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Title: Interview with COL Robert B. Hutchins – Sicilian Campaign and Initial Phases of the Italian Campaign: Communication Section, Part 5.

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Abstract: This report is an interview by COL Robert B. Hutchins on the Sicilian Campaign and the initial phases of the Italian Campaign. This is Part 5 titled: The Communication Section.

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Interview with Col.
Hutchins. Part 5

COMMUNICATION SECTION

INTERVIEW WITH COL. ROBERT B. HUTCHINS

(Sicilian Campaign and Initial
Phases of the Italian Campaign)

UNCLASSIFIED

4 April, 1944.

- Q. The Sicilian Campaign, that was a shore to shore operation?
- A. No. Ship to shore for my outfit. We came over on five large transports. The Division had about twenty-two transports altogether in it's convoy.
- Q. In other words, you did come from North Africa?
- A. No. The Third Division did that. We came from the States, with a lay over in Oran.
- Q. Did you command a regiment?
- A. The 178th Infantry.
- Q. During your landing operations, did you have communication between the other ships and shore?
- A. In the landing I was on the Headquarters ship with Commodore Phillips, who commanded the ships in my regiment and was also the senior Naval Officer of the Transport Division under the Admiral. Naturally, therefore, we did have communication with the other ships through the Navy setup, radio blinkers, etc.
- Q. There was no army communication until after you landed?
- A. That is right.
- Q. In your landing at Sicily, did you find that your sets - radio equipment or any other type of signal equipment was completely washed out?
- A. No. We had all sets waterproofed at Oran and had no difficulty.
- Q. Do you recall what type of waterproofing was used?
- A. They gave us a waterproof bag.
- Q. A transparent bag?
- A. I believe so, I'm not sure.
- Q. Do you recall what type sets you had?
- A. We had the 284, 311 and 533. I think we also had some 288's with hand generator.
- Q. You say you communicated with your division through the 264?
- A. Yes.
- Q. And with battalions?
- A. With the 688 I think. I can't recall the number.

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- Q. Did those sets function immediately upon going ashore?
- A. Yes. They functioned very well.
- Q. Do you recall whether most of the information that was transmitted was handled by CW telephone or by voice?
- A. Everything initially by radio was sent by CW in code. Later on I found it necessary to have a voice set (artillery GLO) with my battalion commanders. I had one and each battalion commander had one on his jeep. We operated on a wide front, from 10 to 15 miles. Laying of wire was an impossibility. With the GLO we used a pre-arranged code and when wire went out we had this radio. It was very good.
- Q. You used GLO between yourself and battalion commanders?
- A. Yes.
- Q. You talked everything in the clear?
- A. Yes, using a prearranged code. If I wanted to know where they were, they would give the location, as, "We are 1000 yards north of X."
- Q. Did you know whom you were talking with? Bill, Joe or Sam?
- A. Yes. We would say a word and he would repeat it. We had a fern made out. However, I knew my battalion commanders' voices and they knew mine.
- Q. Did you use nicknames?
- A. We had a code name for each battalion.
- Q. That's quite interesting. That sound like a telephone directory setup.
- Q. You placed a lot of faith in radio?
- A. Yes I did. It came in fine. I don't know what we would have done without it.
- Q. Had you previously had experience with radio on maneuvers, so that you could place responsibility on radio?
- A. I had had quite a lot of experience in communication. I went to the signal school years back and from that experience I was more interested generally in communications than most commanders are.
- Q. You were communication minded?
- A. Yes, to a great extent.
- Q. Did you ever get a jammed radio?
- A. Yes, but it didn't interfere with us materially.
- Q. Jammed voice radios?
- A. Yes. We found when using radio close up to the enemy it immediately brought artillery fire.

- Q. Can you estimate how long before artillery was fired?
- A. As I got it from the battalion commanders it was only a matter of a short time after they started talking on the radio that artillery shells began to land.
- Q. Was that after the campaign had been ashore for some time?
- A. Yes. Particularly in Italy. Not in Sicily.
- Q. Do you know whether we have any equipment to locate sets there and did we fire artillery?
- A. Not to my knowledge.
- Q. In your opinion is the use of CW (code) of such value as to warrant the training of radio operators for this specialized duty?
- A. In my opinion there is a need for trained men in this specialized duty. We were cut off at Paserno and the regiment surrounded. The only communication we had was the radio and we used messages incoded on the MTOB device. We would have been in a bad way if we had not had trained men with the MTOB device.
- Q. Were your operators trained here?
- A. Yes. All my communications officers were graduates of the Communications School at Benning. Some operators also, but not all. We kept a school going in the division, continuously, for operators.
- Q. Was there any time during your experience in Italy when the casualties to trained operators handicapped you so that you couldn't send CW?
- A. No, we had trained sufficient operators in the regiment to replace the casualties we had.
- Q. Your case is just the extreme of what we heard from other observers; they didn't have any trained operators. Would you say your casualties were high, low or average among communication personnel?
- A. I would say they were low. A good deal of your casualties is the result of how you operate your CP.
- Q. Do you recall what type wire you used?
- A. We used the combat wire - assault wire, 130.
- Q. Was that satisfactory?
- A. That's a hard question to answer. There were so many things - tanks, vehicles, etc. constantly cutting it that you couldn't say whether it was the wire or not.
- Q. Would you say your wire teams were shot up more than other personnel?
- A. No, I lost very few of my wire men.

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- Q. Did they have to lay wire in the road or in a ditch?
- A. They used a jeep and laid the wire mostly along the road.
- Q. Did you find your men placed confidence in the mine detectors from the standpoint of operation?
- A. We found the mine detectors very satisfactory.
- Q. Did you have much trouble with mine detectors failing to function?
- A. Our detectors functioned very well. The operators had been well trained by our division engineers.
- Q. Were those men engineers or infantry personnel?
- A. Infantry, but trained by the engineers. They were taken from all battalions and formed into a mine detecting platoon.
- Q. How many trained repairmen did you have - radio repairmen?
- A. I couldn't give you the exact number.
- Q. Do you recall whether you had one in each battalion?
- A. I am sure we had one in each battalion.
- Q. You probably were organized 15% over - did you have some personnel qualified along that line, even though not designated?
- A. Yes. I had an exceptionally good group of non-coms and outstanding communication men.
- Q. How long were you at any time without transportation; did you carry communication by hand and how far?
- A. We were able to use our communication vehicles at all times.
- Q. How long were you without communication before transportation got there? Did they move by hand?
- A. We seldom, if ever, were without transportation and consequently made only short moves of our communication equipment by hand.
- Q. Transportation landed soon after the troops then?
- A. Transportation was provided to accompany personnel in the communications platoon on landing.
- Q. You didn't carry very much by hand then?
- A. No. We did not.
- Q. Did they have to sandbag the jeeps?
- A. All of them.
- Q. Were trailers with them?
- A. Yes.

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- Q. Mine detectors - do you recall any instance where radio repairmen were called on to repair them?
- A. No.
- Q. What did you do with those that had to be repaired?
- A. We called on our engineer officer and he did the repairing. They were well grounded in mine detectors and mines.
- Q. In your opinion do you think it would be beneficial to give radio men such a course?
- A. No I don't see any reason why he should know about this.
- Q. The reason is that in a course we just started we included a brief course on mine detectors - at the present time one per regiment and one per battalion - we figured it might be helpful if repairmen would know something about that.
- A. I'd rather see the repairmen in the mine detector platoon.
- Q. What was the biggest handicap with the S11's and S26's?
- A. The lack of range and batteries. We were forever having to replace batteries.
- Q. Do you recall how the battery supply was handled?
- A. There was close liaison between my regimental communications officer and the division signal officer and when batteries were needed we received them without much delay. Also, prior planning on the part of tank officers played an important part.
- Q. Were there two types of batteries used?
- A. I don't recall what type batteries were used.
- Q. Was it SOP to carry 1, 2 or 3 spare batteries?
- A. SOP was to carry as many as we considered we needed to operate.
- Q. Was that true of each battalion?
- A. Yes, of each battalion.
- Q. Did battalions have any trouble with supply?
- A. Not enough to mention.
- Q. Was the wire used, new or reclaimed?
- A. All of it was new.
- Q. Did they use telephone in the companies?
- A. Very seldom.
- Q. Did you use telegraph from battalion to regiment?
- A. No. We had pretty good communications, telephone and radio.
- Q. Wasn't necessary to use telegraph?
- A. Throughly necessary.

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Q. That wasn't from lack of operators?

A. We had sufficient operators.

Q. What use did you make of visual signal?

A. None to amount to anything. We had pyrotechnics and panels and yellow smoke grenades.

Q. Signal lamps or flags?

A. No flags. I don't think we had lamps either.

Q. Did you work with airplanes?

A. No. We never did.

Q. At any time did you have to identify your unit to a plane?

A. We never got a call.

Q. Was there any misunderstanding?

A. Yes. They strafed us twice, killed one man in the 1st battalion and several artillery men.

Q. Was there any provision made for identifying ground units?

A. That was in the SOI.

Q. Do you recall whether any personnel had small panels on their packs?

A. No. We just had the yellow and red panels.

Q. Was there any instance when enemy action was the result of the enemy intercepting some of your messages?

A. I would say, never.

Q. Do you recall whether any of the personnel utilized captured equipment?

A. Yes, we did. We used German telephones and they weren't so bad.

Q. You don't know whether they were made by a Telephonic Company?

A. No, I don't.

Q. Did the Germans booty trap equipment?

A. Yes, they did on many occasions.

Q. Who was responsible for your command post?

A. Headquarters Commandant.

Q. Were you ever raided?

A. No.

Q. Did you have a hand attached to your equipment?

A. We had a hand.

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- Q. When you don't have a band do you have a defense platoon?
- A. Yes, a platoon from the reserve battalion.
- Q. How many men do you think should be in a platoon?
- A. About 20 or 40.
- Q. I believe you said your action was rapid enough that you didn't dig in too many times?
- A. We dug in every time we settled down.
- Q. Did all communications personnel dig in?
- A. Yes. They got in foxholes. The main CP was usually far enough back where they had cover at the forward CP in Italy we usually were in cellars or houses.
- Q. Do you recall whether your trains were in contact by radio with any particular group?
- A. With me at regimental headquarters.
- Q. How about the I & R platoon?
- A. They operated directly under the G-3.
- Q. Did you lay wire right along with you?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did you have three liaison officers with you?
- A. I did.
- Q. What transportation did you use for them?
- A. Generally the vehicles the I & R platoon wasn't using. I wouldn't let anyone touch the communications vehicles except for communication purposes.
- Q. We teach another distance - is distance greater in combat than we teach?
- A. I think your teachings are all right but naturally you do extend. Sometimes beyond the distance you teach.
- Q. When you left your forward CP at any time to go up to your CP, did you take any kind of communication with you?
- A. I always carried a radio with me. The artillery radio. I never went any place that I didn't have it with me.
- Q. Did you ever carry a telephone with you?
- A. Yes.
- Q. In the battalions did you use switchboards?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did the wire stay in?
- A. Generally speaking, yes.

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Q. Did you have any support from tanks?

A. Yes.

Q. Supporting your regiment or attached?

A. They were attached to us.

Q. What sort of communications did you have?

A. None, except liaison officer.

Q. Did he have a radio?

A. No.

Q. In other words, even your liaison officer had no communications?

A. That's right.

Q. What is your opinion on that, should the infantry have some means of communication with tanks?

A. Absolutely.

Q. Does the cannon company have communications?

A. Yes. My cannon company was in the regimental radio net.

Q. You didn't see any 300's there?

A. No.

Q. How much did company commanders use radio in attack? Did they have sufficient equipment? Do you know of anything they might need?

A. They used radio almost entirely.

Q. Do you think they need wire?

A. I don't think so. There might be some occasions where they could use sound power telephones. They had control except when sets went out.

Q. They used voice sets?

A. Yes. The 536.

Q. They had 511's down to the company?

A. No. The 536.

Q. Did you ever hear any griping about the awkward size and shape of the 511?

A. Yes, I heard a little. I don't remember the comments about it.

Q. If you had the 300 you could accomplish the same thing?

A. Yes, the same thing and it would be better.

Q. Did you ever jam the 310 frequency?

A. Yes, we could sometimes talk in English to us.

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Q. Did you have an interpreter?

A. Yes. I had an Italian interpreter and a German interpreter, two Lieutenants.

Q. Did you make any river crossings?

A. No.

Q. Do you think a telephone switchboard should be kept in battalions?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you use authenticated code over the telephone?

A. Yes. We used code names for units and commanders.

Q. Did you ever have your telephone lines tapped?

A. Never.

Q. Was there anything like SOP for rotation?

A. There was no SOP but I rotated my battalions, on the principle of the one with the most rest. The battalion commanders did the same thing with the companies.

Q. Changing the subject, did you have very much radio equipment go bad? Did you do any work on them?

A. Yes, we did do some work. It was nothing more than the usual changing of batteries, etc. Our radios worked remarkably well. I was very pleased with the whole setup.

Q. How about telephone equipment?

A. Nothing outstanding that I can remember.

Q. Was your message center employed?

A. Yes.

Q. Could the officers write messages?

A. They did very well. There were some mistakes. However, written messages were seldom employed unless we couldn't get through to the battalion commander.

Q. Your communication was almost ideal?

A. I wouldn't say that but they did function very well.

Q. What type of orders did you issue?

A. Regimental orders were mostly oral, supplemented with overlays to be sure they were understood.

Q. Along that line, do you recall how far down somebody knew what was going on?

A. In combative operations you have to go down to the last man and insist on some end relief move. It's a firm belief that if the American soldier knows what you want him to do or what the objective is in the mind of the senior officer he will act accordingly. We can then act intelligently and well. He insisted that platoon leaders assemble platoons and explain the situation to their men before going off.

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- Q. Was any means of communication taken along with night patrol?
- A. If they were going out to reconnoiter a hill and stay there communication was taken. They took a radio with them. If it was only a reconnaissance patrol we didn't use a radio. We just relied on messages.
- Q. I think you stated before Colonel, that you didn't make such use of pyrotechnics?
- A. Very little. Sometimes we used them. I just can't recall an instance.
- Q. In other words, was there any confusion between signals? Was the same signal used in A, B and C Infantry to indicate the same thing?
- A. There were certain signals mandatory for everybody.
- Q. Did you have occasion to use aerial photographs?
- A. Yes, we used aerial photographs in the invasion of Sicily. They were excellent. The rest of the time we had excellent maps.
- Q. You didn't actually have photographs taken a week or so ahead?
- A. No, we didn't request any.
- Q. Did you have any type of map coordinate codes?
- A. A thrust line, but the maps were so good - we used the coordinate system on them.
- Q. Did you transmit coordinates in the clear?
- A. No, we had to use the thrust line.
- Q. Did you use the English system? Or the metric system entirely?
- A. English system.
- Q. How many days altogether were you in combat?
- A. Six weeks in Sicily and forty days in Italy.
- Q. Did you get replacements?
- A. Just before we left for Italy.
- Q. Were you on the initial landing in Italy?
- A. Yes. We went in September 1943 for forty days and traveled about 150 miles.
- Q. That was one reason why you couldn't maintain wire?
- A. That's right and our fronts were wide. In Sicily we had a ten mile front and continued that width most of the time.
- Q. Evidently your G-2 information was pretty good?
- A. It was not in Sicily - we didn't get a G-2 report for a week. Most of our secrets were taken from prisoners.

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- Q. That was SOP to sandbag every jeep?
- A. It wasn't SOP, it was recommended. Safety first!
- Q. Was your communications officer a graduate of The Infantry School?
- A. Yes.
- Q. How much paper work did you do in combat?
- A. Too much.
- Q. In case of emergency, how did you get supplies?
- A. That depends on your own division setup. If you have a good supply officer you have no trouble. Our G-4 and Quartermaster kept dumps close to us. Nations were handy. Lots of times we had to send back to get ammunition but were never short.
- Q. What provision was made, if any, to supply meals to the front lines?
- A. We used almost entirely the K and C rations when in combat. However, whenever the situation permitted, we brought our kitchens up and gave the men a hot S & A ration.
- Q. Was any water discipline necessary?
- A. I think we should have a vehicle for supplying water to men on the move. Operating as we were, in a warm climate, we issued each man two canteens, which were not ample for them. Any well or stream where we stopped, you would find a crowd around it. The men had halcyon tablets but if we had a vehicle to deliver water in five gallon cans when the troops halt for a rest, I believe it would help water discipline.
- Q. Did you have any trouble with the men keeping their mess equipment clean?
- A. We had boiling water for the mess kits when we served a hot meal and had very little trouble with dirty mess gear.
- Q. When you left division assembly did you have to fight your way very far?
- A. We fought mostly a delaying action on the part of the enemy and covered anywhere from 10 to 15 miles a day.

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