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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY H, 350TH INFANTRY
(88TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT MOUNTERUMICI,
SOUTH OF BOLOGNA, ITALY, 15-18 APRIL 1945.
(PO VALLEY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experiences of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: HEAVY WEAPONS COMPANY
ATTACKING A MOUNTAIN OBJECTIVE.

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company H, 350th Infantry, 88th Infantry Division, in the capture of Monterumici and the breakthrough of the German Lines at the start of the Po Valley offensive in April 1945.

To bring the reader up to date a summary of the major events leading to this action will be given.

During the previous ten months the Allied Forces, composed of the British Eighth Army and the US Fifth Army, had fought their way up the Italian peninsula from the battlefields of Cassino and Anzio, through Rome and Florence to within ten miles of Bologna. There, in November 1944, the offensive ground to a halt. The stubborn German resistance had stopped the Allied drive just short of the Po Valley. (1) The enemy had managed to hold a very strong position in the edge of the mountains, thus forcing the Allied Armies to stay all winter in the high Apennines with exposed positions and long and hazardous supply routes. (See Map A) Throughout the winter months both sides dug in and re-enforced their positions. The Allied divisions were re-grouped and re-trained; new divisions were brought in and supplies built up for the coming offensive in the Spring.

(2)

(1) A-5, p. 6; (2) A-1, p. 1.

The mission of the Allied Armies in Italy was to contain the enemy forces, consisting of some twenty-five first rate German Divisions and five Italian Fascist Divisions, thus preventing the use of these units on the Eastern and Western fronts. Also, the Allies had to prepare for the final task of destroying these enemy units to prevent their withdrawal to the Alps and the prepared defenses of Hitler's Bavarian Redoubt region where the struggle could be prolonged. (3)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

In the spring of 1945, the Fifth and Eighth Armies still faced the enemy in about the same general positions across the northern edge of the Apennines. Some improvement was made in the Fifth Army sector when the newly arrived U. S. Tenth Mountain Division made a limited objective attack in February to clear Mt. Belvedere along Highway 64. (4) (See Map B) The Fifth Army, commanded by Lt. General Lucian K. Truscott, was spread over ninety miles of front, extending from Massa on the Ligurian Sea to Mount Grande, East of Highway 65. The Eighth Army tied in with the Fifth Army at Mt. Grande and extended East to Lake Comacchio and the Adriatic Sea. (5) (See Map B) The Allied Divisions were in good condition; the troops had rested and re-trained for over four months. Supplies were piling up in rear of the defense line. The Air Corps, with almost complete air

(3) A-1, p. 5; (4) A-6, p. 7; (5) A-1, p. 2.

superiority, continued to block the enemy's communication lines from Bologna to the Brenner Pass.

The Enemy forces, although badly battered in the Fall campaign, were still intact and fairly well situated behind their prepared defenses of the Genghis Kahn Line. The enemy had made good use of the winter months to improve his positions and replace and re-train his depleted divisions. He had carefully conserved supplies all through the winter. Ammunition, especially artillery, was used only when absolutely necessary. Troops were moved by foot and maximum use was made of horses and oxen to conserve the critically short supply of gasoline. The Germans used the rich agricultural and industrial region of the Po Valley to make their forces virtually self sustaining. (6)

The main enemy defenses, the Genghis Kahn Line ran from Vergatto, west of Highway 64, to Mount Grande. It was anchored in the center on Mt. Sole, Monterumici, and Mt. Adone blocking Highways 64 and 65, the two main approaches to Bologna. This line was made up of mutually supporting strong points consisting chiefly of fortified stone farmhouses, concrete pillboxes, and special cave positions. Typical German use was made of machine guns and mines to block all avenues of approach to his positions. He massed hundreds of mortars to assist the Infantry strong points. Additional defense lines were prepared in depth behind the Po and Adige Rivers. (7) (See Map B)

(6) A-5, p. 15; (7) A-1, p. 15.

THE GENERAL PLAN OF ATTACK

The general plan of 15th Army Group was to drive through the German lines just west of Bologna, breach the Po River line near Ostiglia, capture Verona, ^{to} thus bisecting the Po Valley in half and to seal the route into the Brenner Pass to prevent the withdrawal of any enemy units out of Italy. Phase I, the main effort, was to break the German defenses between Highways 64 and 65, to isolate Bologna leaving it to be captured later as the drive was pressed on to the Po River. (8) (9) Prior to and in conjunction with Phase I, a diversionary attack was planned along the Ligurian coast directed at La Spezia. The British Eighth Army was to breach the Senio River and attack on the right of Highway 9 up the Po Valley to draw enemy reserves away from the center. (10)

Fifth Armies II Corps was to make the main effort after IV Corps units had reached a line abreast of II Corps along Highway 64. The advance would generally follow the Reno River line which offered the best approach to Bologna except for the key enemy defenses on Mt. Sole, Monterumici and Mt. Adone. These points were the most heavily fortified of the entire German Line. II Corps Plan was to attack these positions directly with the 6th South African Armored Division against Mt. Sole, the 88th Infantry Division employed against Monterumici, and the 91st Infantry Division attacking Mt. Adone. D Day was originally set

(8) A-7, p. 45; (9) A-1, p. 18; (10) A-6, p. 9.

for 12 April 1945 but was later set back to 14 April to allow the Air Corps to take advantage of better weather to participate in the attack. (11) (See Map B)

Div. moved to Pisa 1st April

An elaborate deception plan was started in March designed to conceal the actual point of attack and the true disposition of the 85th and 88th Divisions. A false II Corps was created and moved into dummy CP's in the Eighth Army sector. Visits were made to these CP's by Army Commanders and other staff members. A simulated thinning out of the line in II Corps sector was made by the removal of the 88th Division which was sent blacked out to Pisa for specialized training in river crossings. All traffic in II Corps sector was carefully restricted. (12) New artillery units, moved into position, were not allowed to fire. A careful twenty day artillery firing schedule was set up with gradually increasing fire as D Day approached to mask the actual hour of the attack. A total of 328,000 rounds over the basic rate of fire was set aside for this program. (13)

THE 88TH PLAN OF ATTACK

The 88th Division started moving up from Pisa on the 1st of April to take over its sector in front of Monterumici. The 349th Infantry was to be employed on the left against the Furcoli-Monterumici ridge and the 350th Infantry on the right against the Monterumici-Mt. Adone^N ridge. (See

(11) A-1, p. 19; (12) A-3, p. 2; (13) A-1, p. 27.

Map not located
with Ref. to B.

Map C) The division mission was to break through the Monterumici sector and capture Mt. Mario where it would be pinched out by the 6th South Africans coming across from the left. (14)

Monterumici was a formidable barrier rising 678 feet from the Setta Creek with high extending saddles to mutually supporting Mt. Adove and Mt. Sole. (15) (See Map C) The ground gradually sloped toward the mountain from our positions along Highway 65 thus giving the enemy perfect observation of any activity within a range of over two miles. The only approaches to the mountain were heavily covered by enemy mine fields and fire. The German 296th (and 297th) ^{for mt. Adove} Regiments of the 8th Mountain Division held Monterumici. This was one of the best enemy units in Italy. (15)

THE 350TH INFANTRY PLAN

The 350th Infantry moved from Pisa to a forward area ^{N. of M.} near Pietramalo along Highway 65 on the 6th of April and started making plans for the attack. Detailed meetings with battalion and company commanders were held to discuss and complete the plan. The troops participated in special practice problems in night operations before their final entry into the front lines.

The 350th plan placed the 1st Battalion on the line on D-2 to relieve elements of the 362d Infantry and was to remain there as regimental reserve. The 3rd Battalion was

(14) A-1, p. 67; (15) A-2, p. 4.

to attack from La Valle directly up the peak of Monterumici toward Di Sotto and Le Mandrie. The 2d Battalion was to attack on the right up the Fazzano Ridge to take San Lucia and Ca Di Mazza and to continue north to capture Onercia. E Company was attached to the 1st Battalion until H plus 30 to take over part of the front line positions. (17) The 1st Platoon Company C, 752nd Tank Battalion and 1st Platoon, Company C, 805th T D Battalion were to give general support from positions forward of Anconella and La Garda. The 338th Field Artillery Battalion and 1st Platoon (4.2 mortars) Company A, 10th Chemical Battalion were to fire in direct support of the Regiment. Priority of fires to the 3rd Battalion. Company B, 313th Engineer Battalion was to clear and prepare a road through the mine fields to assist the tanks and TDs to displace when the Monterumici ridge was cleared. Company Commanders of the attacking units were to make an aerial reconnaissance over their sectors in Artillery liaison aircraft prior to D Day.

The regimental CP moved to Anconella on the 10th of April and a forward CP was set up in La Valle. H Hour D Day was set for 2230, 14 April 1945, but was later postponed twenty four hours. (18) (See Map C)

BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The 2d Battalion's plan was to attack in a column of companies, F Company leading followed by G Company. F

(17) A-2, p. 5; (18) A-2, p. 4.

Company was to move out under cover of a thirty minute artillery preparation, cross Savena Creek and mark a path through the mine field with the aid of the A and P Platoon and then attack northwest along the trail to Fazzano. (See Map D) With Fazzano secure, F Company was to scale the cliff north of Fazzano while the enemy strong points of San Lucia and Ca Di Mazza were boxed off with machine gun and mortar fire from Company H. F Company would then cut the ridge trail and attack Ca Di Mazza from the rear in coordination with an attack on San Lucia by G Company launched from the direction of Fazzano. E Company was to remain in reserve on the front line position and attached to the 1st Battalion until H plus 30. H Company was to start moving into firing positions along the front line on 10 April to complete a detailed fire plan before D Day. The battalion forward CP and aid station was to be located at Laghi. The line of departure was the trail near S. Ansano. A battalion wire team was to follow F Company laying W. D. 110 wire for communication during the attack. (19) (See Map D)

Extreme care was to be exercised by all personnel on reconnaissance or working in the forward area to avoid disclosing to the enemy any indication of the preparations for the attack. All activity had to be restricted to night time because of the excellent observation maintained by the enemy over the entire area.

(19) A-8.

H COMPANY PREPARATIONS

A reconnaissance party consisting of company commander,^{H^{eo}} platoon leaders and Reconnaissance Sergeant left the battalion area and moved up Highway ^{Not named on map} 65 in time to reach the forward area at first dark. Transportation was limited to two jeeps in keeping with the restricted traffic regulations. The party moved down the unimproved road from La Garda to Ca Bianca, where a check was made with the company commander, of the unit of the 362nd Infantry in position, to coordinate movement in the forward area. The road from Ca Bianca to Laghi had not been travelled previously by vehicle and H Company Commander was warned that it probably contained old enemy mines left there through the winter. Since it was of utmost importance that a forward company supply point be established near the gun positions, the vehicles were carefully moved down the road to a point where it crosses a ford in the creek just west of Laghi. (See Map D) The jeeps were left at this point to be unloaded while the company commander and reconnaissance sergeant continued on foot to the platoon CP at Laghi. Before he reached the CP the company commander was captured by a group of the jittery 91st Division men who had not received word of the arrival of any newcomers in the area. The company commander was taken to the CP with a BAR in his ribs and held under guard until word finally came down announcing his arrival. (20)

(20) A-8.

Obtaining a guide from the line platoon, a thorough reconnaissance was made of all likely positions in the forward area. The company commander set off a flare as he stumbled through an unmarked mine area thus alerting all riflemen along the front line. This greatly slowed the reconnaissance, M1 safety locks clicked at almost every move because the 91st Division men were still jittery from the activity of strangers in their area. (?)

The forward bluff, west of Laghi, proved to be a good position for the emplacement of the company weapons and was chosen because no other place forward of this was suitable to conceal men in the daytime. The platoon leaders were shown their areas and were left there to carefully select gun positions the next day. They also had to mark a path through the brush and old mine area from their gun positions to the company supply point to facilitate movement at night. The company commander returned with the jeeps to the battalion area to work out the final fire plan. (21) (See Map E)

THE FIRE PLAN

The detailed fire plan was set up to initially cover the enemy outposts east of Fazzano with machine gun and mortar fire as F Company worked across Savena Creek. From then on the fire would shift on call as F Company progressed up the trail toward Fazzano. The 1st Platoon of machine

(21) A-8.

guns and 3d Section of 81 mm mortars would lift and fire on the bluff above the trail. The 2d Platoon and 1st and 2d Section of mortars were to shift up the trail sweeping a path in front of Company F. When Fazzano was taken the guns would lift to San Lucia and Ca Di Mazza. When F Company scaled the cliff north of Fazzano, the 2d Platoon would shift its machine gun fire left of San Lucia and all mortar fire would go in rear of the ridge trail to give added safety for the riflemen. The 1st Platoon of machine guns and the 3d Section of mortars were to box the Ca Di Mazza area off during this action and they were to shift to the trail west of Mt. Adone as to the attack on Ca Di Mazza developed. The 1st Platoon and 3d Section of mortars were to be ready to displace to positions near Fazzano to give continued close support of the attack. The 2d Section of mortars was to be ready at all times to deliver counter mortar fire on all close in probable enemy mortar positions. (?)

(22) (See Map D)

On the nights of the 11th and 12th of April, the squad leaders and gunners moved up on four jeeps along with tools, guns, equipment and ammunition. Heavy overloads on the vehicles were necessary to restrict the traffic. All equipment and ammunition was carried at night from the supply point to the gun positions. The remainder of the company moved into position on the nights of the 13th and 14th of April, along with an additional ammunition supply. A large

(22) A-8.

amount of ammunition had to be placed on position because the battalion supply point was located at La Gorda and re-supply during daylight was not possible. Each machine gun had forty boxes on position with an additional one hundred boxes in the company supply point. Each mortar had one hundred rounds on position with an additional six hundred rounds at the supply point. (23)

The company commander returned to the front line positions on the night of the 12th of April and inspected all gun positions. Platoon leaders were given the plan of attack and their fire plan. They were instructed to begin registration the following day, using extreme caution. One machine gun was to register from each section at widely dispersed intervals and at only one target. The remainder of the data was to be carefully sighted and measured with the mill scale and clinometer. Aiming stakes and safety bars were to be placed out for night firing. All positions were to be improved and sandbagged. No alternate positions were selected because of the limited area. Covered exits were to be dug from all gun positions to facilitate re-supply and control. A sound powered phone was to be placed with each gun section and tied in with the platoon leaders and the company CP located midway between the two machine gun platoon positions. (See Map E) From the company CP two heavy EES phone lines were to run to the battalion CP at Laghi. Three 300 radios were employed, one to be at

(23) A-8.

the company CP, one with the mortar platoon leader, and one with the company commander. These were not to be used unless the telephone system failed. (24)

Each mortar was to register on one of its primary targets with a minimum of two or three rounds. This registration was also to be conducted at long intervals of time so as not to attract the enemy's attention. Six mules were stationed near the company supply point to aid in the forward displacement of the mortars. The company executive officer, Lt. Frank Matte, was to carefully supervise all work, paying particular attention to the maintenance of secrecy. Over two hundred men would soon be in the area right under the enemy's nose and no movement could be allowed in the daytime. The company commander returned to the forward battalion assembly area, which had moved to Amonella, to check on final plans. (25)

The company commander checked the positions again on the night of the 13th and found that all preparations were nearly complete. Registration had been successful and had drawn no enemy fire. Remaining that night, the company commander checked final plans with the battalion commander, Lt. Colonel Donald A. Yongue, and F Company Commander, Captain Charbonnet. The mortar registration nearest Savena Creek was shown to Captain Charbonnet and he was confident that all fires were correct.

The rifle troops at Anconella were eating their last

(24) (25) A-8.

B rations, H Company men were already on a strict C ration diet. Morale was good but all men of the battalion had a certain feeling of reluctance about the coming attack, mainly because of the good news about the success on the western front. Everyone felt that the war was almost over and that this struggle in the Italian mountains would not add much to the cause. Continued explanation to the troops that all units must now make a final drive to shorten the war was necessary to overcome this feeling of reluctance. The battalion had suffered previous heavy losses in other similar operations of the long Italian campaign and the desire to close with the enemy was not as keen as it had been previously. The companies were almost up to strength, but a large percentage of the officers and men were new replacements, yet untried in the offensive. The battalion assembly area, near Pietramalo, was located near a temporary cemetery which contained numerous graves of former members of the 350th Infantry. This seemed to serve as a solemn warning to veterans of the battalion who remembered their former buddies. (It was no help to morale!)

On the afternoon of the 15th, 765 heavy bombers hit targets behind the enemy front lines, between Highways 64 and 65 to Bolonga. 200 medium bombers attacked Praduro and 120 fighter bombers hit targets on Mt. Sole, Monterumici and Mt. Adove. (26) IV Corps on the left was attacking against heavy opposition and had gained some ground. II

(26) A-8.

Corps was quietly awaiting H hour. (27)

At first dark, troops of F and G Companies moved down from Anconella and stopped along the road west of Laghi. The night of the 15th was partly cloudy and dull, a mist of smoke and dust hung low over the enemy positions, lending a fearful atmosphere for the men quietly awaiting the attack.

THE ATTACK

At 2230 hours the sky erupted with a 75,000 round artillery, tank and heavy mortar preparation, directed at Mt. Sole and Monterumici. H Company tied in with the preparation at 2245 hours, firing slowly at first, checking fires under the light of Jerry flares. F Company worked across Savena Creek under cover of the barrage and breached the mine field, reaching the trail leading to Fazzano against little opposition. As the barrage lifted, scattered machine pistol and rifle fire came from the enemy outposts near Fazzano. The heavy weapons shifted fire on call and Company F started up the trail. The enemy was alert and quickly directed a mortar barrage on the advancing riflemen, forcing them to move north toward the shelter of the cliff. The company became disorganized and considerable time was taken before a move could be started on Fazzano. H Company machine guns continued to provide cover with a heavy volume of fire directed up the trail and on the bluff below

(27) A-3, p. 2.

Ca Di Mazza. Moving carefully along the cliff, F Company closed in and captured Fazzano at 0100 hours.

7. H. Co. should be shown on map

Reorganizing quickly, F Company moved toward Ca Di Mazza in two columns and under extreme difficulty, managed to get a few men up the cliff north of Fazzano. G Company was slow in moving up behind Company F and became disorganized in the attack on San Lucia. H Company continued on the fire plan but the enemy was extremely alert and active even under fire. The Germans again poured in mortar fire and F Company fell back behind the cliff. Two men were killed, eight wounded, and many others injured in falls down the cliff. Many others became lost, including the artillery forward observer and party. Captain Charbonnet, the company commander was among the wounded. At 0500 hours the attack stopped and F Company fell back to secure Fazzano. G Company retired to covered positions west of Laghi because of the crowded and exposed area around Fazzano. (See Map E) H Company continued to cover the enemy positions with a slow rate of fire. At daylight, F Company had not yet organized around Fazzano and H Company's mortars were given the mission of smoking the ridge, which was effectively done until 0800, when F Company was well dug in. (28)

At noon on the 16th, the assistant division commander, Colonel J. C. Frye, arrived in the area and checked the situation from the OP, north of Laghi, with the battalion commander and G and H Company Commanders. He instructed

(28) A-8.

that an all out effort be made the following evening to capture San Lucia and Ca Di Mazza.

The 3d Battalion on the left had reached a point 400 yards short of the peak of Monterumici, against strong enemy opposition. The 91st Division's 361st Infantry on the right was similarly stopped cold below Brento. Enemy reaction had been violent all along the line. (29)

During the night of the 15th, H Company's Supply Sergeant had managed to bring in 600 rounds of mortar and 50 boxes of machine gun ammunition. A shortage of 81 mm smoke existed and the supply sergeant was instructed to bring in a jeep load during daylight, which was effected without difficulty, although it disclosed the location of the supply point to the enemy. The enemy had picked up H Company's weapons during the night and shelled the area with artillery and mortars. Many close rounds fell but the men were able to take cover and no casualties resulted.

The fire plan was to remain the same for the attack on San Lucia and Ca Di Mazza. The 1st Platoon of machine guns and the 3d Section of mortars were to be ready to displace on call to Fazzano for continued close support. This was necessary to get more accurate fire on known enemy positions and to aid in holding the ridge if it were taken. All ammunition bearers of the 3d Platoon were to make one trip to the forward position and then return to their covered positions upon completion of the displacement.

(29) A-2, p. 7.

Shortly after dark the battalion commander and H Company Commander moved to Fazzano. The 3d mortar section sergeant was taken along to select positions for his guns. The party strayed off the trail through the mine field but reached Fazzano without mishap. The enemy harrassed the crossing point on Savena Creek continually with mortar fire and at intervals placed a deadly stream of machine gun fire down the trail from San Lucia. G Company moved in later with supplies for F Company and every thing was ready to continue the attack. (30)

The attack jumped off at 2230 hours, one hour late, under a machine gun and mortar preparation from H Company. Both rifle companies worked up along the cliff north of Fazzano, G Company this time made an effort to scale the cliff but an extremely alert enemy zeroed in with machine guns and mortars. The attack was confined to the cliff area because enemy machine guns continued to pour a steady stream of grazing fire down the trail from San Lucia. (See Map E) Enemy soldiers quietly slipped up to the edge of the cliff and dropped hand grenades down on the riflemen. As the attack slowed, the battalion commander ordered the displacement of some of H Company's weapons to counteract the enemy's actions.

The 3d Section of Mortars was started first, guided by the section sergeant. They were followed closely by the 1st Machine Gun Platoon. As the men were crossing the Savena Creek a mortar barrage caught the tail end of

(30) A-8.

the 1st Platoon, destroying one gun and killing one man and wounding four others. The 1st Platoon was placed in position northwest of Fazzano, but ^{were} were unable to go into action because of the constant enemy mortar fire harrassing the area. The mortar section had even more difficulty, they found many enemy shoe and trip mines in their area which had to be cleared before the guns could be put into operation. (See Map E) The ammunition bearers were caught in a mortar barrage as they returned across Savena Creek losing one man killed and six wounded. The mortar observer, Lt. Carmody, joined F Company at 0400 hours, with a sound powered phone connected to his section. By daylight the rifle companies were badly disorganized and intermingled, the attack had failed and the riflemen dug in hurriedly to hold the ground already gained. (31) (See Map E)

On the left, K Company reached the peak of Monterumici, but was driven back, badly cut to pieces with the loss of twenty men killed. The 1st Battalion was committed to regain the peak which was secured by Company C at 0800 hours on the 17th against stubborn opposition. The 361st Infantry on the right was still stopped below Brento. Company E moved into covered positions west of Laghi to support the 2d Battalion. (32)

On the afternoon of the 17th the assistant division commander again visited the 2d Battalion's Commander at Fazzano. Plans were made to commit all three companies

(31) A-8; (32) A-2, p. 11.

to break through the German ridge positions. H Company's forward weapons secured data during daylight to support this attack.

Early in the evening on the 17th, some scattered machine gun fire from the 2d Platoon hit in F Company's area. This was from the dispersion of some fire directed at the trail junction above Ca Di Mazza. The company commander ordered a replacement of gun barrels, but found that all available ones had been burned out. Replacement took considerable time and two of the guns were not ready for the night attack. Only light guns were available and these were not suitable for long range overhead fire at night.

In the late afternoon tank and tank destroyer direct fire was concentrated on the machine gun nests at San Lucia and Ca Di Mazza in an attempt to break up the enemy's bands of fire. The direct fire looked good but was not accurate enough to destroy the enemy guns hidden deep in their fortified holes.

All during the attack, after the initial jump off, companies were making separate attacks to break into the enemy strong points. Coordination was lost and the enemy was able to shift his limited artillery and mortar fire to break up each attack. Company L tried to gain the ridge west of San Lucia late in the afternoon of the 17th. This attack was supported by fire of H and G Companies from the vicinity of Fazzano. One platoon of L Company was caught crossing the open field below San Lucia and mowed down by

an enemy machine gun. The attack was abruptly halted! (33)

At 2030 hours, the 2d Battalion's attack again got underway with Company E leading up the cliff northwest of Fazzano. H Company's fire was split, half directed at Ca Di Mazza and the remainder at San Lucia. The forward guns were held to engage observed machine gun locations. Company E managed to scale the cliff, losing sixteen men injured in falls, and moved directly on Ca Di Mazza. Company G advanced along the cliff toward San Lucia with F Company on the left in the open field. Company E made the most progress, but was driven back after reaching a point 300 yards from Ca Di Mazza. Reorganizing, Company E shifted directions and moved on the right of G Company toward the ridge trail. The enemy reacted violently and swept the area with fire -- badly disorganizing the attack. H Company command group lost the radio operator and one messenger badly wounded by mortar fire. The instrument Corporal of the 1st Platoon was secured to replace the 300 radio operator. By 0800 on the 18th E Company reached the ridge trail and the enemy was found to be withdrawing. (34)

H Company Commander ordered an immediate displacement of all guns. The 1st Platoon was sent to positions near San Lucia to protect the left flank. The 2d Platoon displaced rapidly to Ca Di Mazza in time to aid E Company mop^{up} up some enemy soldiers at Onercia. The mortar platoon displaced by mule to positions behind the cliff northwest

(33) (34) A-8.

of Fazzano but did not get to fire. E Company pushed rapidly down the trail west of Mt. Adone at 1000 and the 2d Platoon displaced to a position above the trail junction to support this advance. (See Map C)

The enemy was withdrawing rapidly but many prisoners were captured as the battalion closed in. Moving in a column of companies, the battalion quickly cleared La Serra and advanced on Badolo. The enemy left numerous mines strewn along the road to slow the advance.

The heavy weapons moved along in the battalion column without going into any more firing positions. The 3rd Platoon was forced to hand carry part of the distance because the mules had difficulty dodging the mines along the road. As E Company reached Badolo a sharp fire fight developed. The 2nd Platoon, following closely behind E Company moved rapidly up to give fire support. The platoon sergeant, T/Sgt. Forbes, quickly placed a section of guns in position along the trail east of the village. He engaged in a duel with a Jerry machine gun located five hundred yards to the northeast. The accurate fire of our machine guns quickly cut the German gun crew to pieces with the loss of only one man wounded from the 2nd Platoon. The advance was halted as more enemy guns opened up from the hill to the east. Several riflemen were wounded and the Battalion S-3.

H Company Commander directed the heavy weapons into position from the battalion column. The mortars were emplaced off the trail fifty yards south of Badolo and started shelling the enemy positions. Plans were prepared to

continue the attack later that night. (35) (See Map C)

At the end of the third day the 2nd Battalion had made the greatest advance of the regiment and the other two battalions were shifted to push through Badolo toward the division objective, Mt. Mario, which was eventually taken on the afternoon of the 19th by the 2nd Battalion. With the capture of Monterumici and Mt. Mario, the German lines before Bologna were broken and the path was clear for a drive into the Po Valley.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The intense and detailed preparations by H Company prior to the attack was of great value in the ability of the gun crews to place an almost continuous volume of fire on the enemy. Machine guns were able to fire even when under an enemy artillery barrage. The location of all the weapons initially in one compact area, although contrary to good tactics, did facilitate the supply and control problems, especially for the night operations. The digging in and sandbagging of gun positions overcomes somewhat the necessity for greater dispersion and the use of alternate positions. At no time did the enemy discover the preparations going on right under his nose. This shows what can be done with heavy weapons if given adequate time to emplace them!

The battalion attack plan should have included an initial assault with at least two rifle companies. This

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lack of concentration of effort probably led to the failure of the unit to initially seize the ridge when the greatest advantages of shock and surprise were at hand. Continued disorganized and uncoordinated local efforts all along the line as the attack progressed through the second and third days gave the enemy a chance to concentrate his limited reserves and supporting fire.

The night attacks, although difficult to control were best suited for this situation because of the excellent observation maintained by the enemy. The few daylight attacks by other units were disastrous.

The rough terrain was the greatest factor that slowed the advancing riflemen and prevented them from closing in under cover of the supporting fires. The enemy remained extremely active even though under fire and allowed no one to approach his strong points. He covered the entire area with constant harrassing fire to keep the attacking troops disorganized. This action shows that supporting fire alone can do little to neutralize the enemy in a strongly fortified position, especially when the riflemen cannot close in before the enemy can recover and man his weapons.

The tanks and tank destroyers were employed too far back to make maximum use of their direct fire weapons. The tanks could have easily been employed in positions west of Laghi. This would have aided greatly in the neutralization of the enemy machine gun nests.

The initial displacement of the heavy weapons to Fazzano was too slow. Although thorough plans had been made

to keep them close up in the initial phase of the attack, the weapons should have been displaced early the second night in time to support the second attack on the ridge positions.

Little use was made of the mortar forward observers because of the excellent observation available to the mortar platoon leader and the company commander. Control of fires at night is best done through a central control system. A direct connection on to the battalion wire that followed the leading company aided greatly in the communication and control problems.

The problems of supply must be constantly watched and checked. The difficulty with machine gun barrels on the third day shows what can happen if this detail is overlooked. The company commander became too engaged in the tactical situation and failed to check on the technical details thus losing the fire of two guns. The constant insurance that guns will fire is a vital part in the employment of heavy weapons.

All of the heavy guns were hand carried for a distance of five thousand yards on the third day and were kept well forward in the attack. The quick engagement of the enemy at Badolo by Sergeant Forbes shows the value of using heavy guns even over difficult terrain. Mules can be used to aid in the displacement of mortars but difficulty can be expected when they are taken through mine fields.

During this operation the 2nd Battalion struggled against fanatic enemy opposition to eventually gain five

thousand yards on the third day. Over one hundred prisoners were captured and all organized resistance in the sector was broken, opening the way for further advances. Total losses for the Regiment were fifty killed, forty missing, two hundred and twenty wounded and one hundred and two non battle injuries. Of this total the 2nd Battalion lost slightly less than one third.

H Company's losses for the three days were two killed and fourteen wounded. Approximately 175,000 rounds of machine gun and 2,800 rounds of mortar ammunition were fired in support of the attack. A check of the enemy's fortified strong points easily showed why the supporting fire had little neutralization effect. Some of the positions were twenty feet underground with heavily re-enforced firing posts. German dead along the trail north of Ca Di Mazza showed the effect of some of the machine gun fire when the enemy made an attempt to re-supply or reenforce his strong points.

The attack although successful was slow in getting underway. It did not show the true aggressive spirit of a battalion that had led the division on many previous engagements. When men can see the end of a war in sight, they are more reluctant to close with the enemy and engage in a tough fight.

LESSONS

1. Adequate time is needed to emplace heavy weapons in the preparation of an attack on a fortified position.

How heavy 2. Heavy guns can be hand carried for considerable distances even over rough mountainous terrain.

3. The digging in and sandbagging of guns prior to an attack overcomes the necessity for greater dispersion and the use of alternate positions.

*artillery
in G.S.
containing
ammunition* 4. A large amount of ammunition should be readily available at the guns if a heavy volume of fire is maintained. In mountainous terrain with difficult supply problems, the ammunition should be stockpiled at the gun positions prior to the attack.

5. With careful prior preparation and control, close overhead and supporting fires can be successfully conducted at night.

6. Supporting fire has little effect in the attack on a well prepared enemy position if the riflemen cannot close in rapidly to take advantage of the fires.

7. Technical details of supply for heavy weapons must be constantly checked to insure that all guns will fire throughout the operation.

8. A system of using guides to displace weapons at night is necessary during an attack.

9. Early displacement in an attack to get short range direct fire is necessary to adequately neutralize an aggressive enemy.

10. A well coordinated attack is necessary to prevent the enemy from concentrating his reserves and fire power to break up local efforts.

11. Heavy direct fire weapons, located close in, are necessary to blast out enemy fortified machine gun nests.

12. Wire communication can be successfully employed even over difficult terrain in a slow moving attack.