

History Of Operations
1-31 May, 1944

Period 1-9 May.

During this time the Battalion was in a defensive position north of the City of MINTURNO, ITALY. Our patrols went out nightly and on several occasions made contact with the enemy. The men learned to distinguish their own outgoing shells from the enemy's and in addition to sense the direction and distance of incoming shells. On 7 May, the battalion moved back to the rest area in MONDRAGONE, where it was reequipped and prepared for offensive combat.

Period 9-12 May.

The Battalion, less Co B and Co D, which had remained attached to the 351st and 338th Inf, respectively, moved from the rest area shortly after dark on the night of 9 June and moved into the 85th Div reserve assembly area west of the City of MINTURNO. The entire area was heavily blanketed with smoke to conceal all movement. In the reserve area the battalion prepared to move out in the attack at any moment. The area was under constant enemy observation during daylight hours. On the afternoon of 11 June orders of the day issued by General Sir HAROLD ALEXANDER, Allied Commander in Italy, and General MARK CLARK, commanding the Fifth Army, were read to all men. The attack order was issued by Army at 1730 and the attack across the front jumped off at 2300. At 0300 on the morning of the 22th, Co A was attached to the 339th Inf and moved out, and at 0530 the remainder of the battalion, including Co B, which had rejoined the night previous, was attached to the 339th Inf and moved by foot to an assembly area south of TRUMENSUOLI, arriving there at 0930. During the march and later in the assembly area, troops were subjected to heavy artillery fire and several casualties resulted. Co D remained attached to the 338th Inf. The Battalion C.P. was established in a building south of TRUMENSUOLI HILL, where space was shared with the 3rd Bn of the 337th Inf, units of which were also attached to the 339th.

Period 12-16 May.

At 0600 on the morning of 12 ^{May} June, Lt. Col. A.R. SCHMIDT, commanding the Battalion, and his S-3, proceeded to the forward C.P. of the 339th Inf in the City of Trumensuoli to receive orders. The 1st Bn was to attack Hill 69 to the North of TRUMENSUOLI, and then push on to take Hill 66, to the left of 69. A route for the approach march was selected and at 1100 the Battalion commander, his staff, and rifle company commanders, went to the forward O.P. of the 339th Inf to look over the terrain. While they were doing this, an enemy shell landed in the center of the group seriously wounding Col SCHMIDT, Capt. RUGH R. BALLANTINE, Commanding Co B, and 1st Lt. W. R. CODDINGTON, commanding Co. A. Major ARNOLD L. SANDERS assumed command of the battalion. As it was too late to make a ground reconnaissance, he and the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants of the rifle companies were briefed by the battalion S-3 and returned to prepare the troops to move out. At 1315, the battalion moved from its assembly area, scheduled to attack at 1400. A request was made to delay the attack until 1415 so that the

the new leaders could be oriented more thoroughly, but this was denied at at 1345 the forward C.P. was established on Hill 119. Troops continued until reaching CAPPO D'AQUA, a waist deep stream fifteen feet wide running behind Hill 69. At 1400 the attack jumped off with the stream as the LD. Co C had the left sector and Co A the right sector, with Co B in close support. Since Co D was still attached to the 338th Inf, no heavy weapons support was available. Big men were chosen to lead the attack and they were instructed to plunge through the stream as rapidly as possible, to give confidence to the men following. Sel-dom was the attacking force out of enemy observation and artillery fire was heavy.

On the lower reverse slope of Hill 69 were the remnants of the 3rd Bn, 339th Inf. and Co K, 337th Inf, who had previously taken both Hill 69 and Hill 66, but had been forced back by large counterattacking forces. After more than an hour of fighting, Hill 69 was completely in our hands and at 1630, Hill 66 was attacked. The initial attack on the latter was repulsed by strong small arms and artillery fire. The enemy's defense included bunkers with walls of concrete two feet thick supported by steel beams. Our casualties were severe and troops withdrew to Hill 69, where they wer reorganized for the second attack at 1830. This attack was preceded by a ten minute artillery barrage which utilized every artillery piece in the Second Corps: 12 battalions, 120 guns, ranging from 105mm to 240mm. Opposition was stubborn and it was necessary to probe each emplacement and hole before the hill was finally taken. Casualties were heavy and after reorganizing and cleaning out the remainder of the enemy, company strengths on the hill were: Co, A, 19 men, one Officer; Co C, 25 men, two officers. At this point morale was at its lowest but from that time on it rose steadily. Shortly after midnight the tiny group was joined by a platoon of 30 men and one officer from Co. B.

On the morning of 13 June an enemy force of approximately 50 men stormed Hill 66 with machine pistols sweeping every inch of the ground. Our force had withdrawn to the reverse slope when the counterattack first materialized, and there they waited. When the enemy crossed the crest of the hill and were within 50 yards of our lines, the order to fire was given. Every man in the enemy group was killed. Artillery had been ordered by radio and it covered the forward slope, preventing reinforcements from joining the first counterattacking echelon.

Again on 14 June the enemy counterattacked, this time using considerably more artillery, but the same tactics were used by our troops with the same re-sults.

Enemy artillery, because of its complete visibility during daylight hours, was extremely heavy and accurate throughout the engagement. The rear C.P. south of TRUMENSUOLI, was shelled daily until it was reduced to a shambles. The trail leading to the front was also shelled heavily, causing many casualties in supply trains, litter teams and replacement groups.

Adding to the difficulty of bringing up supplies and replacements was a mine-field, composed of stake-type anti-personnel mines, planted on the north side of CAPBO D'AQUA. Since they could not be cleared during the day because of enemy observation and direct small arms fire, men from the battalion ammunition and Pioneer Platoon removed them at night, but before they could be removed they caused several casualties and considerable fear among replacements and supply trains. In one group which went forward, the leading men stepped on mines and before the rest of the party could be organized into a column which could safely pass through

the field, the men had scattered. Courageous leadership of an officer, several NCOs and privates got the men and supplies through safely. However, on the night of 14 May, a group of 75 replacements carrying supplies started from the rear C.P. Fifteen of this number finally reach Hill 66. The remainder had been scattered by artillery and mines and many were wounded. On the night of 15 May, we succeeded in getting 80 replacements and 14 officers into positions on Hill 66. One hundred were originally dispatched, along with 16 officers but 22 casualties were incurred in the shellfire and minefield.

Medical personnel performed a difficult task with great success removing the scores of litter cases and walking wounded and in evacuating them quickly. On 14 May alone more than 100 litter cases were evacuated and during the period 12-16 May more than 500 wounded, walking and litter, had been evacuated through the battalion aid station. In addition to the regular battalion litter section, additional men for this purpose came from Co A, 310 Med Bn, the battalion anti-tank platoon, Div Band, and 8th QM Co. Squads of litter bearers were established in a relay station halfway between the front lines and the aid station. Some men, however, had to wait many hours before being evacuated from the battlefield, one group of 25 men being discovered more than 24 hours after the area in which they had been moving was covered by a heavy enemy barrage.

Communications and maintenance throughout the operation were excellent. Wire communication existed between the forward and rear C.P.'s and despite the heavy shelling which necessitated a wire crew out constantly, rarely was communication out. An SCR 300 radio net was used for communication with the rifle companies and one was stationed at the rear CP. At no time were communications completely out.

A supply DF was established near the rear CP and operated so that socks, rations, ammunition and equipment could be sent forward. Light kitchens were maintained to feed replacements, wounded men, and stragglers. Supply trains moving forward were composed of cooks, casuals, members of the ammunition and Pioneer Platoon and Anti Tank Platoon of the Battalion, and members of Co D when they rejoined the battalion.

Estimated casualties for the operation included: WIA, 235; KIA, 21 EM, 5 Off. Non battle casualties, 40. Missing in Action: 15 (most of these were killed).

Early on the morning of 16 May the battalion received word that it would be relieved from that position and at 1130 the battalion returned to the original assembly area, where the men were given clean clothing, food and rest.

The strategic location of Hills 66 and 69, protected by CAPPO D'AQUA CREEK, was such that they dominated a valley which ran generally east and west and which was north of the hill mass 53, 79, 113W, 119, and 113 E, and south of the hill commanded by CASTLE (NORATO). After the 338th and 339th had taken the south hill mass, the enemy on 69 prevented further forward movement across the valley.

Upon the success of our attack the units on our flanks were able to reduce Cave D'AR -- . Upon the success of our attack the units on our flanks CAVE D'ARGILLA and Hill 108, beginning the final phase of the breakthrough of the GUSTAV LINE'S western anchor.

Period 16 May, 21 May.

Following his loss of the GUSTAV LINE, the enemy fell back rapidly with Allied forces in hot pursuit. The 1st Bn moved past SANTA MARIA INFANTE in regimental reserve and into TRIVIA. The Div on 17 May had taken its objective the town of Maranola, and the Bn was assigned to outpost the mountain to the northwest, MT. S. MARIA, our troops organizing positions there on the night 16-17 May. There was little enemy contact except for isolated groups and snipers and our forces continued to advance through FORMIA, a shell-crushed city on the Tyrhennian seacoast. The battalion was placed in regimental reserve in an area six miles north of GAETA on 20 May. On the morning of the 21st it moved out in support of the 2nd Bn and marched to an assembly area three miles north of FONDI. Here the battalion was given a separate objective, to capture the city of TERRACINA, 11 miles to the north, above the flooded PONTINE MARSHES and at the western slope of MT. CROECE. In this section the enemy had placed a formidable delaying force and during the approach march, with Co B as the point the battalion met resistance five miles west of MOUNT ST. BAGGIO.

Several truck loads of enemy troops had been rushed to the end of the TERRACINA AQUEDUCT, where they occupied prepared positions from which small arms and mortars covered a long stretch of Highway 7.

Period from 21-26 May.

The forward elements of the march column underestimated the strength of this opposition, since only a few shots were fired at the start of the fight. It developed, however, that a considerably larger force occupied commanding and it was necessary to commit Co C, which killed and captured an estimated 50 Germans. The opposition was cleared after a two hour fire fight and the battalion proceeded.

Further and more serious opposition developed on the outskirts of TERRACINA. The point of the march column was within 500 yards of the city proper, having reached there without any opposition, when automatic small arms opened up on it. A beach known to be mined was on the left of the road and high bluffs lines the right side of the road. Tanks which had been attached to the Bn. were committed and were stopped by a crater road block and small arms fire. A covering force was left and the Battalion withdrew, the rifle companies placed in position three abreast on the northern and forward slope of MT. CROCE. When dawn came a half hour later, it was discovered that we had by-passed a large portion of the enemy's delaying force, which was dug in on top of the mountain. This force delivered considerable fire, pinning down the rifle companies and rover snipers armed with machine pistols caused considerable trouble. Patrols wiped out some of this opposition so that late in the afternoon of 22 May our troops were able to withdraw. They were moved to the reverse slope of Mt. Croece and followed a rolling barrage, completely wiping out the enemy force.

Although it could have been more serious because of the enemy situation, this contact cost the battalion more than 100 casualties, including the company commanders of B and D Companies, 1st Lt. ROSARIO M. SPINA and 1st Lt. FRANCIS W. MOORE, both of whom were killed. Following the subsequent capture of the town many cleverly concealed positions were found, designed for all types of weapons from a rifle to 88mm guns. Most of these positions were along the high embankments along Highway 7 leading into TERRACINA, but though used with some effect, these emplacements were designed to defend against an attempted landing from the sea.

While the 1st Bn was clearing out opposition on the western slopes of Mt. Croce, the 3rd Bn was advancing and cleaning out the eastern slope. The 3rd Bn then swung to the right and took commanding ground above the city. At the same time 2nd Battalion was moving down the highway and 1st Bn was reorganizing in regimental reserve. On the afternoon of 23 May, the 1st Bn was committed and moved to the right flank of the regiment, tying in with the 3rd Bn. During the night of 23-24 May a patrol from the 1st Bn scouted the city and encountered no enemy. Shortly after daybreak another patrol advanced through the city and found nothing. The city was secured and troops were reequipped while the battalion remained there until the morning of 26 May. During this time troops had a chance to swim in the sea, following the clearing of a beach of mines by the engineers.

Period 26-31 May

Early on the morning of 26 May the battalion moved by truck to the vicinity of SEZZA. The enemy had been moving at top speed and the battalion's mission was to protect the right flank of the division and to outpost the range of hills due south of PREPERNO. During the night 26-27 May patrols were sent into Preperno and reported no enemy contact. Our troops remained in position there until the afternoon of 27 May, when the battalion was withdrawn. On the evening of 27 May, the Division was placed in Army reserve and moved to the vicinity of SABAUDIA. On the morning of 30 May, we moved by motor and marching to the positions occupied by the 30th Inf, 3rd Div, east of the City of LARIANO. The city was located 600 yards to our front. Immediately to our front was a railroad track running through a deep ravine and on our right flank was the railroad station. The station was the first objective of an attack which jumped off at 1300 hours on 31 May. B Co reduced this objective and with Co C on its right, advanced in a northerly direction, bypassing the city. Co B met opposition on the outskirts of the city consisting of high velocity artillery and automatic small arms fire. Co C and Co A were able to by-pass this trouble and moved forward to the hills above the town where they organized positions for the night. In the meantime, Co B neutralized the enemy fire and under cover of darkness was reorganized and moved up with the rest of the battalion.