from which the enemy fire was originating and the approximate location of his column the battalion commander directed F Company to prepare to move to the right of G Company. Having received no in-

(28) Personal knowledge

(29) A-6, (1615 G-3 Journal)

formation from G Company, the battalion commander determined from the amount of rifle and mortar fire at the head of the column they were in difficulty. He ordered F Company to move. F Company Commander led his company from the battalion column to the right flank of G Company. A short distance from the column the leading men struck a trip wire which set off an illumination flare. His column was at this time discovered so he directed his platoons to deploy and move toward the direction of the enemy. Heavy rifle fire was encountered which the company commander ordered his platoons to return. (30) Company F Commander made contact with battalion and sent word back they were "advancing by fire." (31) F Company continued their forward move and by 0845 hours had units in SIDI NSIR. Progress became very slow as an increasing volume of fire was coming from the vicinity of the railroad station.

At day break, H Company which was now located in rear of the ridge line near the Battalion CP went into action to support the two front line companies. The heavy machine guns were located on the ridges directly in rear of the left company. The majority of their fire was directed on the heights to the left and above G Company. The mortars went into position near the RIVER DISSA directly in rear of the right company. Throughout the day they directed their fire on the HILLS, 473 and 375, and in the vicinity of SIDI NSIR railroad station. (32)

By 0930 hours the battalion commander seeing that his forward company was making very slow progress and that his left company was pinned down decided to maneuver E Company

(30) Personal knowledge, related by Lt Good, 1944

(31) A-6 (1615 G-3 Journal)

(32) Personal knowledge, related by Lt Sutton

to the left onto the objective. Regiment previously had ordered the 1st Battalion to attack HILL 407 and continue the attack to occupy HILL 473 with the regimental objective HILL 375. The battalion commander coordinated with regiment and 1st Battalion then directed E Company Commander to take his company up the draw to the rear of the line now held and occupy HILL 473. E Company Commander moved his company to the rear and up the draw toward HILL 473. This section of the hill was extremely steep and progress was slow. Occasional rifle fire and machine gun fire was directed on E Company to retard their progress. By 1445 hours the leading platoon had gained the heights and were progressing toward the enemy on the regimental objective. Advancing approximately 300 yards E Company came under heavy machine gun fire from HILL 375 and artillery fire from beyond HILL 342 their progress was halted. They had by this time relieved most of the pressure from G Company, who was at the base of the objective. The fire coming from HILL 473 had ceased but G Company was still partly pinned down from enemy positions located on the slopes of HILL 375. (33)

SECURING THE OBJECTIVE

The situation remained essentially the same until dusk at which time the Battalion Commander directed the two front line companies, F and G, to reorganize their units and hold their present position until further instructions at which time they would be guided up the draw in rear on to HILL 473. At dark Company G reformed and consolidated the positions in

(33) Personal knowledge, related by Lt Trussler

the area, evacuated casualties, collected those killed in action, and prepared to move to the Battalion Command Post area upon further orders. Company F completed likewise their reorganization and prepared to move to the rear area.

The 1st Battalion had moved across the objective late in the afternoon and had moved into position to attack the Regimental objective. The 3d Battalion had moved forward along the far side of HILL 473 and were preparing to attack HILL 375. After the two battalions were in position to attack the 2d Battalion Commander sent orders for the two companies to rejoin E Company on the objective. During the night F and G Company Commanders were guided to the battalion's forward command post and arrived there at day break. The 2d Battalion went into regimental reserve and was assigned the mission of protecting HILL 473 and the approach to the hill from the north which was the open flank of the regiment.

E Company moved forward onto the nose of the Hill where it could if necessary place fire on HILL 375. G Company moved to the left of the hill and protected the open flank. F Company moved down into the draw to take up patrol activities in the vicinity of HILL 369. At 0600 hours 28 April, the 1st and 3d Battalions had occupied and secured the regimental objective, HILL 375.

On the afternoon of 28 April, just as the situation looked as if the 2d Battalion would have a long needed rest after its continuous five days of operation, orders were received for the 2d Battalion to be attached to the 133d Infantry Regiment of the 34th Division for an assault on the heavily defended key terrain feature HILL 609. (34)

(34) Personal knowledge

In summarizing this engagement: The 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry while it failed to capture its objective in the night attack, did successfully exploit it, penetrating into the enemy's main line of resistance and force the enemy to draw in the anchor it had established for its right flank.

Viewed from the regimental level it was a successful operation. An objective which for two days, two battalions attacking with major artillery support had unsuccessfully tried to accomplish. The forcing of the enemy to withdraw his anchored flank was essential to the division object, HILL 609, which was the key terrain feature in the area. It offered the division an opportunity for freedom of maneuver.

The casualties of the assault company in the assault amounted to two officers and twenty one enlisted men. The casualties of other units in the battalion were few. (35)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. OBJECTIVE:

In studying this operation, it is the opinion of the writer that the objective assigned the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry was too extensive in lateral distance for one battalion to attack. From map reconnaissance and viewing the objective on the ground from a distance of three miles the chances of not definitely defining the objective was increased. From the map study it was determined the objective covered a lateral distance of approximately 1500 yards. Operations on an extensive lateral objective at night by compass can very easily give rise to error. The directional
(35) A-6 (1620 168th S-1 Report)

reading of the compass may vary any number of degrees each way depending upon the point on the lateral objective chosen during visual reconnaissance. As in this operation, by the direction of the attack it can be assumed that the wrong directional reading was taken when the initial reconnaissance was made on the evening prior to the attack. The objective should be easy to locate, a prominent object lends itself best to this principle. From the line of departure the objective was silhouetted against the sky line and appeared as one continuous mass of mountain. The HILLS 489-407-473 and 375 appeared as one. To locate the objective the column depended entirely on a compass reading taken by the leader of the first echelon. Had the objective been marked during the prior artillery preparations and had the marking continued through out the entire night, the time and distance lost by the Battalion could have well been added to the direct line from the line of departure to the objective, and the Battalion would have reached its goal in sufficient time to secure it prior to daylight.

2. LINE OF DEPARTURE

To properly consider the line of departure first the advantages of the one designated must be pointed out. It was a hard surface road which was easy to distinguish at night. It ran approximately perpendicular to the direction of attack, it was under the control of friendly forces, and was directly forward of the battle position. The only disadvantage was the excessive distance of the line of departure to objective. It is the opinion of the writer that the ad-

vantages far outweigh the one disadvantage. Study of the terrain indicates that no other line of departure could be chosen that would satisfy the prime requirements of a good line of departure. It is the opinion of the writer that battalion in picking a route to the line of departure could have extended its control to choose a route and furnish guides to a company release point. This would have facilitated travel, direction, and time enroute. This had a main disadvantage of lending itself to possible detection and causing the loss of the element of surprise.

3. ORIENTATION

A night attack's success depends on every individual, from the leader to the lowest ranking man in the unit, to know exactly the how, what, where, when, and why of the attack. The how will indicate the method to be used going into the attack, and the actual assault in the attack, and immediately after the attack. The what gives the individual confidence when he knows what he is up against. The where locates the objective and route to objective in his mind. The when relieves his anxiety. The why is always the same - "success in combat." It is the opinion of the writer that insufficient time was available to properly orient the entire Battalion. In the case of the 2d Platoon when the attack bogged down the what and why of the orientation was missing.

4. CONSTANT CHECK BY LEADERS

To analyze rate and direction of advance it is necessary to state "a column is only as fast as its slowest man" and

that includes the mortar man carrying a tube, and that direction is maintained only in respect to the ability of the leaders. The column's rate of advance from the assembly area best indicates this lack of control in maintaining a speed that would assure the column's keeping closed. The wait of 60 minutes on the line of departure was the price paid for this. The ability of the leaders for direction is indicated when the battalion checked but once on its direction of march. The most efficient individual can be leading a column by compass but the necessity of constant check by the leaders is essential.

5. RECONNAISSANCE

Reconnaissance by leaders during daylight hours. In reference to leaders, it must be considered that the squad leader be included. It is insufficient to have only the company commanders make this reconnaissance. In the event that the key leader is lost the unit has lost its eyes. In the case of the 1st Platoon losing its Lieutenant and Platoon Sergeant, the Squad Leader took over and was doing the only thing he could without a mental picture of the area. Defending when the situation indicated attack. Night patrols should be used to gain information of the terrain although they can if detected, decrease the chances for surprise. In this operation time did not permit their use and the general knowledge of the ground satisfied the needs for the operation.

6. SECRECY

Secrecy is the measuring rod to surprise and surprise

increases the odds of success. In analyzing the secrecy employed, it is worthwhile to note several facts. Reconnaissance was made from a distance of three miles and not likely to have been detected. Artillery ceased at 0130 hours as it was in the habit of doing. Silence on the march was superior. Radio silence was ordered by Battalion. In general all prime measures of secrecy were completed with. Then why did S-2, regiment, intercept a message, "Fritz to Fritz, vacate 407 to 473, one company." Where did the security of the attack break down? In the enemy listening posts. It is the opinion of the writer that the secrecy could have been maintained if patrols had been used to eliminate any listening posts.

7. CONTINUITY OF PLAN

The plan of attack was ordered for one assault company to take the objective; one company to go to the right and base of the objective to protect flank; one company to go to the left on objective prepared to assist the assault company and protect flank. The situation changed but the plan retained its continuity. It had only to be adapted to the new situation. The one company went in on the right and protected flank. The other company maneuvered to the left onto objective thus assisting the assault company and protected its flank. When orders are issued and understood even though the situation changes men expect to find assistance in the general position originally planned.

8. TACTICS

Quoted from Operation Memo #12, 2 May 1943, by Major General Ryder. Tactics -- "Some CO's apparently haven't learned that basic tactical methods in the attack is the establishment of a base of fire with part of the unit and maneuver to the flank or flanks with the rest. Straight frontal attacks invariably fail." Whenever maneuver was employed it was successful. As an example HILL 473 stoutly resisted until a Battalion Commander worked a platoon around the enemy flank. This action resulted in the complete collapse of the enemy position and the capture of the Hill with the minimum losses. Always attack from the flank or rear when possible.

LESSONS

1. In night attacks the objective should be definitely defined, not too extensive an area, and above all easy to locate.
 2. Lines of departure for night attacks should not be too far from the objective.
 3. A complete orientation of every individual in the attacking unit is essential, as to plan of attack, method to be used, and the objective.
 4. Rate of advance, and direction of advance must be constantly checked by the leaders of the leading element to insure the column does not become extended and that proper direction on the objective is maintained.
 5. Reconnaissance by all leaders is necessary, daylight
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reconnaissance should be augmented by night patrols in the area to gain information of the ground to be covered, nature of obstacles, and routes to the objective.

6. Secrecy of a night attack is rewarded with the element of surprise. Surprise when exploited measures the success of mission.

7. Once the attack has started and situation changes, the plan can be changed to fit the new situation but the continuity of the plan should remain basically the same.

8. Basic tactical methods should be used in the attack, base of fire and maneuver to the flank or flanks.