

~~CANCELLED~~
~~REPORT OF THE ADVANCE GUARD~~
~~DOWNWARD ADJACENT~~
REPORT OF OPERATIONS - SEPTEMBER
PERIOD 1 SEPTEMBER - 11 SEPTEMBER

The Regiment was in a bivouac area near Certaldo, Italy as the month opened. Troops were engaged in a program of training which stressed firing of weapons, mountain combat, physical conditioning, scouting and patrolling. All organizations completed final preparations for engaging in the new Fifth Army offensive against the vaunted Gothic Line.

"Salerno Day," 9 September was celebrated as a holiday with a Regimental formation. Awards presented included the Distinguished Service Cross to Technical Sergeant Drayton E. Norwood, Company "L", and a Presidential Citation to Company "G" for outstanding performance of duty in action in taking and holding Hill 66 near Trensueli at the start of the Gustav Line break-through.

The Army attack order gave the II Corps the mission of penetrating the Gothic Line and debouching into the Po Valley on a three division front. The 85th Division with the 358th and 359th Infantry Regiments abreast was to make the main effort. Initial objectives were Mount Altusse and Mount Verruca, both over 3200 feet in height. The 357th Infantry was initially in division reserve with orders to follow the advance of the 358th Infantry by bounds.

PERIOD 12 SEPTEMBER - 15 SEPTEMBER

On 12 September at 1130 the Regiment moved through Florence to an assembly area near Bivigliano (8381), completing the move by 1930. Division announced the time of attack as 130600 September. At the designated time all along the front infantry troops began to move forward and the battle for the Gothic Line had commenced. Good progress was made at first as enemy outposts were forced to pull back. Just before dark on 13 September the Regiment moved into another assembly area north of the Sieve River near Borgo San Lorenzo. On division order, plans were made to repel counter-attacks in the zones of both assault regiments.

By 15 September resistance along the entire line stiffened as the main German position was reached, and forward movement virtually stopped. Pierce resistance and withering fire prevented our troops from taking Mount Altusse in the left sector. The right regiment with all reserves committed was also stalemated short of its initial objective. A break-through somewhere was necessary in order to relieve pressure along the entire line. At this time the 357th Infantry was alerted for possible commitment around the right of the division sector to pass through the 66th Infantry Brigade, 1st British Division, after they captured Mount Pratone (Hill 1081), to continue the attack to the north, and to assume boundaries and objectives of the 359th Infantry. This plan was put into effect, and at 1830 on 15 September the 3d Battalion marched to Grezzano with a mule train and extra litterbearers, prepared for immediate commitment. The Regimental CP opened near Luco di Mugello (9193).

PERIOD 16 SEPTEMBER - 21 SEPTEMBER

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At dawn the next day the 1st Battalion began the march to a forward assembly area and the 3d Battalion moved forward in the zone of the 1st British Division. The British at this time had advanced no further than Hill 938 which was over one thousand yards short of their objective, Mount Pratone. At 1000 the Commanding Officer, 357th Infantry assumed control of operations against Mount Pratone. The 3d Battalion was then ordered to pass through the 2nd Royal Scots and capture this hill. Higher headquarters sent word that it was imperative that Mount Pratone be taken as soon as possible. A prearranged plan of artillery fires on Hill 1080 was ordered and 1300 was set as the time of attack. Company "K", 359th Infantry, in the general vicinity of advance elements of the 3d Battalion was attached to the battalion and ordered to occupy Monte Signorini. In the meantime both 1st and 2nd Battalions were ordered to move to forward assembly areas around (937959).

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REPORT OF OPERATIONS - SEPTEMBER (CONT'D)

At 1330 "I" and "K" Companies were moving forward meeting sniper and mortar fire. By mid-afternoon heavy machine gun fire from high ground to the right (Hills 973 and 885) was holding up the advance and a platoon of Company "K" was ordered around to the east of Hill 885. Company "L" prepared to exploit this advance, if successful. The 1st Battalion was given orders to move up behind the 3d Battalion and assist in the capture of Mount Pratone, since it was now evident that this hill was a key point on the enemy main defense line and that its capture would be resisted with all possible strength. By dark the 1st Battalion officers had completed their reconnaissance and arrangements had been made to commit the battalion to the east of the 3d Battalion when it arrived. All during the night Company "L" continued its advance and by morning was out of contact with battalion headquarters. The 1st Battalion, moving up the draw east of Hill 885, by noon had reached stream junction 710. At 1345 an urgent message from Company "L" said that they were on Ridge 1018-1019 but that friendly fire on that point had caused twelve casualties and forced them to withdraw five hundred yards. This fire was later determined to be heavy British mortars. Company "I", unable to advance to the north from Hill 928 along the high ground, pulled back and moved to the west and then up the Rampolli draw. By 1600 this company had taken Hill 803 just 800 yards short of the objective. Two hours later, in the face of heavy mortar concentrations, they had advanced further and taken some prisoners, and an hour later they were on Mount Pratone. By 2230 the entire 3d Battalion was on the objective and had organized it for defense.

Corps intelligence reports indicated that local withdrawals might take place during the night and patrols were sent forward to maintain contact. Although the number of men lost to enemy fire was relatively low, the troops of both assault battalions were fatigued by the backbreaking climbing, and lack of sleep since the beginning of the attack. It was decided to pass the fresh 2nd Battalion through the forward elements to take Mount Fellone (Hill 1073), a peak just as formidable as the hills already taken. At 180315 the 2nd Battalion moved to a forward assembly area south of Pratone, closing in by 0730. At this time communication was established with the 1st Battalion and it was learned that the battalion's forward company was just north of Hill 945. The battalion was ordered to take Hills 1018 and 1019. Hill 1037 was given to the 2nd Battalion as its first objective and at 1000 the attack began. Hill 1037 was occupied without much fighting. The 2nd Battalion then pushed aggressively forward toward Mount Fellone (Hill 1073) from the south and west against scattered resistance which stiffened sharply as the crest of the hill was reached. At dark the enemy battalion defending Fellone had been forced to withdraw to the northern tip of the hill. All day long the 1st Battalion situation remained confused as "B" and "C" Companies struggled to gain the summit of Hills 1018 and 1019 hampered by heavy fire and difficult terrain. At 1640, Company "I" was sent to the northwest to make contact with a 339th Infantry company on Hill 690. This point was not on the main ridge line and not thought to be strongly defended. Plans were made for the 1st and 2nd Battalions to continue the attack at 190530 September and troops were resupplied by mile.

After a thirty minute preparation, the two battalions moved forward with Mount Acuto (Hill 1058) as the initial objective. The 3d Battalion was ordered to follow the route taken by Company "I" and assemble south of Mosoheta. At mid-morning the 2nd Battalion was at the base of Acuto and making ready to assault it when shell fire from the adjacent British artillery caused eighteen casualties and disorganized Company "F". At 1045 this was stopped and Acuto was taken. The 3d Battalion had taken Hill 690 and their patrols made rapid progress to the north. The 1st Battalion was moving forward echeloned to the right rear in order to protect our exposed right flank. The 2nd and 3d Battalions made phenomenal progress during the day in an exhausting cross country advance that by dark had netted Hills 849 and 739 and fifty prisoners. This rapid progress of the front line had far outdistanced supply facilities and created a 6000 yard gap on our right flank. The night was spent in resupply and evacuation of casualties, and 0900 was set as the hour of attack the next day.

On the morning of 20 September the 3d Battalion captured Mount Montale (Hill 853), and the 2nd Battalion battled their way north across the Santerno River to San Pellegrino and Hill 725. From these vantage points both battalions could see many small groups and gun positions which were brought under fire with good results. Patrols were sent out to round up prisoners. On the right flank Hills 1083 and 1090

still remained uncaptured. This mission was given to the 1st Battalion. After a ten hour march the hill mass was taken without enemy contact.

During the night arrangements were made to pass two battalions of the 88th Division through our front line and this was accomplished the next morning. Before the relief was completed both 3d and 1st Battalions became engaged in minor skirmishes killing many enemy troops and capturing 23. The battalions assisted in the passage of lines and then assembled northwest of Moscheta on a two hour alert.

PERIOD 22 SEPTEMBER - 30 SEPTEMBER

The next day the troops rested and at 1520 the regiment was alerted to pass through the 339th Infantry the night of 22-23 September. This plan was rescinded when the one battalion of the 339th Infantry was forced to withdraw from Mount Coloreta. The 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, however, apparently found a weak spot in the enemy defense line and pushed rapidly to the north in the Bordignano sector. The new order directed the 337th Infantry (less the 3d Battalion) to move to an assembly area east of Firensuola immediately, begin the advance from there at 230600, by-pass resistance in the Coloreta area, contact the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry and place them under 337th Infantry control, and take the western slopes to La Fine.

On the morning of 23 September the advance began with the battalions in column, 2d Battalion leading. The route followed the highway northeast to Camaggiore, then turned northwest along mule trails to La Torta (Hill 690). Here the 2nd Battalion column was shelled but continued to move forward. At 1600 the Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry reported he was on the objective, Hill 781, and receiving heavy enemy artillery fire. The 2nd Battalion was then ordered to take over the position on Hill 781. This was completed at 2030, and the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry assembled near Visignano in regimental reserve. The 1st Battalion remained in a defensive position around Hill 690 during the night. A message from division ordered present positions held until further orders were issued. Though few enemy troops were seen during this advance, enemy heavy artillery constantly harassed the forward and rear areas.

This rapid advance had accomplished two important missions: first, the Radiosa-Castel San Pietro Road was cut south of Roco; second, vital high ground was seized before the enemy could send reinforcements to hold it. But the left flank was dangerously exposed as the adjacent regiment was just north of Firensuola, 5,500 yards to the rear.

At dawn on 24 September the 1st Battalion began the move up behind the 2nd Battalion, and at 0800 the 3d Battalion was released to regimental control and ordered to move by truck to the La Torta area. Partisans reported that one hundred Germans in Giugnola desired to surrender, and although arrangements were made to escort them through the lines the capitulation was never accomplished. Heavy enemy fire delayed the 1st Battalion but by mid-day they had assembled in the vicinity of Visignano. The first in a series of enemy attacks in small strength against the 2nd Battalion position occurred at 1530 but was repulsed by Company "H". During the early evening hours many targets were taken under fire as the enemy advanced toward our defensive position unaware that it was in our hands. Artillery fire was placed on two long lines of German infantry and a column of vehicles with lights streaming down the highway. The 3d Battalion closed in and bivouacked for the night near La Torta.

The next morning enemy prisoners reported that an attack against our line was planned. Enemy groups seen assembling in the open were scattered by our fire, and the only enemy to get near the position were fanatical raiding patrols that caused little damage. At noon the 1st Battalion was ordered to send one company to relieve Company "G" on the high ground east of Monsano and thus provide the 2nd Battalion with a reserve, since considerable enemy activity to the front indicated that the enemy might try to regain the ground held by the 2nd Battalion. Also one 1st Battalion company was ordered to Hill 954 to relieve the left company of the 349th Infantry. At 1500 a directive from division postponed our impending attack several days, and ordered the 337th Infantry to take over control of the entire Mount La Fine hill mass. The 3d Battalion was ordered to relieve the 2nd Battalion, 349th Infantry; the 1st Battalion was ordered to relieve the 3d Battalion, 349th Infantry. By midnight both changes were completed.

REPORT OF OPERATIONS - SEPTEMBER (CONT'D)

Prisoners taken during the night said that enemy commanders indicated that the Mount La Fine ridge must be retaken at any cost. During the day they kept constant pressure against the front line. Enemy patrols in some strength made continuous suicidal thrusts against Company "F" on Monsano and a group of 20 attacked Company "B" but all were repulsed.

The 27 September was an uneventful day except for continued enemy harassing fire which was returned many times over. Division ordered that il Poggio be seized and occupied by the 3d Battalion after their relief on il Sasso by a battalion of the 349th Infantry. The 1st Battalion, 349th Infantry was placed under command of the Commanding Officer, 337th Infantry.

During the morning of 28 September the turn-over was accomplished and the 3d Battalion occupied il Poggio without contact. Partisans reported that during the night the enemy withdrew, so the three battalions were ordered to send patrols north to the highway to determine if the enemy still held the small villages of Roco, Pincaldoli, and Giugnola. The 3d Battalion put one platoon on Hill 540 overlooking the highway as a blocking force.

The next day patrols reported the highway within the regimental sector in excellent condition and all towns evacuated by the enemy. Each of the patrols in Roco, Pincaldoli, and Giugnola was reinforced to the strength of a reinforced company. Division advised the regiment that a corps attack was set for 1 October, so orders were issued to move the battalions to a suitable line of departure.

On 30 September the 2nd Battalion assembled near Le Lane overcoming scattered enemy resistance on the way, and the remainder of the 3d Battalion moved to Giugnola. Field Order #25 was issued to all organizations with H-Hour at 010600 October, and another phase in the Italian campaign was ready to begin.

During the latter part of this month of offensive operations the regiment for the first time encountered the foul weather that is characteristic of an Italian winter. The front line soldier's life was made more miserable by the driving rain, the biting wind, and the constant cold and fog. But the factor that reduced the advance to a painstaking creeping forward inch by inch was the rugged terrain that provided the enemy with excellent delaying positions. Steep peaks of bare rock that towered over 3,000 feet in the air, bottomless valleys and gullies, and treacherous mountain trails made speed impossible.

Supply functions and evacuations worked efficiently despite swollen streams, destroyed bridges, and mud that rendered most secondary roads impassible. The regimental sector at no time during the advance contained a paved road and troops were supplied by mules of the 2nd and 9th Mule Groups (Italian). Company "A", 310th Engineer Battalion worked long hours to provide vehicle routes as close to the front line as possible. An outstanding example of their skill was the jeep trail from Lucco to Mount Pratone.

A total of 126 prisoners of war were captured during the month; most were from the Lehrbrigade, 306th, 362nd, and 716th Infantry Divisions. Upon interrogation many admitted that they had been without food for seven days.

The regiment went into combat with all organizations up to strength and a Casual Company of 436 men. Strength of the command as the period opened was as follows: 179 officers, 5 warrant officers, and 3,400 enlisted men. Attached were 11 officers and 246 enlisted men. At the end of the period the strength was as follows: 171 officers, 5 warrant officers, and 3,291 enlisted men.

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REPORT OF OPERATIONS - SEPTEMBER (CONT'D)

Decorations awarded this month:

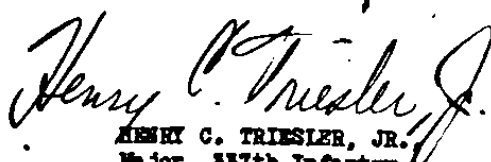
- Distinguished Service Cross - T/Sgt Drayton E. Norwood
- Legion of Merit - Lt Col Earl A. Madsen
 - Capt Robert E. Friauf
 - Sgt Rolland J. O'Connor
- 11 Silver Star Medals (1 posthumously)
- 72 Bronze Star Medals (2 posthumously, 1 missing in action)
 - 1 Oak Leaf Cluster to Bronze Star Medal
- 46 Purple Hearts
 - 17 Oak Leaf Cluster to Purple Hearts
- 289 Combat Infantryman Badges
- Citation of Unit - Company "C" cited for outstanding performance of duty in action, from 12-16 May 1944 near Tremensuoli, Italy.

Our battle casualties for the month were as follows:

	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>ENLISTED MEN</u>
Killed in action	1	29
Wounded in action	3	184
Missing in action	1	102
	<u>5</u>	<u>315</u>

Total casualties - 320

By order of Colonel HUGHES:


 HENRY C. TRIESLER, JR.
 Major, 537th Infantry
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