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OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 143D INFANTRY
(36TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON ALTAVILLA,
ITALY, 13-14 SEPTEMBER 1943
(NAPLES-FOGGIA CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of Operation described: AN INFANTRY BATTALION ATTACKING
TO SECURE A KEY TERRAIN FEATURE DOMINATING A BEACHHEAD
AREA

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 2

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 143D INFANTRY,
(36TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON ALTAVILLA,
ITALY, 13-14 SEPTEMBER 1943
(NAPLES-FOGGIA CAMPAIGN)
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the action of the 3d Battalion, 143d Infantry, 36th US Division in the attack on ALTAVILLA, ITALY, 13-14 September 1943, during the SALERNO invasion.

In order to provide the reader with sufficient background to this operation it has been endeavored to depict the more important operations leading up to the action to be later described.

The conclusion of the SICILIAN CAMPAIGN on 17 August 1943, permitted the Fifteenth Army Group, composed of the British Eighth Army and the American Fifth Army, to complete its final preparations for the launching of an attack on the ITALIAN mainland. (See Map A) This was to be the initial attack against Fortress EUROPE. (1)

On 3 September 1943 the British Eighth Army, which had until its conclusion been engaged in the SICILIAN Campaign, crossed the MESSINA STRAITS from SICILY and thus launched the initial amphibious assault against the ITALIAN mainland. Landing with the bulk of its forces at REGGIO the Eighth Army proceeded north against slight resistance from Italian forces in that area. (2)

The American Fifth Army, composed of the American VI Corps, the British 10th Corps and a floating army reserve made up of one reinforced RCT of the 45th Division US and one reinforced RCT of the 82d Airborne Division US, which was prepared to

(1) A-1, p. 22
(2) A-1, p. 56

land on any of the beaches, sailed from ports in NORTH AFRICA and SICILY commencing 5 September 1943. (3)

The mission of the Fifth Army, given the operational title "AVALANCHE", was to seize the port of NAPLES and secure the nearby airfields in order to establish a firm base for further offensive operations. (4)

During the afternoon and evening of 8 September 1943 the Amphibious force of the Fifth Army sailed into the SALERNO GULF which had been selected as the site for the Fifth Army amphibious assault. (5)

At 1830, 8 September 1943, as the ships bearing the Fifth Army were converging in the gulf area, General Eisenhower broadcasted the following message to all ships in the force: "Hostilities between the United Nations and Italy have terminated, effective at once." It was made known to all troops at this time that operation "AVALANCHE" was to proceed as planned. (6)

On 9 September, and precisely as planned, the Fifth Army assault elements landed on beaches in the SALERNO GULF area. Simultaneous with the Fifth Army landings at SALERNO the British 1st Airborne Division landed by sea at TARANTO, ITALY and became a part of the British Eighth Army effort in the south. (See Map A) (7)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The SALERNO PLAIN stretching from SALERNO southeast to AGROPOLI is approximately 26 miles in length. The plain itself is crescent shape, being narrow in the SALERNO and AGROPOLI areas and extending some ten miles inland in the SELE RIVER area.

A well established road-net exists in the plain area with

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- (3) A-1, p. 25
 - (4) A-1, p. 25
 - (5) A-1, p. 30
 - (6) A-2, p. 13
 - (7) A-1, p. 56

Highway 18, a major highway running north-south thru the plain. Although the SALERNO PLAIN presents ideal landing sites and inland routes, its entire expanse is dominated by a mountain range rising off the plain proper all the way from AGROPOLI to SALERNO. Occupation of this mountain range permits excellent observation of the entire plain area. (8)

Enemy forces in the SALERNO area on 9 September 1943 consisted of the 16th Panzer Division (armored) which was assigned the mission of beach defense from the SORRENTO PENINSULA to AGROPOLI.

Other enemy forces not in the SALERNO area but able to influence the Fifth Army operations were the Hermann Goering Division located on the plains of NAPLES, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division in the general vicinity of GAETA and the 1st Paratroop Division occupying coast defenses south of BARI.

The 29th Panzer Grenadier and the 26th Panzer Divisions were both in Southern ITALY but not in contact with the British Eighth Army. (See Map A)

Of these enemy forces all were completely equipped and full strength with the exception of the Hermann Goering and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions which were reorganizing and reequipping, both having suffered heavily in SICILY.

The 16th Panzer Division defending the SALERNO area defended the beaches with small groups and relied chiefly on armored detachments roving behind the beach areas to repel any attempted landings. (9)

The British 10th Corps landing on beaches between PICENTINO CREEK and the SELE RIVER at 0330, 9 September formed the Fifth Army main assault with the mission of capturing NAPLES. (10)

(8) A-2, p. 4
(9) A-1, p. 28
(10) A-2, p. 8

Simultaneous with the 10th Corps the American VI Corps, consisting of the 36th Division (reinforced) landed on beaches in the vicinity of PAESTUM with the mission of seizing and occupying the high ground extending from PONTE SELE-ALTAVILLA-ALBANELLA-ROCCADASPIDE-AGROPOLI. (11)

An existing gap of approximately 10 miles between the 10th and VI Corps was to be closed in the vicinity of PONTE SELE as the attack progressed inland. (12)

The 36th Division (reinforced) forming the assault of the VI Corps landed on beaches in the vicinity of PAESTUM at 0330 9 September, minus any naval or air bombardment preparation of the beach or objective areas, with the 142d and 141st RCT's abreast. The 143d RCT, constituting the division reserve, landed at 0645 behind the assault elements and was to be prepared to replace assault forces on either flank. (13)

Advancing under heavy small arms, artillery and mortar fire, and against numerous isolated tank attacks which initially caused a great deal of confusion and disorganization, the assault elements managed to continue their advance through the 9th, 10th and 11th of September and by the evening of the 11th had secured the Corps objective with the exception of the PONTE SELE area. The dispositions of the division on the evening of 11 September found the 142d RCT occupying Hill 424 and ALTAVILLA, the 143d RCT occupying positions from MT. SOPRANO to CAPACCIO and the 141st RCT in positions protecting the Corps right flank in the vicinity of AGROPOLI and OGLIASTRO. (See Map B)

The Corps left flank reverted to the control of the 45th Division, which had commenced landing on the morning of 10 September. By late afternoon of the same day elements of the 179th RCT had advanced to positions overlooking PONTE SELE.

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- (11) A-1. p.28
(12) A-2, p. 8
(13) A-2, p. 17

Strong enemy counterattacks pointed against these units, forced them to withdraw to positions just northeast of PERSANO, along the LA COSA CREEK. (14) (See Map B)

36TH DIVISION SITUATION 12 SEPTEMBER 1943

Although the sectors occupied by the 141st and 143d RCT's were comparatively quiet, during the night and morning of 11-12 September, with only occasional activity, the 1st Battalion 142d RCT occupying positions in ALTAVILLA and on Hill 424 became heavily engaged with enemy forces in that area.

Hill 424 with ALTAVILLA lying on its southwest slopes proved to be the dominating terrain feature in the VI Corps beachhead area. In the hands of the enemy it permitted observation and commanding ground of the entire central beachhead area and also denied the attacking force observation of routes of withdrawal from southern ITALY. Hill 424 is joined by a saddle to Hill 315 to the south with another unnumbered hill lying one half mile to the southeast. This entire hill mass, although dominating, was very difficult to defend due to terracing and deep gorges on the slopes which greatly limited fields of fire and observation along the hillsides. (15)

By morning of the 12th of September, enemy units had completely infiltrated both flanks and cut off the 1st Battalion from the remainder of the 142d RCT. At dawn the enemy continued his attack, isolating the companies of the battalion and forcing them from Hill 424 and ALTAVILLA. (16)

Simultaneous with the setbacks suffered by the 142d RCT in the ALTAVILLA area the 143d RCT minus the 1st Battalion, which had been withdrawn from the regiment and sent to the north to strengthen the 10th Corps left flank (17), commenced the movement of the 3d Battalion from the CAPACCIO area to an assembly area

(14) A-2, p. 49

(15) Personal Knowledge

(16) A-1, p. 37

(17) A-1, p. 36

2½ miles east of CAPACCIO, there to relieve the 2d Battalion 143d RCT in division reserve for movement to defensive positions on MT. CHIRICO. (18)

Shortly before noon Colonel Martin, commanding officer of the 143d RCT was called to the Division Command Post and ordered to organize Martin Force to reattack and secure Hill 424 and ALTAVILLA commencing at 0600, 13 September. (19)

PLANS AND DISPOSITIONS OF MARTIN FORCE

With the 3d Battalion 143d RCT, the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 142d RCT being made available for the attack, the plan of the Martin Force was to retake Hill 424 and ALTAVILLA with the 3d Battalion 143d RCT attacking and occupying the high ground northeast of ALTAVILLA and drive the Germans north and east from the CALORE RIVER. The 3d Battalion 142d RCT was to move to the unnumbered hill southeast of ALTAVILLA and attack in the direction of Hill 424. The 1st Battalion 142d RCT, now approximately 260 officers and men strong, was to constitute the force reserve assembled west of ALTAVILLA and be prepared to attack ALTAVILLA or extend either flank. (See Map C)

To support the attack was the 132d FA Battalion in direct support of the 3d Battalion 143d RCT, 151st FA Battalion in direct support of the 3d Battalion 142d RCT and one battery of the 155th FA Battalion in general support. In addition to supporting the Martin Force the artillery was to be prepared to mass their fires for the 2d Battalion 143d RCT which had been committed in the SELE-CALORE corridor.

In addition to the artillery support available to the attacking forces the Cannon Company (less one platoon) and the Anti-Tank Company (less one platoon) of the 143d RCT were to be in general support of the attack. The 751st Tank Battalion also a

(18) A-6 p. 6
(19) A-6 p. 6

part of the force was given the mission of occupying positions in the valley west of ALTAVILLA preventing hostile elements from cutting the communications and supply lines of the attacking force. (20)

BATTALION SITUATION (See Map C)

The 3d Battalion, 143d RCT having been ordered to move into an assembly area $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of CAPACCIO, commenced their movement late in the morning of 12 September. Prior to reaching the previously designated area the battalions movement was diverted and it was ordered into a rear assembly area in the vicinity of CAPPA SANTA. Simultaneously the battalion commander was issued a warning order in effect that the battalion would be prepared to continue its movement after dusk to a forward assembly area $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of ALTAVILLA, from where it would be committed in the ALTAVILLA sector.

Due to the exposed front and open terrain under enemy observation, daylight reconnaissance of the area over which the battalion was to move and operate was limited to the battalion commander.

After dusk the battalion cleared its rear assembly area and continued its movement to the forward assembly area, arriving there shortly before midnight. Security during the movement and of the forward assembly area was the responsibility of the battalion inasmuch as neither the flanks nor the front of the battalion was secured by friendly forces.

It was'nt until midnight that the commander of Martin Force could assemble his unit commanders to issue the attack order. The 3d Battalion commander, informed of the coming attack, ordered all units of the battalion to complete any preparations necessary immediately and to allow the units to get as much rest as possible.

Although the battalion had marched some 16 miles during the day its combat efficiency was excellent as the battalion had previously been committed in a comparatively quiet sector permitting the command to become well rested. Casualties within the battalion since its landings on D day had been slight and there were no apparent equipment shortages. Even though all of the battalion organic transportation had not as yet been landed there was sufficient transportation available to support the battalion once it had become engaged. (21)

BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

Upon receiving the force commanders order the 3d Battalion Commander formulated the battalion plan of attack and, at approximately 0200, 13 September, assembled the company commanders at the Battalion C.P. to receive the attack order.

At the time of issuing the attack order the battalion commander had had little success in obtaining information as to the enemy situation in the battalion zone of action with the exception that the enemy occupying the ALTAVILLA area had been estimated to be the 2d Battalion of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment.

With the mission of attacking and securing the high ground northeast of ALTAVILLA and drive the Germans north and east from the CALORE RIVER the battalion commander planned to cross the line of departure, a north-south road at the base of the ALTAVILLA hill mass, with two companies abreast, "L" Company on the right and "I" Company on the left. "K" Company would follow "L" Company in the left zone as the battalion reserve. "M" Company would support the attack with a section of machine-guns from the 1st Platoon attached to each assault company.

(21) Personal Knowledge

The 2d Platoon would advance in rear of "I" Company's left flank and provide protection to the battalions left flank. 3d Platoon of "M" Company would follow in rear of the battalion reserve and be prepared to move into position, and fire on call.

Artillery preparations on the objective area would begin at 0545, lifting 600 yards at 0600 and firing at that range until 0630, after which all fire would be on call. (22)

A road leading up the west side of the objective, capable of handling all vehicles, would be used for resupply and evacuation. The battalion supply point would, until further orders be located in the present assembly area.

The Battalion C.P. and aid station would initially advance in rear of "K" Company with the battalion commander and his command group in rear and between the assault companies. Wire would be laid by the command group as it advanced to supplement radio communications with the Force C.P.

Both flanks of the battalion would initially be exposed. It was not expected to make contact on the right flank until the battalion reached ALTAVILLA, then physical contact would be made with the 3d Battalion of the 142d RCT attacking from the south. The battalion's left flank presented a problem inasmuch as it would be impossible to maintain physical contact with the 2d Battalion 143d RCT which had been committed in the SELE-CALORE corridor since the battalion would have to extend itself over too wide a front. It was therefore planned that the existing gap on the left flank would be covered by fire. (23)

Upon receiving the battalion attack order the unit commanders in turn issued their order to their companies. A careful map study of the terrain was quite necessary by all commanders of all echelons as no previous reconnaissance had been made and the area

(22) A-6 p. 7

(23) Personal Knowledge

was unfamiliar to the battalion.

As H hour neared it became more and more evident that the security of moving under cover of darkness and the limitation of movement in the area during daylight hours had proven successful as only sporadic artillery fell in the area up to this time. It was seemingly apparent that the enemy had not sensed the presence of the battalion in the area.

NARRATION

SUCCESS AT ALTAVILLA (See Map D)

With dawn breaking bright and clear, the 3d Battalion, having completed its final preparations for the forthcoming attack, cleared the forward assembly area swinging into positions in readiness to cross the line of departure at 0600. As preplanned the artillery preparation commenced at 0545 lifting 600 yards at 0600.

Crossing the line of departure at 0600 with "I" and "L" Companies abreast the battalion commenced its advance toward the battalion objective.

The initial advances, although not met by any determined enemy resistance, was greatly slowed by steep stone terraces along the entire western slopes leading to the battalion objective. As the advance neared the top of the ridge northwest of ALTAVILLA, "L" Company attacking on the battalions right encountered light resistance in the form of small arms and sniper fire from the northwestern outskirts of ALTAVILLA. By 0815 "I" and "L" Company had gained the ridgeline and continued the attack towards the high ground northeast of ALTAVILLA. (24)

Although "L" Company was meeting continued resistance from the edge of town it was able to advance to the high ground

(24) Personal Knowledge

northeast of ALTAVILLA which had been designated as the battalion objective. The enemy appeared to be withdrawing into ALTAVILLA indicating that a separation of the forces in the town and the forces on Hill 424 was trying to be avoided. By 1200 the battalion had reached the objective and proceeded to organize defensive positions in the event of a counterattack.

In occupying positions in the right sector of the battalion objective, "L" Company was receiving continuous harrassing small arms fire from ALTAVILLA. Thus the battalion commander ordered "K" Company, still in battalion reserve, to clear ALTAVILLA of enemy and occupy the town providing protection to the battalions right flank. Shortly after moving into ALTAVILLA, "K" Company cleared it of resistance with little difficulty and proceeded to prepare and occupy positions on the southern limits of the town in accordance with its mission. (25)

2d Platoon Company "M" having advanced in rear of "I" Company on the left, moved into position on the left of "I" Company where it overlooked the northern slopes of Hill 424 and covered the northern approaches into the battalion left flank.

Up until this time mortar and artillery fire falling in the battalion area had been widely scattered with only minor casualties being suffered by the battalion.

Upon reaching the battalion objective it was discovered that a great deal of ammunition, equipment and rations that the 1st Battalion 142d RCT was forced to abandon, when it had been driven from positions previously occupied in the area, was still intact.

(25) Personal Knowledge

Details were immediately organized and all of the supplies that could be utilized by the battalion were collected and placed in a battalion dump approximately 700 yards north of ALTAVILLA. (26)

Throughout the afternoon all elements of the battalion remained in close contact with the enemy, with short but effective fire-fights cropping up at intervals along the entire front. The enemy appeared content in keeping the battalion occupied in this manner as there were no other indications of any other offensive activities along the battalion front.

About midafternoon the machine-gun platoon occupying positions on the left flank reported, by runner, to the Battalion C.P. that an enemy foot column, estimated to be a company of approximately 150 men, was being observed moving southwest along a road between the base of Hill 424 and the CALORE RIVER. The battalion commander immediately moved to the left flank and upon arrival, ordered the platoon leader to bring the column under fire. The column was still approximately 1500 yards from the gun positions and were apparently unaware of the presence of the platoon. The platoon leader felt that at that range his fires would be too ineffective, yet acting on orders, the platoon opened fire causing the column to deploy. This over-eagerness definitely proved a mistake as the fires caused but slight damage, if any, on the advancing column and jeopardized the platoon positions. The platoon was enveloped thru the course of a stiff fire-fight and forced to withdraw under heavy small arms fire into "I" Company's left flank, as the platoon had been in position on the extreme battalion flank minus any local rifle support. (27) Contact with friendly forces on either the right or left flank had not been established by 1600. Information received from the

(26) Personal Knowledge

(27) Personal Knowledge

Force C.P. indicated that the 3d Battalion 142d RCT had been initially unsuccessful and had been unable to advance on the right. Also no activity could be observed in the SELE-CALORE corridor where the 2d Battalion 143d RCT was supposed to be advancing. This left the battalion with both flanks and the rear highly exposed to enemy attacks.

COUNTERATTACK AT ALTAVILLA

The battalion commander deciding that the battalion would be unable to effectively defend and hold the present battalion objective unless Hill 424, which overlooked the present positions, was taken and occupied, planned to continue the attack with Hill 424 as the objective.

Assembling the company commanders at the Battalion C.P. at 1630 the battalion commander issued the order to continue the attack and secure Hill 424. "I" and "L" Company were to attack abreast with "K" Company remaining in ALTAVILLA as the battalion reserve and continue to protect the battalion left flank and rear. It was also learned at this time that artillery support for the attack would be unavailable as all fires had been shifted and were being massed in front of the 2d Battalion 143d RCT which was being heavily counterattacked in the SELE-CALORE corridor. Therefore the assault companies would be supported by only the 81 MM Mortar Platoon from "M" Company. The attack would jump off from the presently occupied positions at 1715. (28)

Due to the short time available for preparation for the attack the companies had to rely heavily on radios in issuing orders and instructions, and in doing so were negligent in their radio security. (29)

(28) A-6 p. 7

(29) Personal Knowledge

As H hour for the attack drew near it was quite evident that there was a definite lull in the enemy firing in the area, and at 1710, ten minutes before the battalion was to jump off, movement in the vicinity of Hill 424 was detected. Orders to withhold all fires in that area was immediately given as there was the possibility that elements of the 3d Battalion 142d RCT had been able to reach the hill which had been their objective. As the movement approached the battalion positions over the open ground, separating the battalion and Hill 424, it was soon detected that the troops were Germans and were making an attack aimed at the battalion. As the enemy counterattack, estimated to be a reinforced battalion, progressed, the battalion opened fire from their positions which had been well prepared.

Since "I" and "L" Company had been prepared to jump off in an attack on Hill 424, elements of those units were able to place a murderous effective fire on the counterattacking force, thereby inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, forcing him to become disorganized and to withdraw.

The momentum of the counterattack, although it had been unsuccessful along the battalion front, continued to advance along both flanks of the battalion and drove a wedge between "L" and "K" Company.

"K" Company, which had received a counterattack along the southern outskirts of the town at the same time, was driven back into the northern part of ALTAVILLA before it could reorganize and halt further advances by the enemy.

The Germans, upon locating the battalions flanks, and finding them unsecured, continued his counterattacks along the

entire battalion front thus keeping those forces occupied and prevented the battalion commander from shifting forces to either flank to prevent an envelopment. By now it was very apparent that the battalion could not prevent the enemy from developing the flanks, and it was necessary to reorganize into an all around defense to prevent attacks upon the battalion rear.

During the course of the repeated counterattacks, the 81 MM Mortar Platoon had expended the greater part of its ammunition supply making it necessary to resupply the weapons for further use. Vehicles were dispatched to the battalion ammunition dump, which was still located in the forward assembly area that the battalion had left that morning. In the attempt to get the vehicles down the westernside of the hill they ran into a road block about half way down and were forced to return to the battalion after having suffered the loss of a vehicle and its driver. It was not until then that it was determined that the battalions rear had been cut.

Realizing that any further resupply would now be unavailable, immediate orders were issued to insure the conservation of the present supply of ammunition and further attempts were made to search the area for any more ammunition that the salvage parties had failed to collect that afternoon.

Enemy mortar and artillery fire, which had greatly increased following the first counterattack, was beginning to take a heavy toll on the battalion, that, coupled with the casualties suffered by small arms fire was beginning to overload the Battalion Aid Station, which by now was unable to evacuate any of the casualties to the rear.

WITHDRAWAL FROM ALTAVILLA (See Map E)

Shortly after dark a message was received over the battalion radio for all units to withdraw. (this radio was now the only source of communication with higher headquarters as all the other radios had been damaged during the afternoon action.) The battalion commander sensing the situation and not fully aware of either the enemy nor the battalions situation, decided to remain in position until the following night thereby allowing time for reorganization and a daylight reconnaissance for routes of withdrawal. (30)

During the night the battalion was reorganized as best as possible and positions were consolidated to prevent any further penetrations into the battalion area. Both flanks of the battalion were drawn in to give the battalion all around defense.

Enemy activity during the night was limited to occasional mortar and artillery fire through the area as well as harrassing small arms fire.

As daylight on the 14th September broke, the enemy again continued counterattacking, attempting to break the battalion into small groups. The battalion was unable to place 81 MM Mortar fire in support of the defenses as the entire supply of ammunition was now completely depleted. Radio communication to the rear was also out as the battalion radio set had gone out during the night thereby eliminating the last source of any communication to the Force C.P. The units had to rely entirely on the 60 MM Mortars for all supporting fire as there was still sufficient supply of ammunition for the weapons.

(30) A-6 p. 8

By noon, through repeated efforts, the Germans had cut completely between "L" and "K" Company and snipers had infiltrated into the battalions defense area and were utilizing trees and a church steeple on the outskirts of town to snipe from.

During the afternoon, "K" Company, still occupying the northern half of ALTAVILLA, received continuous counterattacks which they were able to repel, although their ability to hold their positions in the town much longer was quite uncertain as the Germans were beginning to support their attacks with tanks which were systematically destroying, with fire, the buildings which "K" Company were occupying. "K" Company was abled considerably in slowing these attacks by employing a 536 radio in one of the taller buildings in the occupied part of town, to direct mortar fire on the attacking forces. From this vantage point the radio operator was also able to observe enemy activity in the front of "L" Company's right flank and direct fire in that area.

Early in the afternoon the battalion radio operator was able to repair the battalion commanders radio set sufficiently to receive transmissions from the Force C.P. Over the radio repeated messages were received for the battalion to return to its parent unit on an azimuth of 284 degrees.

Plans were immediately initiated to prepare the battalion for a night withdrawal with the least possible casualties. All units were contacted and informed that they would so organize what remained of their units under their control in to small groups which would infiltrate from the present positions on the general azimuth of 284 degrees until they gained contact with friendly forces. It was further ordered

that competent details would be left to keep up the fire in covering the withdrawal. These groups, most of which were either captured or killed later, were to follow the battalion at the time that they felt that sufficient time had been allowed for the battalion to have cleared the area.

It was further planned that all wounded not capable of moving would remain in the Battalion Aid Station. The Battalion Surgeon volunteered to stay with the wounded to insure that they were properly cared for. "K" Company in ALTAVILLA gathered their wounded in a large building and put them in the care of a German medical aid man who had been captured earlier in the day. (31)

Approximately 2 hours after darkness had set in, though it would not be complete during the night as the sky was clear and the moon was shining, making movement without detection very difficult, all units commenced their withdrawal. Previously all weapons and supplies that were to be left behind, were destroyed to the fullest extent possible without inviting any attention from the enemy. As the groups were dispatched at intervals along different routes the covering forces kept up a fire, which if not effecting the enemy, was tending to muffle the sounds made by the withdrawing groups and distracting from them.

By midnight all forces had cleared the ALTAVILLA area, with the exception of those who had been intercepted by the enemy, and were arriving at what was now the main line of defense of the beachhead, LACOSA CREEK some $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of ALTAVILLA.

Although all elements of the battalion which had withdrawn from ALTAVILLA did not reach the beachhead defense line until late in the night of 15 September the battalion had been successful in

(31) Personal Knowledge

withdrawing approximately 500 officers and men from what had seemed an impossible position. Thus the second battle for ALTAVILLA had proven unsuccessful. (32)

In summing up the operation it may be noted that the attack, although the battalion was initially successful, would probably have been a complete success had units committed on both flanks been able to advance to their objectives thereby permitting exposed flanks of the battalion to be secured. Although the battalion found itself in a very critical situation with the possibility of being completely destroyed, the courage and fighting ability exerted by the members of the battalion enabled the unit to withdraw with better than half of its original strength still intact. Regardless of the fact that the ammunition supply of the battalion had become critical during the latter stages of the fighting, further supply would not have enabled the battalion to hold the position over much longer a period of time due to the overwhelming force of the enemy.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. RECONNAISSANCE

Although the initial battalion attack met with a certain degree of success without any prior reconnaissance of company and subordinate commanders, it is believed that had the enemy heavily resisted the battalions advance after it had crossed the line of departure it would have caused utter confusion. A delay would have been necessitated during which units would have had to reconnoiter the area in order to be able to maneuver against the enemy.

2. COMMUNICATION SECURITY

It cannot be ascertained whether violations of radio security, prior to the continuation of the attack to Hill 424,

6. ENEMY SITUATION

Inasmuch as the dispositions of the enemy in the battalions zone of action were practically unknown to the battalion, steps to secure such information should have been instigated. The timely use of patrols in the area may have indicated our proposed action but would nevertheless have given the battalion commander information of the enemy and terrain on which to base his plans and orders.

7. BATTALION LEFT FLANK

The placing of the machine-gun platoon, without any local protection on the left flank proved to be a mistake which could quite easily have been rectified. Although the platoon was occupying a vantage point in an exposed position on the battalions left flank, its presence would have served a purpose, had the battalion commander, on visiting there, strengthened the position.

LESSONS

1. Lack of prior reconnaissance, both map and terrain, definitely limits the success and coordination of the attacking units.

2. Communication security must be strictly adhered to by all units involved in an operation.

3. The difficulty in operating on an extended frontage requires special attention in the protection and security of the flanks of the unit involved.

4. Regardless of what measures ^{are} necessary, steps must be taken to insure continuous communications with higher and adjacent headquarters.

5. Continuous resupply of all types of ammunition must be maintained to insure maximum use of weapons.

were the direct cause of the German counterattack on the battalion positions. Without doubt it more than likely influenced the Germans time of attack. All units of the battalion had been trained fully in the proper use of the radio and the need of security had been well stressed, yet once the battalion became engaged, the tendency seemed to be to overlook security in an effort to save time.

3. EXPOSED FLANKS

The inability, to advance, of units attacking on either flank of the battalion, presented a problem that the battalion commander was unable to cope with. As it was, a gap of approximately 3 miles existed on both flanks making it impossible for the battalion to secure its initial gains.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

Had the battalion been able to keep informed of progress on either flank it would have greatly assisted the battalion commander in the dispositions of his troops. With the probability of being cut off from its parent unit, recognizable steps should have been taken beforehand to insure that the battalion would still be able to communicate with its parent unit. Naturally the loss of all radio communications would be difficult to foresee yet had utility sets been carried by the battalion, their use in receiving orders and directing artillery fire would have contributed materially to the battalion situation.

5. RESUPPLY

Immediately upon organizing the battalion objective, steps should have been taken to build up ammunition supplies, especially for the 81 MM Mortars, instead of waiting until the supply on hand had become nearly depleted. As it was, during the latter stages of fighting in the ALTAVILLA area, the 81 MM Mortars were rendered completely useless due to lack of ammunition.

6. Methods of gaining information of the enemy must be utilized to the extreme.

7. Units should be employed with consideration given to their limitations and capabilities.