

Staff Department
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1949-1950

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 337TH INFANTRY
(85TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT CASONI DI ROMAGNA, NORTH
OF PIANCALDOLI, ITALY, 1 - 4 OCTOBER 1944
(NORTH APENNINES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Intelligence Officer)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION ATTACKING
AND HOLDING A KEY FEATURE IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

Captain Cecil H. Cates, Jr., Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	2
ORIENTATION.....	3
Introduction.....	3
The General Situation.....	5
Dispositions and Plan of the 337th Infantry.....	9
The Battalion Situation.....	9
NARRATION.....	14
The Night Attack on Hill 752.....	18
Counterattack on Hill 752.....	20
The Battalion Moves Forward.....	22
Summary.....	23
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	24
Terrain.....	24
Supporting Fires.....	25
The Enemy.....	26
Friendly Forces.....	26
LESSONS.....	27
MAP A Italy - Salerno to the Arno	
MAP B The North Apennines - Dispositions of 5th and 8th Armies	
MAP C Disposition of II Corps Troops	
MAP D Dispositions 3rd Battation 337th Infantry	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 Operations in Sicily and Italy (July 1943 to May 1945)
Department of Military Art and Engineering
US Military Academy, West Point, N.Y. 1945 (TIS Library)
- A-2 Fifth Army History Part VII
US Army, Fifth Army (TIS Library)
- A-3 From Salerno to the Alps
A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945
By Lt. Colonel Chester G. Starr (TIS Library)
- A-4 The 85th Infantry Division in World War II
By Paul L. Schultz (TIS Library)
- A-5 S-3 Journal Headquarters 1st Battalion 337th Infantry
(Possession Captain Robert Aycock, Capt., Infantry)
- A-6 Monthly Operations Report 85th Infantry Division 1944
(TIS Library)

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 337TH INFANTRY
(85TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT CASONI DI ROMAGNA, NORTH
OF PIANCALDOLI, ITALY, 1 - 4 OCTOBER 1944
(NORTH APENNINES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Intelligence Officer)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 337th Infantry, 85th US Division in the Battle around CASONI DI ROMAGNA, ITALY, 1 - 4 October 1944, during the Gothic Line Offensive.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events which led up to this action.

Early in September of 1943 the British Eighth and US Fifth Armies invaded the ITALIAN PENINSULA. These two Armies were under the command of the 15th Army Group. The British Eighth Army began their drive up the Italian East Coast. The Fifth US Army landed on the West Coast at SALERNO and pushed northward abreast of the British Eighth Army. (See Map A) (1)

By mid-November the Allied Armies had pushed northward against a succession of natural and prepared defenses; capturing NAPLES, FOGGIA and crossed the VOLTURNO RIVER to the line of the RAPIDO RIVER. Here, 75 miles north of SALERNO, Marshall Kesselring, the German Commander in ITALY, taking advantage of the mass of mountains lying between the central ridge of the APENNINES and the TYRRHENIAN SEA, 100 miles below ROME, had prepared a series of skillfully laid out defensive positions. The drive to the north lost impetus. (2)

(1) A-1, p.31,49

(2) A-1, p.51

After two months of exhausting fighting the Fifth Army had progressed but little. The amphibious landings at ANZIO, 22 January 1944, did not break this deadlock. (See Map A) (1)

Weeks of careful planning preceded the spring attack. Fresh divisions arrived from America. Among them the 85th and its sister Division the 88th. Both of these Divisions were known as the first Selective Service Divisions to enter combat. (2)

On 11 May 1944 the Allied Armies attacked. In quick succession CASINO fell, the ANZIO forces broke out of their beachhead, and ROME was taken. (See Map A) (3)

Working frantically to piece together sufficient forces to cover his retreat, Marshall Kesselring pulled his broken units back toward northern ITALY. Outnumbered and outmaneuvered, the German Army Group Southwest lost the greater portion of its 14th Army in the fighting below ROME, and barely succeeded in extracting its 10th Army from the shattered defenses of the GUSTAV LINE. (4)

Two days after the capture of ROME, Allied Forces crossed the ENGLISH CHANNEL to open the long awaited offensive in FRANCE. Two months later, on 15 August, 7th Army, made up of troops drawn from the MEDITERRANIAN THEATER, landed on the FRENCH RIVIERA. The action in FRANCE, which represented the major allied offensive in the west, took precedence over the ITALIAN CAMPAIGN. In all, nine full Infantry Divisions and the equivalent of a tenth left Fifth Army in the period prior to 1 August 1944 for FRANCE. (5)

Having reached the ARNO, Kesselring was ready to call a halt to the series of rear guard actions and retrograde

(1) A-1, p.69

(2) Personal knowledge A-2, p. 2

(3) A-1, p.78

(4) A-1, p.83 A-2, p. 2 4

(5) A-2, p. 3

movements. By throwing reserve divisions into the line and rushing reinforcements to battered divisions he had been able to restore a semblance of organization in his order of battle. The enemy had behind him now the rugged peaks of the northern APPENINES reinforced by a series of fixed defenses prepared by the TODT ORGANIZATION. These defenses were even stronger than those of the GUSTAV LINE. (See Map A) (1)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The mountain barrier, the northern APENNINES, extends from the LIGURIAN ALPS south of GENOA, southeast across the ITALIAN PENINSULA nearly to the ADRIATIC SEA below RIMINI. North of this barrier is the broad fertile plain of the POE RIVER, breadbasket and industrial center of southern Europe.

At its narrowest point between FLORENCE and BOLOGNA these mountains are approximately 50 miles wide and rise to a height well over 5000 feet. It was at this point that Fifth Army planned to force a passage into the POE VALLEY. The attack was to follow generally highway 65 between these two cities. (See Map B)

All roads are marked by twisting curves, sharp gradients and narrow defiles; bridges are often hard to bypass; and landslides are frequent even without the assistance of German demolition experts. Cart tracks and mule trails often are the only local routes of communication.

The mountains are covered with a few chestnut trees, scrub oak and some pine forest wherever there is soil, but many of the mountains have precipitous, bare rocky slopes, razorback ridges and occasional sheer cliffs.

(1) A-2, p. 3,7

Late in September the rains begin, mountain streams change to raging torrents in a few hours time. Fog and mist accompanying cloudy days often reduce visibility to nearly zero. By late October snow falls.

The Germans began the work of constructing the defenses in the northern APENNINES when Fifth Army was first landing on the peninsula 200 miles and 12 months to the south.

Marshall Kesselring, by the end of August, counted twenty seven German and Italian Divisions but his total forces would not have mustered sufficient troops to make up 15 fresh full divisions. (1)

Operation orders issued on 16 August by the Allied Armies in ITALY directed the 8th British Army on the East Coast to attack and force an entry into the POE VALLEY by way of RIMINI. This action was to be launched after a show of force by Fifth Army on the left to draw as many of the enemy troops as possible away from the Eighth Army front.

Intro
After 8th Army attack was under way and upon information that enemy troops were pulled from in front of Fifth Army, General Clark was to attack. The Fifth Army attack would be made with two corps abreast; IV Corps on the left, British XIII Corps on the right, the US II Corps was to follow XIII Corps and pass through it north of FLORENCE. The US II Corps was directed to attack north astride highway 65 and debouch into the POE VALLEY in the BOLOGNA area. XIII Corps was to protect the right flank of Fifth Army when passed through by II Corps. (2)

Operations commenced on 26 August when the Eighth British Army struck near the East Coast and Fifth Army had

(1) A-2, Chapter 1 p. 13

(2) A-2, p. 19

attacked into the mountains facing its long front. By 4 September the British and Poles had fought their way forward over difficult terrain to within five miles of RIMINI. The XIII British Corps, then a part of Fifth Army, had successfully moved into the southern outpost of the GOTHIC LINE north of FLORENCE. II Corps then assembled behind XIII British Corps, passed through them and struck the center of the main barrier of the GOTHIC LINE on 13 September in the vicinity of FUTA PASS. XIII Corps then reverted to Eighth Army. (See Map B) (1)

By 28 September II Corps, with four divisions in line, had outflanked and captured FUTA PASS, pushing northward to take RADICOSA PASS, the northern watershed of the APENNINES. The 88th Division, then the right flank division of II Corps, had made a serious threat to break through into the POE VALLEY by way of the ^{N5} SANTERNO VALLEY. However, German reserves were thrown into this sector, and on the 28th hard fighting still continued there. (See Map B) (2)

The day after the fall of RADICOSA PASS II Corps issued orders for the resumption of the Corps offensive to the north. D Day was set for 1 October. (3)

Terrain North of RADICOSA PASS the drainage pattern of the streams on each side of highway ^{N5} 65 was generally northward with ridge lines lying between and paralleling the streams. Traversing ridges and tributary streams, characterized by dominating hill masses and deep gullies, cut across this pattern at intervals of three to four miles. At such intervals the hard pressed enemy was afforded a series of delaying positions which he developed as time permitted.

- (1) A-2, p. 52, 53
(2) A-2, p. 108
(3) A-2, p. 111

Plan II Corps

For the October drive General Keyes planned to employ all four of his infantry divisions attacking simultaneously on a broad front. Although the 88th Division thrust on the right flank had failed to carry through, it had drawn considerable elements of the enemy from the central sector.

(See Map C)

The 91st Division would continue to advance astride highway 65. To the right the 85th Division, initially on a 6 mile front, would advance between ^{NS} ZENA CREEK and the SILLARO RIVER, thus working down the IDICE RIVER and the hill mass on either side. These two divisions were to form the spearhead of the attack with emphasis to lie in the 85th Divisions sector. The 34th Division, in addition to attacking north, was to protect Corp left flank; to the east the 88th Division was to perform a similar function on the Corps right flank. This flank extended almost at right angles to the rear for 18 miles. (See Map C)

For this attack II Corps would be without a reserve. In order to provide a reserve General Keyes ordered each division to hold out one regiment and to rotate the regiments in line approximately every five days. Corps plans were so arranged that coordinated attacks would be launched at intervals which coincided with the appearance of fresh units in the line. In practice this five days system corresponded closely with the rate at which each enemy defense line was developed. (1)

The 85th Divisions attack plan called for the 339th and 337th Infantry Regiments to attack abreast; the 339th to attack along the ridge line to the west of the IDICE RIVER;

the 337th to attack east of the IDICE RIVER, with its right flank along the SILLARO RIVER. The 338th Infantry was to be in Division reserve and would relieve the 339th on approximately 5 October. (See Map C) (1)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 337TH INFANTRY

On 28 September the 337th Infantry held a bridgehead ^{N/C} over the SILLARO RIVER in its left Battalion zone. The Regimental front held by two battalions was approximately 6000 yards wide. Its reserve Battalion was 1500 yards to the ^{NS} rear defending MOUNT LAFINE the dominating terrain feature in the Regimental sector. (See Map D) (2)

Colonel Hughes future plan of advance directed two battalions to attack abreast with initial objectives: the high ground in the vicinity of ^{map D} SPEDALETTO for the 2nd Battalion on the left; and ^{map D} CASONI DI ROMAGNA in the right or 3rd Battalion sector; 1st Battalion to remain initially in reserve and to follow the Regimental center. The Regimental attack was to be supported by Company A 756 Tank Battalion, Company A 805 Tank Destroyer Battalion, and its normal attachment of engineers and medics. Due to the nature of the terrain Division Artillery would remain under Division control. Initially Colonel Hughes allocated the tank company to 3rd Battalion with one platoon of tank destroyers attached. (See Map D) (3)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

On 28 September 3rd Battalion had moved north from MOUNT LAFINE into the town of GUIGNOLA and had deployed along the south banks of the SILLARO RIVER. (See Map D) On 29 September Battalion had sent patrols across the river to the

-
- (1) A-4, p. 157
(2) A-5, p. 49, A-6
(3) A-5, p. 49

heights of MOUNT LA GAVINA (Hill 608) and to the cluster of houses at IL RIO. These patrols found both places unoccupied; however, considerable activity was noticed on the ridge above Hill 608; in the vicinity of SPEDALETTO (Hill 732) and on Hills 774, 750, 751 and 752; on the C di GUZZO ridge above IL RIO (Hills 550 and 547). Some mortar fire had been encountered around IL RIO. (See Map D) Late in the evening of 29 September a German patrol was discovered in the river valley about 400 yards west of GUIGNOLA. After a sharp fire fight Company K managed to capture one of this patrol. Information from this prisoner indicated the German main defenses ran along the ridge SPEDALETTO northeast to the junction of the CASA di GUZZO ridge then southeastward down the shoulder to Hills 658, 550 and 547. (See Map D) (1) Based on this information Colonel Madsen, 3rd Battalion Commander, directed Captain Victor R. Savacool, commanding Company L, to move his company to MOUNT LA GAVINA (Hill 608) and for Captain John M. Davies, to move his company, Company I, to the vicinity of IL RIO. This move was accomplished by 1000 September 30. Company K remained in defensive position forward of the town of GUIGNOLA.

Two observation posts were established; one occupied by the Battalion Commander, in a three story building on the north edge of town; the other occupied by the Intelligence Section on MOUNT GAVINA (Hill 608). (See Map D) (1) ^{NS}

The troop Commander from the 85th Reconnaissance Troop reported to Battalion Command Post about noon to state that his troop would provide security for the right flank of the Division and that it would establish and maintain contact with the 3rd Battalion and the 88th Division on its right.

(1) Personal Knowledge A-6

Colonel Madsen at this time requested this officer to accept the responsibility of the valley road and the low ridges adjacent to it. This the Troop Commander did. (See Map D) (1)

Forward movement on the 28th of September would have been impossible. The Battalion on its present position was now being supported by artillery firing at its maximum ranges. Movement of the artillery forward in this roadless country would be no mean task. (2) Further it had been anticipated that the Battalion would continue its attack northward on rather short notice, so prior to the movement of Companies I and L on the 29th, Colonel Madsen had given all subordinate commanders his general plan for the expected attack. All day of the 30th, Unit Commanders and Battalion Staff spent in vigorous reconnaissance. Highway 6429 had been opened and the Battalion was completely resupplied. Hot chow was the order of the day. (See Map D) (1)

The weather todate had been wet and extremely foggy. All movement off of the only hard surface road (6429) was extremely difficult, men and animals were constantly bogging down in the bare muddy fields and the few foot paths within the area. Due to the fog visual reconnaissance had been limited at best. All streams within the sector were raging torrents. Prospects for brighter weather were slim. (3)

The moral^e of 3rd Battalion was high considering the adverse weather, difficult terrain and hard fighting with which they had had to contend for the past two weeks. The enemy had been defeated with each encounter and progress, though slow by normal standards, had been rapid for the mountainous terrain such as 3rd Battalion had been operating.

(1) Personal Knowledge

(2) Personal statement Colonel Oliver W. Hughes, C.O. 337th Infantry, 29 October 1944

(3) A-6

The toll of casualties had not as yet had its effects upon the Battalion; companies were on the average of 3/4 strength. All senior officers, including company commanders, executive officers and battalion staff, had been with the Battalion for over two years. All platoon leaders had had combat experience. Cooperation had reached a high peak of efficiency. In the days ahead this was to prove the deciding factor in the successful operation of this Battalion. (1)

Little was known of the exact composition of the enemy forces to the front. Elements of two German divisions had been identified. The 362nd and 44th German Infantry Divisions. (2)

2c | The Battalion zone of action (See Map D) ran generally northward from GUIGNOLA. On the right, the SALERÒ RIVER VALLEY formed an approach into the enemy positions; however, this terrain would be under constant observation by any enemy in the adjacent hills. On the left, the boundary was formed by the extension of the MOUNT CANDA RIDGE running generally northeast to within the Battalion sector thence northward perpendicular to the Battalion front. Before the immediate objective, CASONI DI ROMACNA, lay the ridge formed by hills 750, 658, 550 and 547. This ridge was formed by two intermediate streams that joined the SALERÒ RIVER north of GUIGNOLA. The ridge was characterized by muddy eroded slopes and bare rocky basins formed by many intermediate rivulets at the base.

Only one house was on this ridge, at hill 550 (C di Guzzo). On the morning of 30 September Colonel Hughes, Regimental Commander, had received the Division attack order. By noon Colonel Madsen was called to Regiment to receive this

(1) Personal knowledge

(2) A-4, p. 157

order. It was basically as Colonel Madsen had anticipated. H-hour was to be at 0600 1 October. Upon leaving Regiment, about 1500, Colonel Madsen and his staff made a hasty reconnaissance of the 3rd Battalion sector of advance. By 1800 hours Company Commanders and Battalion Staff met with Colonel Madsen in the Battalion CP to receive the attack order. Hardly had the issuance of the order started when Captain John M. Davies, commanding Company I, was rendered a casualty by a shell burst in the courtyard outside the OP. The executive officer, Lt. Minor Couch, was sent for. (1)

*hadn't
they been
there?
Couch
7*

The situation as related to the enemy was already known to everyone. The objectives assigned to the Battalion, as previously stated, were C di GUZZO (Hill 550) and CASONI DI ROMAGNA (Hill 752). The emphasis of the entire Division would be to assist 3rd Battalion in securing these two objectives. To support this attack A Company of the 756 Tank Battalion would be allocated to 3rd Battalion as were priority of fires from the 328th Field Artillery Battalion. Colonel Madsen's plan was for Company K to launch its attack from hill 608 northward to hill ^{2 3 mi} 750. Company I was to move directly against hill 550. Company L would remain in reserve on hill 608 and would move northwest to hill 774 and thence down the ridge to relieve Company K on CASONI DI ROMAGNA. A platoon of heavy machine guns would be attached to each attacking company. 81mm mortars would remain in general support from in rear of GUIGNOLA. The anti-tank platoon (at this time equipped with 50 caliber machine guns in place of their 57mm anti-tank guns) would also be in general support from positions on hill 608 and 511. (See Map D) (1)

(1) Personal knowledge

Air support for the attack on 1 October was to be performed by the 86th Fighter Bomber Group. Rover Joe (a system of tactical air support control performed by light aviation) was assigned to the 337th Infantry. Arrangements were made with the artillery for marking targets with smoke. Flights of eight P-47 Thunderbolts were to be available to Rover Joe every 1/2 hour during the period 0700 to 1100 1 October. (1)

The 328th Field Artillery Battalion would fire concentrations on hills 751 and 550 commencing at 0600 and continue until lifted by the attacking companies. (2)

One company of Italian pack mules were attached to support the Battalion under the control of Battalion S-4. Battalion SOP for resupply at night would be in effect.

At this time the Battalion had some 12,300 radios in excess of its TO/E. Most of these radios had been allocated to the Heavy Weapons Company, Staff and supporting units. Wire would be laid by the companies as they advanced. (2)

The Battalion Command Post would remain in GUIGNOLA. The Battalion OP would be established in a large three story building at the north edge of the village. Battalion S-2 would establish an OP on hill 608. The Battalion Aid Station would remain initially in GUIGNOLA and be prepared to move by pack mule upon the capture of hill 550. (See Map D) (2)

During the night of 30 September the Battalion was subjected to considerable enemy artillery and mortar fire.

NARRATIVE

At 0600 October 1, 1944, Company K and Company I moved towards their objectives. Daylight was at 0615. The weather

(1) A-2, p. 116

(2) Personal knowledge

was wonderful. The sky cloudless; a bright warm sun shone on the muddy, bare, hillsides. About 20 minutes after crossing the line of departure, Company K was brought under mortar and machine gun fire but by moving rapidly down the forward slopes of hill 608, taking advantage of the many gullies, this company suffered but few casualties. Progress at the bottom of the draw became increasingly difficult and by 0645, as the company began their drive up the slopes of hill 658, increased artillery, mortar and machine gun fire drove the leading platoon to the ground. Captain Bannister immediately moved his second platoon to his left flank to obtain the advantages of the high grounds in that sector; but, by 0730, it too had been halted by the intense fires.

The Battalion Commander of the 756 Tank Battalion appeared at the 3rd Battalion CP about 0800. This was the first time a member of the tank force had contacted the Battalion. This commander was very pessimistic about the employment of his tanks in the Battalion sector. The next hour was spent in reconnaissance of the Battalion forward areas for suitable tank approaches. A crossing over the SILIARO RIVER was found but tanks could not negotiate the steep muddy slopes of ^{NE} MOUNT GAVINA. There were no other possible crossings in the zone. These findings were reported to the Regimental Commander. The tanks were used very successfully in the 2nd Battalion sector later in the day. (1)

On the right of the Battalion sector Company I had moved in platoon column down a narrow foot trail to the bottom of the draw below IL RIO and thence upwards towards hill 550. At 0700, as the leading platoon was within 200

(1) Personal knowledge Lt. Colonel Earl A. Hudson Commanding Officer 3rd Battalion, 337th Infantry; A-2, p. 117

yards of the house on hill 550, the company received a hail of machine gun fire from their right rear, both flanks and from the house on hill 550. This fire drove the leading two platoons, company headquarters and the weapons platoon into the nearby draws and gullies. But even here the men were unable to return the fires of the enemy. The third platoon on seeing the situation ahead immediately turned and assaulted the enemy positions on the small knob 504 to their right rear. This assault carried the position, two enemy machine guns were knocked out and several of the enemy killed; but upon reaching the crest it was found that the platoons rear, left flank and front were exposed to several enemy guns located on the C di GUZZO RIDGE (Hill 550) and that the position would be untenable. At 0800 the platoon withdrew to the houses at IL RIO. (See Map D) (1)

The actions of Company K and I could only partially be observed from the two Battalion OPs. The report from K Company indicated that continued effort there would mean ~~estimating~~ that company. The enemy had too much artillery and mortar fire at their disposal for K Company to continue in an attack across this open and rugged terrain. The Company was directed to dig in and hold what ground they had taken. (1)

No word had been received from Company I since 0630. At 0800 Battalion S-2 located the third platoon of this company and reported their condition to the Battalion Commander. From the information received Battalion was afraid to give supporting fires on hill 550. S-2 then went forward to try and contact Company I. (See Map D) (1)

Battalion now feared committing the Reserve Company in

(1) Personal knowledge A-2, p. 117

daylight across terrain so dominated by the enemy artillery and mortar. Rover Joe was contacted and air strikes placed on all suspected mortar and artillery positions of the enemy. This continued until 1300. At that time the Battalion Artillery Liaison Officer had obtained the priority of fires of a battery of 240 howitzers and was using these guns on all suspected enemy occupied positions. (1)

Company I's location and situation had been determined but communication had not been reestablished. The wire laid by this company had been knocked out and the company was in such a precarious position that physical contact was difficult if not impossible. The company radios had been destroyed. The company was told to remain as they were until dark at which time they were to withdraw, if necessary, to IL RIO and there receive further orders. It would remain impossible to place supporting fire on enemy positions on hill 550 and ^{NS} 545. K Company was told to withdraw their platoons to hill 608 after dark. (1)

By 1700 1 October it was evident that a new plan had to be devised in order to secure the Battalion Objectives. The Battalion Commander then directed S-3 to go to hill 608 and brief Company L on the following plan: Company L was to move at dusk with one machine gun platoon from Company M (now with Company K) and such units of Company K that could join them on the crest of the ^{NS} CASONI DI RAMAGNO RIDGE in the vicinity of hill 774. The company was then to attack north along the crest of the ridge and take hill 751 by daylight. Company I would continue their attack on hill 550. (See Map D) (2)

2 BN:
Zaid

-
- (1) Personal knowledge
(2) Personal knowledge A-2, p. 117

Radio and wire communications had been established with all companies at dark.

THE NIGHT ATTACK ON HILL 752

Boundary changed?

Company L, one platoon of Company K and a platoon of heavy machine guns reached hill 774 shortly after dark, bypassed the enemy strong point on hill 782 and pushed rapidly northward down the ridge line. (See Map D) Progress soon slowed as the leading elements ran into a series of German strong points. Sergeant Chritos Karaberis, leading the advance squad, soon overcame this resistance but within a few minutes had developed a similar position 200 yards down the ridge. This continued all night. By 0440 on the morning of 2 October Company L assaulted and captured hills 751 and 752. During the course of the night Sergeant Karaberis personally had captured five enemy machine guns, killed eight and captured 22 Germans. For this he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Shortly after daylight a second platoon and Company Headquarters of Company K joined L Company on hills 751 and 752. (See Map D) (1)

Although the spectacular advance to hills 751 and 752 outflanked many of the enemy positions, his immediate reaction was to hold firm while counterattacking to retake the lost ground. The bypassed positions came to life on the morning of 2 October when the 8nd Battalion attempted to join Companies L and K and by noon all three companies of the 2nd Battalion were engaged in bitter fighting. (2)

It was realized that once L Company had secured its objective the Germans would concentrate all of their energies towards the retaking of that position. Prearranged artillery

(1) Personal knowledge A-2, p. 117; A-4, p. 158, 236
(2) Personal knowledge A-2, p. 117

and mortar fires had been prepared on the 1st of October to cover all sides of hills 751 and 752. It was well that this had been done for at daylight a thick blanket of fog rendered visibility to a few feet.

reduced

The morning of 2 October was spent by the Germans probing the positions of Company L. No less than once every half hour an enemy patrol was driven away from the positions. Artillery and mortar shells fell within the perimeter incessantly. (1)

Company I had, prior to daylight 2 October, attacked and captured hill 504 but by 0900 were stopped short of hill 547 and again found themselves, as in the day before, in a position unable to maneuver. (See Map D) (1) Colonel Madsen had requested that one company of the Regimental Reserve be used to attack hill 550 from behind 2nd Battalion, down the ridge from the left flank. This request was approved, and C Company, after having established radio contact on the 3rd Battalion net, moved out at 1130. (1)

Action against Company L and K increased around noon but intensive fires laid down by Division Artillery soon quieted this sector. At 1300 the sun broke through the fog and visibility extended for miles. (1)

At 1330 a Tank Destroyer platoon, under the command of a Sergeant, arrived at the Battalion OP in GUIGNOLA. Upon direction of the Battalion Commander this unit moved north on Highway 6429 about 200 yards and under intense German artillery and tank fire knocked down the buildings on hill 564. Heavy mortar fire on I Companies position ceased after this and was never resumed. The Tank Destroyers then pulled back

*this position
we
not
shown*

(1) Personal knowledge A-2, p. 117

behind the shelter of the buildings in GUIGNOLA. Again and again throughout the attack these guns used their direct fire to destroy located enemy in the Battalion sector.

(See Map D) (1)

Company C launched its attack against the flank of the enemy facing Company I and by 1400 these two companies had cleared the C di GUZZO RIDGE of all enemy. Company C immediately went back into Regimental Reserve and Company I organized the newly gained position against possible counter attack.

COUNTERATTACK ON HILL 752

Meantime activity on hill 752 was increasing. At 1430 a force of about 20 enemy and two tanks struck the right rear of Company L and a sharp fire fight ensued. Both tanks were captured and rendered useless. Several enemy dead lay before the position. Hardly had this action been completed when the whole front of Company L position began to receive fire from three tanks to the front. This fire was uncannily accurate and continued until about 1700 at which time, out of the twilight, a large mass of German infantry surged forward. By 1800 the enemy had still not penetrated the perimeter. One tank had been knocked out. As dark came on the enemy withdrew. (See Map D) (1) During the course of this action defensive fires were brought in so close to the friendly troops that an estimated 1/3 of the rounds fell within the perimeter, it is believed that this was the deciding factor in driving off the counterattack.

At 2000 the enemy tank fire was again placed on Companies L and K's positions. After a 20 minute satura-

(1) Personal knowledge A-2, p. 117

tion of enemy artillery and mortar fire, a force of about 100 Germans armed with panzerfaust (a large bee-hive type anti-tank grenade fired by one man) attacked the forward positions of Companies L and K. This attack had been anticipated and prepared artillery and mortar fires were brought down immediately. However, due to the casualties sustained in the previous attack and the enemy preparatory fires the position was overrun. Captain Savacool, by withdrawing squads from the rear of the perimeter was able to stop the penetration and after about 45 minutes of scattered hand to hand fighting the enemy was ejected from the positions and slowly withdrew into the night. (1)

NC
Company K, holding positions along the left side of the perimeter, had as yet received but few casualties and these mainly from artillery and mortar. A small cart trail running north and south along the ridge cut through the crest of hill 751 and K Company, taking advantage of this cut, had dug into the inside banks and from this defiladed position could fire over the top across about 100 yards of fairly sloping ground. This cut was about 75 yards long. At 2400 a tank appeared at the north entrance to this cut and immediately began firing its 75mm gun and bow machine gun down the length of the cut. The men of Company K dove into their holes to wait out this fire. About five or ten minutes after this attack a large body of German Infantry poured over the edges of the cut into the roadway from the west. At this time the tank instead of cease firing, came roaring down the cut, all guns blazing. The men of Company K, frightened, bewildered and confused, remained in their

(1) Personal Knowledge A-2, p. 118

holes. After the tank passed on they came out and counted over 25 German bodies in the roadway. Company K had not fired a shot. (1)

Early the morning of 3 October an officer and one man of Company L, working their way to the front, located and knocked out the remaining two tanks with a bazooka. The company was not bothered by further counterattacks.

Enemy artillery continued to fire for the balance of the night but fell off to spasmodic firing during the morning of 3 October. The last rounds to fall on this position fell at 0900 hours and were 75 red smoke shells.

THE BATTALION MOVES FORWARD

During the night 2-3 October Company I's position had received spasmodic shelling from enemy light mortars but otherwise had been unbothered. Two patrols sent forward by the company during the night had not made contact with the enemy. At daylight the company continued its attack by sending one platoon, widely dispersed, around the upper end of the draw to their front and thence on to the next ridge. After a short fire fight this platoon had secured the ridge. The balance of Company I, following the first platoon by 30 minutes, had crossed this ridge below the positions of Company L and K and moved rapidly down the nose to the village of VILIA di SASSONERO, arriving there about 1200. This was 2500 yards in advance of CASONI DI ROMAGNA. (See Map D) (1)

At 0900 3 October Company K, now reorganized, pushed down the western slopes of the SASSONERO RIDGE and took up positions to the left of Company I by 2000 hours 3 October. The Battalion Command Post was moved to VILLA DI SASSONERO

(1) Personal knowledge.

the morning of 4 October. During the night of 3-4 October Colonel Madsen issued orders to Company K to move from their present location to positions on the high ground on hill 513. K Company moved during darkness and by daylight had defensive positions established along this ridge. The 1st Battalion in the meantime had relieved 2nd Battalion on hill 587 and contact was made with 3rd Battalion. (See Map

D) (1)

NC For the other companies of the Battalion 4 October was spent in reorganizing, issuing winter equipment, re-supplying the Battalion with ammunition and integrating such replacements as had been received. Of the 150 replacements allocated to 3rd Battalion only 25 were trained Infantrymen; the balance were Engineers, Quartermaster, Medical and Air-corps personnel hastily impressed into the roll of an Infantryman. This condition was to become steadily worse. (2)

At 1900 Company L passed through Company K and after a sharp fire fight occupied positions on hill 407¹² and 396. The German reaction was violent. The 3rd Battalion had captured a position in the Germans next line of defense. The whole process was to be repeated.

SUMMARY

To summarize - the 3rd Battalion had, after a two day reorganizing and maneuvering period, on 29 and 30-September attacked strongly held enemy defenses in the most unfavorable terrain ITALY had to offer. This attack was over an extended area but by skillful maneuver, daring and aggressiveness had broken the enemies defensive line in such a manner as to capture his key terrain feature and causing the rapid collapse of his entire defenses despite heavy counterattack.

(1) Personal knowledge A-2, p. 118

(2) Personal knowledge

Supplies had been maintained and evacuation carried out by 1/4 truck and mules to a degree of superior performance. Artillery and mortar support had contributed the maximum to the Battalion effort.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Looking back over the entire operation, the events preceeding and the events that later followed, it is felt that an analysis can best be made by considering the following conditions:

1. TERRAIN

This, in general, was a known quantity based on past experience and from what could be observed from the high grounds held by the Battalion. Map study assisted greatly, for the maps possessed at this time were excellent. However, even this was not sufficient to eliminate all errors. Hill 504 being at the very edge of the maps used and in a tangle of contour lines, hachure marks, streams, trees, etc., went unnoticed, then too, this terrain feature could not be observed from any position held by the 3rd Battalion prior to its jumpoff. The enemy took full advantage of this oversight to strike Company I, rear and flank, early the morning of the first day.

Night attacks

Past experience had dictated that in open mountainous terrain such as faced the Battalion, night attacks were the most effective means of capturing enemy positions. Armed with this knowledge the Battalion had sought to move its units as far forward under cover of darkness on the night of 30 September so as to be in a position to assault the enemy at daylight. The extremely rugged terrain in the creek bottom

around IL RIO proved too great an obstacle to be crossed in the time allocated. This delay caused Companies K and I to be caught floundering before the enemy positions at daylight.

2. SUPPORTING FIRES

The Battalion zone of action was over 3000 yards in width and contained innumerable positions from which the enemy could observe any and all actions to their front; all positions were mutually supporting and the enemy had a prepondance of light and medium mortars to cover any actions in defilade. It was impossible for our artillery and mortars to cover all of the critical areas.

The situation described had been anticipated by higher headquarters and such supporting weapons as were available had been allocated to the Regiment; this included its normal attachement of artillery plus the bulk of fires allocated by Corps, a fighter bomber squadron, a company each of tanks and tank destroyers. It was unfortunate the tanks and tank destroyers did not arrive in sufficient time to participate in the initial attack. Even when the tanks did arrive at 3rd Battalion the terrain there was not suitable for their employment. The Regimental Commander immediately employed them in another Battalion sector where their full shock value was used. However, several hours of the most crucial period of the engagement had transpired and the element of surprise and shock were lost.

The employment of tactical air support was not relegated to front line control. Even had this been done the lack of air ground training would possibly have made matters even worse. As it was, the best that "Rover Joe" accomplished was to prohibit the enemys excessive movements during daylight.

3. THE ENEMY

It had become an established fact to the enemy forces at this time that II Corps intended to break into the POE VALLEY in the vicinity of BOLOGNA or in any other area southeast of BOLOGNA if the opportunity presented itself. This opportunity had become nearly a fact with the 88th Divisions thrust down the SANTERNO VALLEY. By 1 October Kesselring, the German commander, had withdrawn additional forces from his right and left flank to support his sagging line in the center.

The intelligence situation was extremely difficult as the prisoners captured were from a pollygot of units thrown into the line in "battle groups" composed of from 10 to 100 men whose mission was to hold their positions at all cost or to be pounded against the American Forces in fanatical counter-attacks.

It had been hoped that once a penetration was made into the enemy lines that he would be forced to withdraw on other fronts to keep from being outflanked. This he did not do. As his positions were mutually supported and due to the heavy fogs he chose to hold and counterattack to retake those positions captured from him.

4. FRIENDLY FORCES

The 3rd Battalion took the village of GUIGNOLA on the morning of the 28th of September. Contact with the enemy had been lost the night of the 27th. All day of the 29th was spent in occupying positions in and around GUIGNOLA. All day of the 30th was spent patrolling in the MOUNT GAVINA and IL RIO sector.

It is felt that had the Battalion moved more aggressively and on the evening of the 28th occupied MOUNT GAVINA and IL RIO then launched their attacks against the C di GUZZO RIDGE the night of 28-29 September those positions would have been overrun with a minimum of casualties and would have facilitated the rapid advance of the balance of the Regiment.

The logical explanation for this possible failure on the part of the Battalion and Regiment was lack of artillery support. Division guns were, at this time, firing at maximum ranges and it was necessary for them to move forward to give continuous support. Moving the guns forward was, in turn, held up due to lack of usable roads in the zone. Then too, had the Regiment continued its attack from MOUNT IAFINE, a penetration into the enemy lines would have been made but both flanks would have been open to hostile attack. At this time there were insufficient reserves within the Corps to exploit such a breakthrough.

LESSONS

1. A commander, by anticipating orders, should plan and build up his command for any future attacks within his sector. By so doing, when orders are received, his subordinate unit commanders and his staff will be thoroughly prepared to continue the action on short notice.

2. It is essential that once contact with the enemy is made that every effort be made to maintain this contact and strike the enemy before he has a chance to occupy fixed positions.

3. Tactical surprise can be the decisive factor in battle. This surprise can almost inevitably be obtained

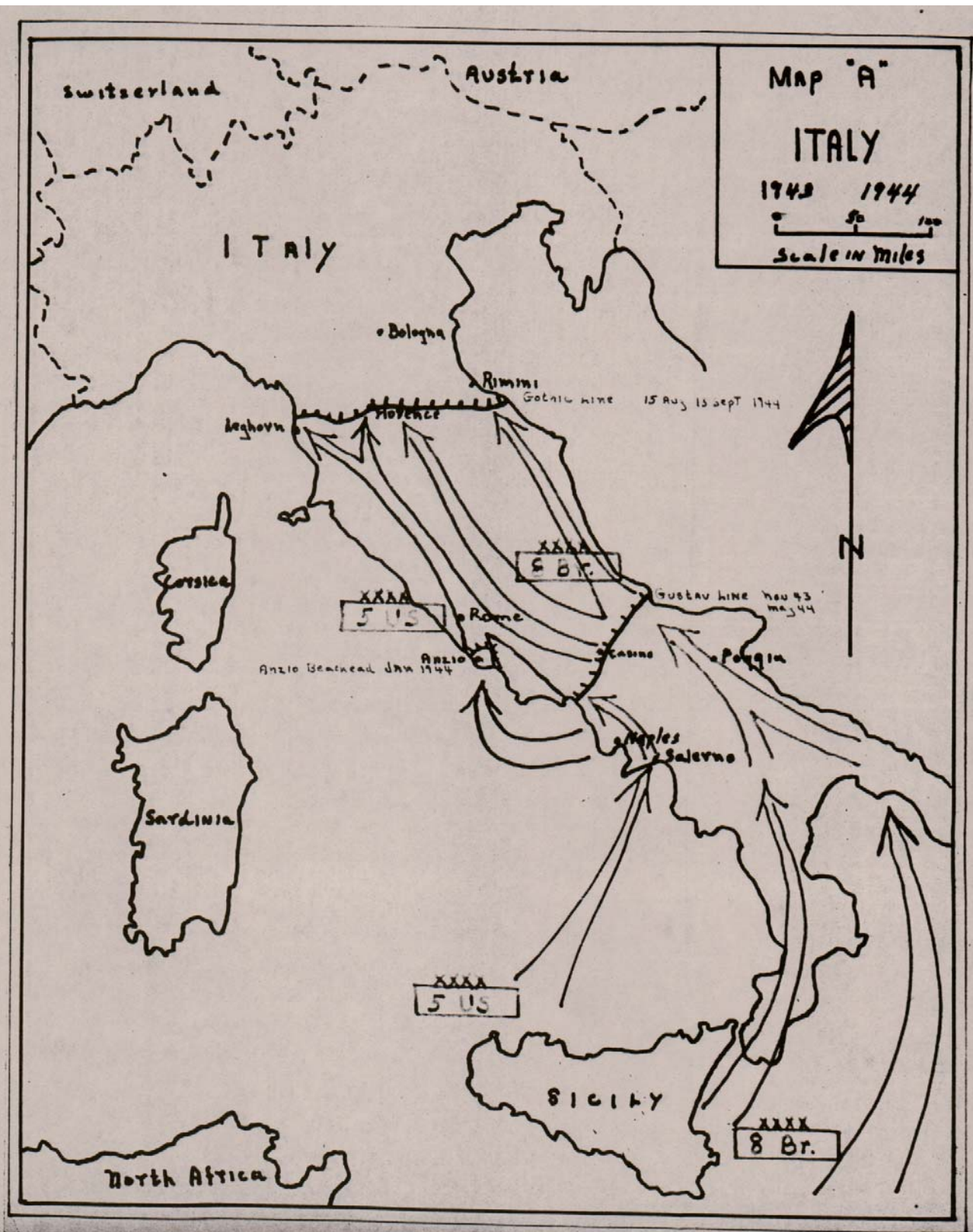
by a well coordinated aggressive night attack.

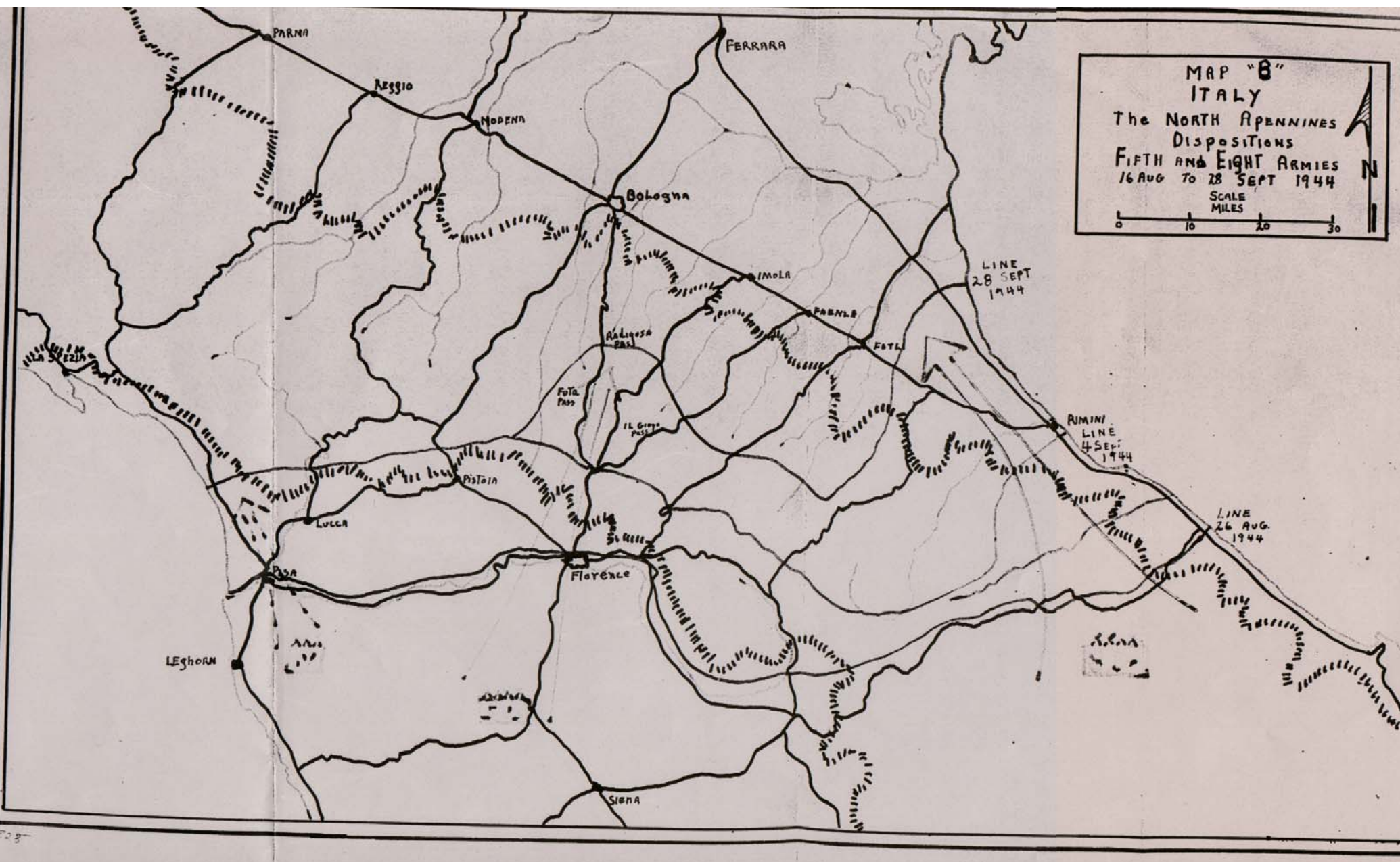
4. The timely employment of Battalion or Regimental reserve will change the course of a battle.

5. Mutually supporting positions should be attacked simultaneously to prevent the enemy from concentrating his fires against a single point of attack.

6. Attacking units should press vigorously forward in their assigned zones of action to prevent the enemy from shifting troops and fires to critical areas of the battlefield.

7. The loss of a highly respected and able leader at a crucial period of the battle will lessen the aggressiveness of a unit.





MAP "B"
ITALY
The NORTH APENNINES
DISPOSITIONS
FIFTH AND EIGHT ARMIES
16 AUG TO 28 SEPT 1944
SCALE
MILES
0 10 20 30

MAP "C"

DISPOSITION

II CORPS

28 Sept. 1944

5 4 3 2 1 0 5
Scale in miles

