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Title: Ranger Force: remarks made to COL R.F. McEldowney by LTC Darby, C.O. Ranger Force on 12 October 1943

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Abstract: This report consists of remarks made by COL R.F. McEldowney to LTC Darby, commanding officer of Ranger Force, on the First Ranger Battalion's operations in the Sicilian Campaign.

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TO: The Commandant, Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia.


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By command of LT. GEN. McNAIR:

2 Incls.

Incl.-1. AFHQ G-3 Notes on
Sicilian Campaign

Incl.-2. Notes on Ranger Force

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RANGER FORCE

Remarks made to Colonel R. F. McIlhenny, by Lt. Colonel DARBY,
G. O. Ranger Force, on 12 October 1943.

The First Ranger Battalion was split to form a total of three battalions for the Sicilian Campaign. This was on order of Allied Force Headquarters. We have been operating with a makeshift Force Headquarters. A Force Headquarters is needed very badly -- authorization was turned down by the War Department. It makes me wonder what our future is.

In preparation for the Sicilian Campaign we trained at Mersa, Africa, in conjunction with the Navy. It was very mountainous country. We set up our own training center. Our training to a great extent consisted of speed marching, cliff climbing, night work including operations with the Navy. By mutual arrangement between the Navy and myself we continually had at our disposal 18 LCI. We used obstacle courses similar to those used at the Command Depot in Scotland. We did a great deal of cliff climbing, abseiling (descending cliffs) and speed marching. The cliffs we operated were 2000 feet directly above the water. We had what we called a Bullet and Bayonet Course. The men worked in pairs over obstacles, high walls with a 10-14 foot drop-off. There were targets that would suddenly appear simulating men; others simulating MG nests, etc.. One man of the pair was always protecting the advance of the other man, firing over his head. Another course was the Me and My Pal Course. It was primarily a street fighting course. In all our training we employed combat firing extensively; don't go in much for marksmanship, we don't have the time. Fire from the hip and battle positions is stressed.

Great emphasis is placed on physical conditioning. In our work we use the Buddy System -- the men always work in pairs. They live in pairs, they eat in pairs, they do guard in pairs, they even KP in pairs. Confidence in each other is developed. The men pick their own buddy from within their platoon. (Most of our work is night work. After conditioning and hardening, we employ 100% night work.) In our training we never do anything without battle noises and effects; we always use live ammunition. We use mines, barbed wire, bands of MG fire extensively. The men very quickly get accustomed to having live ammunition flying about them. If the problem is to capture a MG nest, there is always a MG nest there with a MG firing in a fixed direction. Captured Italian and German machine guns and machine pistols are used by the "enemy" in our problems. These are a great aid. Our men quickly learn to differentiate between the fire of our own weapons and enemy weapons. Also the "enemy" makes constant use of flares. (Our typical problem is a landing operation accompanied by all the "trimmings". It is made as difficult and realistic as possible.) In all our training we have had one NCO killed (shot in back by recruit during a landing problem). There have been several injured, but none seriously.

We always carry our normal load of ammunition with the weapons loaded. Any man who accidentally discharges a weapon is immediately reduced to private and fined \$40.00. In our work we must be drastic against the accidental discharge of weapons. We learned our lesson in Tunisia where the accidental discharge of a rifle "queered" a raid and caused a 24 hour delay in operations. If a man knows his weapon is loaded, he will take better care of it.

We use colored flashlights (dim color) for recognition purposes in night work. We find them essential. Different colors are used and we usually have a certain light signal for recognition, for instance "a" which would be dot dash. It gives a man great comfort and confidence when working at night especially in towns to be given a recognition signal when needed.

(We use the column formation for approach and assault movement. It is the only formation which will work at night.) In one battalion attack we made, we attacked with 4 companies abreast -- using recognition lights -- each company using a different color. We have 6 companies in our battalions, each of 3 officers and 63 men.

(In movements at night, we do not attempt to use prominent terrain features to keep our direction. We use pacing, compass bearing, and stars.) (Usually in advancing to attack at night we check position every 1000 yards. We start moving again by radio signal (SCR 536) or by runner.)

In one raid we used Bazookas as anti-personnel weapons. Their effect was devastating. After a night raid to capture prisoners and create confusion we usually retire under cover of our own mortar fire. (It is necessary to collect your men again after the raid is over. To do this I have men stationed along a line through which we will pass at intervals and as the men withdrawing pass this line they are stopped and collected by those who have been stationed there for that purpose.)

LCVP's are noisy and give things away when you are trying to make a quiet, secret landing, whereas the LCA's (British) are silent and can slip in undetected.

In our landing at GELA in Sicily to take the town we had the operation planned in three phases as follows:

- 1st Phase: Secure beach and taller buildings on near edge of town.
- 2nd Phase: Capture main streets.
- 3rd Phase: Advance through remainder of town and secure far edge.

The GELA beach was wired and mined, with both Teller and S-Mines. The shore defenses in the immediate vicinity of our landing area consisted of: 3 shore batteries (two 3 inch -- one 4 inch); 2 searchlights; 2 mortar companies; one battery 77 mm guns; and 25 machine gun nests, from about 30 cal. to 1/2 inch. The Cruiser Savannah did a beautiful piece of work in aiding in the reduction of these defenses. She fired 1200 rounds of 6 inch shells into these defenses. The positions were wired and dug in. We landed according to plan and ran over the beaches. Incidentally, to get through a mine field, run like hell, because if you don't the MG's will get you. We lost three officers and some vehicles on the beach.

This operation was very thoroughly rehearsed in North Africa. We used recognition lights as follows: 1st Ranger Battalion--Red; 4th Ranger Battalion--Amber; 1st Battalion 39th Engineers--Blue. There was one recognition signal for entire force. (Note: 3rd Battalion Rangers landed further west at LICATA with 3rd Infantry Division).

The mission of my force at GELA was to capture the town and hold it at all costs, and protect the left flank of the 1st Infantry Division.

The plan of this landing was as follows: There was a pier extending out into the water which just about divided the town in half. The 1st Ranger Battalion was to land west of this point and clear out the west half of the town and pivot on west to clean out hostile shore batteries and MG nests west of the town. The 4th Ranger Battalion was to land

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east of the pier and clean out the east half of the town and pivot to the east to take out defenses east of town. The 1st Battalion, 39th Engineers was to follow the assault battalion and take over defense of the central part of the town after the Ranger battalions had pivoted east and west respectively. The Ranger battalions landed at H hour and the Engineer battalion at H + 30. To support the force, the 83rd Armd. F.A. Battalion was to land at H + 60. This was followed by the 1st Battalion, 531 Engineers at H + 90.

The operation went according to plan and GELA was in Ranger hands before noon, D day (July 10).

On D plus 1, GELA received three counterattacks from tanks. Nine tanks penetrated the town and raced around with everyone in some confusion. Three of these tanks were knocked out and the remainder withdrew. The most serious was the counterattack on the right (east) of the town in which there were 20 tanks including some Mark VI tanks. This attack was broken up primarily by the 1st Division Artillery and the 4.2 mortars of the Chemical Battalion. The mortars put down a smoke concentration which caused considerable confusion among the tanks and coupled with the artillery fire caused them to withdraw. When the attack on the right finally settled down there were 9 tanks burning, two of them Mark VI.

On D plus 1, I was ordered to take San Nicola. In the meantime I had acquired the 1st Battalion, 41st Armd. Regiment. The 1st Ranger Battalion was to move via Porte Olive, thence west and occupy the high ground west of San Nicola. The 1st Battalion 41st Armd. Infantry Regiment was to move north and occupy the high ground of San Nicola. This was to be done during the night D/1. The 4th Ranger Battalion was left to cover the left flank of the force.

The 1st Ranger Battalion occupied its objective during darkness as planned. The Armored Infantry Battalion for some reason or other did not reach its objective and daylight caught them flatfooted, and they were shelled by 3 Batteries of 149's. The C.O. of Co. D, 1st Ranger Battalion from his position could see these batteries. He by radio relayed their position to me and I in turn to the Naval Liaison Officer with us who had naval gunfire brought to bear on these batteries and silenced them. Then the 41st Infantry Battalion behind tanks charged the hill and took it. The enemy pulled out and endeavored to mine the roads behind them. This was frustrated to a great extent by our patrols in jeeps with MG's mounted on them which were very active and aggressive.

BUTTERA

I was ordered to take Buttera the next day (D plus 3). I decided to push ahead that night and take it before daylight D plus 3 if possible. I decided to attack in column of battalions with companies in column. The terrain was very rugged. Buttera sits on the top of a high truncated cone formation with a narrow winding road approach. It is flanked on either side by two high mountains. My formation was column of battalions -- 1st Ranger Battalion; 1st Battalion 41st Armd. Regiment; 4th Ranger Battalion.

My plan was to go straight into Buttera in the dark, and be prepared to take the high ground on either side of Buttera should the situation demand. I had three batteries of armored artillery which registered on the town. I also had five tanks. The orders were that if we did not gain surprise in the attack the Artillery was to shell

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the town until ordered to lift. We would then attack up the hill and take the town.

The advance guard consisted of one platoon. As it advanced up the road approaching Buttera, it suddenly drew machine gun fire and supposedly our surprise was lost. I frantic for fear my artillery would open up -- but they did not. The advance guard withdrew to foot of the hill. The platoon commander had been wounded. The company commander reorganized the advance guard quickly and began a flanking movement up the steep hill. Suddenly they came to the road and heard considerable talking and activity. They were suddenly upon a large group of the enemy. They cut loose with all the fire power in the platoon -- result: 77 killed and 14 captured. With a little persuasion on the part of the Rangers the Italians shouted in Italian: "Don't shoot, don't shoot". The platoon without further effort marched into the town and occupied it. Casualties in the capture of Buttera: 1 officer wounded, 1 man wounded (thumb shot off). The advance guard consisted of 30 men with 5 Tommy guns, 2 BAR's, and the remainder M-1 rifles. (Note: Colonel Darbey stated the capture of Buttera in the manner it happened was a fluke and accident -- just one of these things.)

No special equipment of any kind was used in the operation. No special supplies were used and supply presented no unusual problem. We were prepared to shell the town; the artillery was all set, but I was able to contact them by radio in time to prevent it when the advance guard first ran into trouble. My orders for the attack were oral, fragmentary, and brief. The enemy that we ran into apparently were in the process of emplacing AT guns. There were three on the road and one still on a truck that had not been unloaded. In withdrawing, apparently the enemy hit some of their own mines. We found them everywhere -- under cobblestones in the streets. We had not been to sleep for four days and everyone was very tired. We hit the town about 0300 hours and had occupied it by dawn. We used lights for recognition purposes in this operation. There was a little sniping as we entered the town but we handled it without difficulty. We captured the Baron of Buttera and took over his mansion. (END BUTTERA)

Our supply officer has always been able to keep rations and ammunition pushed up to us. We carry one full K ration in the pack. We dress lightly on equipment. (We remove the mess kit pouch from the pack and hook it on the belt. It makes a fine grenade pouch.) Each man carried 4 grenades and two 1/2 pound blocks of TNT. Officers and NCO's carry smoke and incendiary grenades and 2 assault grenades. (Each man carries 2 assault and 2 fragmentation grenades.) Tat corporal in each squad carries caps, primers, and fuses. In this way we can carry about 250 pounds of TNT in one battalion. (We use assault grenades extensively in our night work -- much more than fragmentation grenades. They stun if they don't kill and follow up is easy. In the pack we carry raincoat, toilet articles, K ration, mess kit (including knife, fork, and spoon). We carry 1 spare bandolier of ammunition.)

I like for men to cook own meals and use mess kit for cooking. You would be surprised how they can dress up the C ration with some onions, peppers, etc. collected at random. It helps them. We did not have kitchens in Sicily and we have been in Italy a month without kitchens. Regardless of kitchens, I always have men cook at least one meal a day individually.

One of our best means of physical conditioning is speed marching, finally reaching a point where we march 10 miles at rate of 6 miles per hour. To keep in condition we use calisthenics and five mile speed marches daily.

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(Disciplinary drills are all important. We have a retreat formation daily, conditions permitting. At this formation men are inspected, some manual of arms performed, followed by retreat. Every Sunday A.M. there is a review, followed by inspection in ranks, followed by inspection of quarters. In the training area we have a lot of ceremonies. It keeps away sloppiness. We have at least four periods per week of close order drill and manual of arms. One period a week every week is devoted to military courtesy. It cannot be overstressed.

We are severe in our punishments. Summary court used considerably. Infractions of discipline, military courtesy, and uniform violations are dealt with quickly and rather severely. Accidental discharge of fire arms is reduction and \$40.00 fine. The officers must bear down on these things. The Army has not stressed strict discipline enough and without it you are lost. I find my men slump after battle. I believe most of it forgetfulness.)

In combat every man carries a bottle of atabrine and a bottle of helazone tablets. Each officer carries a box of morphine syrettes and five tags already prepared except for the time entry. First aid is stressed in training. Our medical detachment is small -- 1 officer and 2 men per battalion and 1 aid man per company who lives with the company and does everything with it.