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TITLE

RECONNAISSANCE MUST BE AGGRESSIVE AND CONTINUOUS IN ORDER TO
PROVIDE UP-TO-DATE BATTLEFIELD INFORMATION

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

- (1) 1st Battalion, 328th Infantry (26th Infantry Division)
at Bezange La Petite, France, 8 November 1944.
- (2) Company G, 378th Infantry (95th Infantry Division) at
Merten, Germany, 28 November 1944.
- (3) 3rd Platoon, Company G, 48th Armored Infantry Battalion
(7th Armored Division) at Overloon, Holland, 2 - 4 October
1944.
- (4) 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry (34th Infantry Division)
crossing the Volturno River, Italy, 13 October 1943.

Captain Carl H. Bell, Jr., Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. 1

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EXAMPLE I

1. History of the 328th Infantry (Major C. L. Hilton, Jr.)
2. History of the 26th Infantry Division (TIS Library)
3. Patton and His Third Army (TIS Library)
4. Personal Experience of Major C. L. Hilton, Jr., Infantry

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5. The Official Report of Operations Conducted by 1st Battalion, 378th Infantry, Between Pierreullers, France, and Ensdorf, Germany from 14 November to 20 December 1944 (Captain George Lundberg)
6. Personal Experience of Captain George Lundberg, Infantry
7. The 95th Infantry Division History (TIS Library)

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10. Lessons Learned in Combat (O808.3 - .34th - .A2 - TIS Library)

RECONNAISSANCE MUST BE AGGRESSIVE AND CONTINUOUS IN
ORDER TO PROVIDE UP-TO-DATE BATTLEFIELD INFORMATION

Reconnaissance is a systematic process of physically searching for information of the enemy, the terrain, and how best to use the area over which an operation will or may take place. There is a great deal of difference between passive observation and aggressive searching for information. Proper reconnaissance is a never-ending search for information and must be continuous to insure that valid facts are constantly being made available upon which a logical decision may be based.

The commander who makes a decision based on faulty or inadequate reconnaissance is like a blind man in a strange place; a sightless man may make his way along smoothly for a time but sooner or later he will, in his helpless condition, encounter an undetected object and be thrown helplessly to the ground. Thus the commander who fails to use all of his available agencies to the utmost is sooner or later doomed to defeat.

One of the nine principles of war is security. In turn, the primary element of security is reconnaissance. A detailed study of these principles will reveal that through the achievement of surprise one force often has an excellent chance of success over another equal force. Conversely, efficient reconnaissance, pursued with vigor, can eliminate the opportunity for surprise and eventual possible defeat by an enemy.

There are many different ways to secure the information desired but in the final analysis all hinge on the soldier as an individual or as a member of a group obtaining the needed information. The commander may himself be able to gather all the information that he needs; a small patrol may accomplish the desired result; or it may take many patrols and much patrol combat action to obtain the intelligence needed.

The following selected operations from World War II depict examples of excellent and poor reconnaissance. Object lessons are presented indicating the price that was paid when reconnaissance was not as aggressive and continuous as it should have been.

Example I (Operations of the 1st Battalion, 328th Infantry, 26th Infantry Division, at BEZANGE LA PETITE, France on the 8th of November 1944) is an example of what can be accomplished when sufficient time is available and adequate use is made of all reconnaissance facilities.

Example II (Operations of Company C, 378th Infantry, 95th Infantry Division, at MERTENS, Germany, on the 28th of November 1944) depicts the result suffered by a unit which did not use aggressive and continuous reconnaissance.

Example III (Operations of the 3d Platoon, Company C, 48th Armored Infantry Battalion, 7th Armored Division, at OVERLOON, Holland, on 2nd-4th October 1944) shows the disaster which can follow when a unit is committed without prior reconnaissance.

Example IV (Operations of the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, 34th Infantry Division, crossing the VOLTURNO RIVER, Italy, on the 13th October 1943) reveals the success that accompanies an operation where all reconnaissance facilities are used to the utmost in the preparation for an attack.

It is hoped that the historical examples shown will in some way help others to profit by the mistakes of the past so that these same errors will not be repeated in the future.

EXAMPLE I

During the night of 26-27 October 1944, the 1st Battalion, 328th Infantry, 26th Infantry Division, relieved the 1st Battalion, 104th Infantry and assumed a defensive role. The position in which the Battalion now found itself was alien to its members. Their positions were on the reverse slopes of HILL 253 and RIDGE Y.

The weather at the time was extremely wet and cold. Snow had transformed the area into a huge bog which made vehicular travel off the roads almost an impossibility. The condition of the countryside and the constant rain and snow made reconnaissance hazardous and considerably limited observation. Patrols, however, were sent out every night and secured much valuable information. The Battalion commander also took numerous visual reconnaissance parties forward to a vantage point on RIDGE Y to determine the best routes for the impending attack.

On the 4th of November, the Battalion commander discussed his tentative plan for the attack with his company commanders and then took them on an aerial reconnaissance of the area in L4 planes of the Division artillery. Following this aerial reconnaissance the Battalion commander issued his attack order.

The next three days were spent in further reconnaissance, orientation, and coordination with adjacent and supporting units.

The enemy's main defense consisted of mutually supporting strong points on HILL 265, HILL 253, and the woods around the village of BEZANGE LA PETITE.

The approaches to HILL 265, HILL 253, and roads leading into the village of BEZANGE LA PETITE were mined. The woods and vineyards around the village were thoroughly booby-trapped. The position, which was occupied by a reinforced Battalion of the 11th German Panzer Division, was well set up and camouflaged and had withstood attacks by the 10th Armored Battalion, the 2nd Cavalry Group, and the 104th Infantry Regiment.

At 0500 hours, 8 November 1944, Division, Corps, and Army artillery began firing the one-hour preparation which preceded the attack. Thirty thousand rounds of artillery were fired during the first forty-five minutes, at which time Companies A and B moved up and replaced C Company on the line of departure.

As everything was being firmed up on the front lines, things began to happen in the Battalion rear. The 791st Tank Battalion, in its attempt to move from its assembly area, became confused and disorganized. Firing took place and there was much confusion and milling around in the darkness. The Battalion was finally reorganized and its B Company brought forward to the village of RECHICOURT. It encountered mud and mines in this attempt to join A and B Companies of the 328th Infantry. This resulted in the tanks not arriving in time to participate in the attack.

The attack jumped off at 0600, 8th of November, and by 0730 Company A had advanced through heavy artillery and mortar fire and had cleared HILL 265 and HILL X. The attack was a complete tactical surprise to the Germans. They had believed that it was impossible for an attack of any magnitude to be launched at this time due to the weather.

A Company then began a reorganization which was hampered by enemy artillery and later by an enemy counterattack. The counterattack, which consisted of approximately seventy-five Germans, was stopped by heavy rifle fire from A Company and the enemy withdrew into the village of BEZANGE LA PETITE.

A Company resumed the attack on the village of BEZANGE LA PETITE at 0800 hours. The advance was slow. It developed into an infantry rifleman fire fight through woods until a German fortified position based on the brick wall of a cemetery was encountered. Company A had a great deal of trouble cracking this position but finally cleared it by tossing numerous grenades over the cemetery wall. The attack was then quickly reorganized with the 1st platoon attacking the left half of the town, the 2nd platoon

taking the right half, and the 3rd platoon mopping up after the two lead platoons. With the aid of supporting fires the remainder of the village was quickly taken. The 1st and 2nd platoons then moved up on the higher ground and occupied it at 1000 hours.

Company B moved off from the line of departure at the same time as A Company. With the help of artillery supporting fires of the regiment and much hard fighting, the company captured HILL 253 at 0800 and was ordered to await further orders. B Company remained on the hill, despite enemy artillery fire, ready in event of counterattack.

At 1100 hours the objectives assigned the 1st Battalion, 328th Infantry, had been taken. It was now time, in accordance with the original plan, for the 2nd Cavalry Group to come into the picture for the exploitation phase of the operation.

- FROM: (1) History of the 328th Infantry (Major Hilton)
(2) History of 26th Infantry Division (TIS Library)
(3) Patton and His Third Army (TIS Library)
(4) Personal Experience of Major C. L. Hilton, Jr., Infantry

DISCUSSION

The actions of the 1st Battalion, 328th Infantry, in this attack portray an excellent example of aggressive and continuous reconnaissance to provide up-to-date battlefield information. They had the necessary time available and they used it to advantage. Patrols were active in finding the information needed. The use of visual reconnaissance helped familiarize unit leaders with the ground over which they would operate. The issuance of a tentative attack order by the Battalion commander and the taking of company commanders on an aerial reconnaissance was unique. This method was excellent as it enabled them to make their plans fit the terrain with much less chance of error.

This maximum use of all reconnaissance methods available gave this unit that extra factor that the unsuccessful units just didn't possess. It gave them the confidence that accompanies an encounter with the known as compared with the fear and lack of assurance when confronted with the unknown. A confident, aggressive attitude is definitely a great advantage to all concerned in any endeavor and particularly in battle.

The omission of prior reconnaissance by the tank company, their lack of knowledge of the terrain and trafficability of the soil of the area over which they were to operate, rendered them useless in their mission of supporting the attack. The attack, although very successful without tank support, could have been greatly aided by their employment.

EXAMPLE II

On the morning of the 28th of November 1944, Company C, 1st Battalion, 378th Infantry, 95th Infantry Division, was continuing on its long hard drive from the city of Metz, France, to the Saar River. Enemy resistance seemed to be stiffening more and more as each action brought the Allied front line closer to the German border.

On the night of 27-28 November, friendly patrols in the towns of MERTEN and BIBLING had reported no detectable enemy resistance. At 0800, 28th of November, C Company jumped off as the right flank company in the action against the town of MERTEN-BIBLING.

The company commander of C Company decided to use two platoons in the assault and one platoon in support for this operation. As C Company emerged from the woods to the southwest of the town, the company commander ordered the left platoon into MERTEN as a security and reconnaissance patrol to search out the town and make sure that it was clear of enemy. The platoon entered only the edge of town and after a short stay and a more or less dutiful check left the town and proceeded the short distance across the field to its normal position in the Company formation just as the Company was passing the northeast edge of the town.

The first platoon took its position in the column and the Company had started on toward the higher ground northeast of MERTEN. Suddenly enemy machine gun and automatic rifle fire opened up on the column with withering bands of fire. The enemy also fired 76mm and 88mm guns from positions in the town. When the shock of this surprise fire had subsided, the troops that were able took cover to the north of the town and effected a reorganization. C Company launched an attack from the north and after much bitter and bloody fighting was able to gain a foothold by taking several of the buildings on the edge of town.

During the night there were many violent patrol clashes with the enemy in the town. Orders were then received that A and C Companies would attack next day while Company B executed a holding attack. The attack was carried out next morning as planned and MERTEN fell in a short time. Thirty-five enemy were killed or wounded and twenty-nine taken prisoner.

American losses were listed as forty-seven killed, seventy-seven wounded, and two missing. There was also a very heavy loss in crew-served weapons which proved to be very costly as their fire power was not available to support the attack.

- FROM: (1) The Official Report of Operations Conducted By 1st Battalion, 378th Infantry, Between Pierreullers, France, and Ens Dorf, Germany From 14 November to 20 December 1944 (Captain Lundberg)
- (2) Personal Experience of Captain George B. Lundberg, Infantry
- (3) The Ninety-fifth Infantry Division History (TIS Library)

DISCUSSION

In the action of C Company we find that reconnaissance was twice effected. From the information available we are not able to evaluate how effective it was on the first occasion, but when the platoon entered MERTEN the events

listed above indicate that reconnaissance certainly had not been aggressive or thorough. If the unit had used continuous reconnaissance instead of being lulled into a false sense of security by negative patrol reports of the night before, the search of the town would certainly have been more thorough and the chances of finding enemy in the town would have greatly increased. Also, an aggressive search of MERTEN would have revealed the enemy. It is certainly obvious that he was present in the town at the time the platoon was there, for in a matter of minutes he was in position and delivering extremely effective fire upon Company C.

In its failure to do a thorough job the platoon failed in its mission of making up-to-date battlefield information available to its unit. Had it, however, through aggressive and continuous reconnaissance made a more complete search of the town, the loss of many men, much equipment, and much time could have been averted.

EXAMPLE III

The third Platoon, Company C, 48th Armored Infantry Battalion, 7th Armored Division, had just completed a six day motor march as a member of Combat Command A. The move, which was almost continuous, greatly fatigued the men, but despite this fact morale was exceptionally good. Partial reasons for this high state of morale probably could be traced to rumors that the division was going to be given a quiet sector in Holland in view of the many days of tough fighting which it had endured south of Metz, France.

After traveling two hundred and sixty miles the motor march terminated in an assembly area at OPL00, Holland, on 30 September 1944. On the 1st of October 1944 the units of the command, which had now been sub-divided into Task Force Brown and Task Force Chappuis, were ready to jump off in the attack on OVERLOON the next morning.

Combat Command A was to attack OVERLOON from the southwest. This side of the town contained the most wooded area and therefore was decided upon as the best infantry country. The area was also very flat, enabling the enemy to detect vehicular movement from several miles distance.

On 1 October, late in the evening, the company commander of C Company, 48th Armored Infantry Battalion, summoned his platoon leaders. He pointed to the city of OVERLOON on the map and remarked, "Here it is, fellows". He then issued each platoon leader a roughly drawn copy of his map, an inadequate one itself.

OVERLOON was estimated to be garrisoned by a company of German paratroopers with some artillery support. C Company was to attack through the woods with the 3rd platoon on the right and the 1st platoon on the left. The 2nd platoon was to be in support. The 3rd platoon leader picked up the machine gun and mortar squad leaders who were attached to him for the operation and, in the darkness under a half-track tarpaulin, he oriented his squad leaders on the situation.

The 3rd platoon was to attack with three squads in line and with the supporting squads located to the flank and rear. The squad leaders were ordered to have their squads ready to move out at 0500, which was approximately thirty minutes prior to daybreak. The unit was located about three and one half miles from OVERLOON.

The next morning, 2 October 1944, the 3rd platoon left its half-tracks in the assembly area and in about fifteen to twenty minutes was in the attack position, which was about 150 yards in rear of the line of departure. Dawn was just beginning to break when the platoon leader signaled the squad leaders to form a skirmish line. The platoon moved forward toward the woods until the leading elements were within fifty yards of them. Suddenly all hell broke loose. Enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire raked the area with a hail of bullets. Many men were hit, and to make bad matters worse, enemy artillery, which had previously been registered,

began to fall on the attackers. This, along with the small arms fire, inflicted heavy casualties among the members of C Company.

The position in which the platoon leader found himself was a very precarious one. The enemy was too close to call for friendly artillery. The enemy fire was too intense to allow maneuver or withdrawal. The platoon leader called for supporting tanks and, in about fifteen minutes, two came in from the left flank only to be knocked out by enemy anti-tank guns. Then after another call by the platoon leader, two additional tanks came into the third platoon's position from an approach which was directly in line with the woods. The 3rd platoon followed the tanks and with accurate fire and grenade tosses eliminated the fanatical enemy, who refused to surrender. Only four prisoners were taken.

The platoon reorganized on the captured position and prepared for further action. They were soon forced by heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire to withdraw to their previously held positions. Several vicious enemy counterattacks were beaten off and one enemy tank was knocked out. The platoon enjoyed very little rest that night.

The jeep which was carrying the four captured prisoners to the rear was wrecked and only one prisoner was in condition to be interrogated. He, however, gave a lot of valuable information. He told of the strength of an attack which was to come and the strength of the fortified position. This information brought much more friendly artillery to the sector in question.

On the 3rd of October 1944, two additional counterattacks were repulsed. Supply and evacuation was accomplished after dark. Because of the great number of casualties A Company, 33rd Engineer Battalion, was put in on the right of C Company's sector to fight as infantry. During the night the position was continually harassed by enemy artillery and also by tank hunters, who were trying to eliminate the two supporting tanks.

On the morning of the 4th of October 1944, word was received that the 23rd Armored Infantry Battalion would relieve the 48th Armored Infantry Battalion that night.

It was learned from prisoners captured during an enemy attack that the positions to the front were constructed so that they would be able to withstand a tremendous amount of artillery fire. These positions had entrances that could not be seen from the front and were mutually supporting. Intelligence gained from the prisoners suggested the use of air. An air strike of twelve P-38's bombed and strafed the position. The enemy counterattacked immediately following the air attack and before this counterattack was broken up a second air strike was required to help stop the determined enemy.

The relief of the Battalion took place that night. C Company had suffered about 40% casualties and its fighting efficiency and morale were at a low ebb.

FROM: The Personal Experience Monograph of Captain Leo V. Thieme,
Infantry (TIS Library)

DISCUSSION

The foregoing narrative is an excellent example of the price that is often paid when units are committed in an unknown area with little or no information and with no time to make a reconnaissance. These troops had just finished six days on the road and upon arrival at their destination were immediately plunged into attack.

A photo mission would have revealed that some installation was facing them and a detailed daylight or night reconnaissance would have certainly shown that something was located close to the line of departure. It would have required only a minimum of time for a company reconnaissance patrol to obtain information which would have revealed that positions covering the line of departure would be able to break up the attack even before it reached the line of departure.

The high number of casualties could have been averted if the company had sent out several patrols and had obtained information which could have

helped to prevent the shock of the unexpected fire. The units would have been able to take this and other bits of information and pieced it all together to obtain a more complete picture of the enemy it was facing. An aggressive search for information could have then been continued which would have indicated the adoption of a more feasible plan of action for the accomplishment of their mission. The failure to use reconnaissance gave the units no basis to use for pursuing any particular course of action and therefore endowed all available courses with too great an element of gambling. With the use of continuous and aggressive reconnaissance this operation could have been converted from a mere chance to a calculated risk.

EXAMPLE IV

On the 9th of October 1943, the 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry, 34th Infantry Division, was in position on the VOLTURNO RIVER, planning for its assault crossing. The area which the 34th Division occupied was almost flat in comparison to the high hill masses which were occupied by the enemy. The enemy positions stood out above the half circle course of the river like a medieval castle surrounded by a moat.

All bridges across the river had been blown and the road net was limited and inadequate. The nights of the 9th, 10th and 11th of October saw infantry and engineer parties make extensive reconnaissances in the selecting of crossing sites for the assault units. The units were also supplied with adequate aerial photographic coverage as a supplement to their maps. This was the first time that the Division had ever been furnished ample photo coverage.

The Battalion Commander had taken his company commanders to a vantage point immediately after receiving his orders and had oriented them on the terrain over which they were to operate. The company commanders did likewise with their platoon leaders. The continuous reconnaissance which followed for the next three nights fixed locations for supporting weapons.

Crossing points were also found at places which at first seemed unlikely for crossing. These sites were selected because there was less chance of their being covered by enemy machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire. The crossing sites selected by reconnaissance later proved to be most advantageous as the enemy had the good crossing sites well covered by their weapons.

On the 12th of October the Battalion Commander called all his officers together, gave them the final plan, and checked over all coordination deemed necessary. That night the supporting weapons were placed in position and the Engineers strung guide ropes at the crossing sites.

The Battalion moved into its attack positions at 0130, 13th of October 1943. At 0200, the artillery preparation, interspersed with smoke, started and the leading platoon moved slowly across the river. The artillery and supporting weapons were so placed that their area of impact was very close to the far bank. This was done to obtain surprise and cover possible crossing noises.

Reconnaissance and briefing of the units had been so thorough that everyone knew his part perfectly. Information which had been gleaned through thorough reconnaissances on both sides of the river was used to take complete advantage of every flaw in the enemy's defenses.

The 2nd Battalion was completely across the river at 0645 and had captured the town of SAN GIOVANNI, their objective, at 0730 on the 13th of October. The only casualty was one man who was killed by machine gun fire. This smooth, well-planned operation was only possible by adequate, accurate, aggressive reconnaissance and the proper use of the information which had been collected.

- FROM: (1) Personal Experience Monograph of Lt. Colonel Robert E. Coffey, Infantry (TIS Library)
- (2) Lessons Learned in Combat (0808.3 - .34th - .A2 - TIS Library)

DISCUSSION

The 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry, 34th Infantry Division, made four major river crossings. Three of these were over the VOLTURNO RIVER and one was over the RAPIDO RIVER. All these river crossings were successful but the one cited above was the most successful of them all. This crossing was planned so as to allow adequate time for reconnaissance. The other crossing plans permitted less time for aggressive and continuous reconnaissance and proved successful but to a lesser degree.

The above example, which is definitely the story of an effective operation, shows how the 2nd Battalion, by its continuous and aggressive use of all methods at hand to gather information, used all available material to a maximum to provide up-to-date battlefield information.

The results which were obtained in this action are an example of the type of success which results from the study and use of all information available, by all concerned in a unit, to attain a common goal. This goal should be the aim of every unit, namely, success in battle.

CONCLUSION

In the study of combat actions of World War II it is found that many victories and defeats can be directly attributed to the degree of completeness to which the use of aggressive and continuous reconnaissance was applied in providing up-to-date battlefield information. It is also found that many commanders were easily lulled into a false sense of security by reports containing information inviting actions which followed the line of least resistance.

Continuous ground reconnaissance is a tedious, arduous and dangerous task at best. There is no "best" method in any given situation, and no easy or abbreviated methods through which desired results can be obtained.

The four historical examples which you have read show actions of varying degrees of success and failure.

In the first operation (EXAMPLE I) we find how a unit used the time which was available and by thorough, complete and accurate reconnaissance made it pay dividends in the accomplishment of their mission. This action showed how this up-to-date battlefield information was put to use by a unit in the attainment of a goal which others had been unable to attain.

Two of the operations (EXAMPLES II and III) were stories of destruction and defeat of American armed forces which definitely can be attributed to the lack of full and vigorous reconnaissance. In one action (EXAMPLE II) the reconnaissance was faulty and in the other (EXAMPLE III) the reconnaissance in question was non-existent. Both of these narratives disclose how two very fine, battle-proven units were greatly reduced in efficiency, material, and personnel by the omission of minimum adequate reconnaissance measures.

The last narrative (EXAMPLE IV) clearly portrays how the use of continuous and aggressive reconnaissance made it possible for a unit to accomplish a difficult mission in the face of great odds. This unit accomplished its assigned task with practically no casualties against a well-emplaced and organized enemy who was fighting on terrain of his own choice.

It is hoped that it has been proven:

1. That the success or failure of a large percentage of operations can be attributed to good or bad reconnaissance.
2. That all information, regardless of source, should be checked and evaluated.
3. That it is impossible to obtain too much information about any situation because the more information available, the less the chance for error.
4. That there is always the possibility that information disseminated is in error.
5. That reconnaissance must be aggressive and continuous in order to provide up-to-date battlefield information.