

Staff Department  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1949-1950

THE CAPTURE OF COMMANDING OFFICER, COMPANY B, 361ST  
INFANTRY AND SURRENDER OF COMPANY K, 361ST INFANTRY  
(~~31ST INFANTRY DIVISION~~) IN THE BATTLE OF LIVERGNANO,  
9 - 10 OCTOBER 1944  
(NORTH APENNINES CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY RIFLE COMPANY  
ATTACKING A VILLAGE IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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THE CAPTURE OF COMMANDING OFFICER, COMPANY B, 361ST  
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the capture of the Commander of Company B and the surrender of Company K, 361st Infantry, 91st Infantry Division, in the battle for LIVERGNANO, ITALY, 9 - 10 October 1944, during the drive toward the PO VALLEY. The action occurred behind the GOTHIC LINE in a place the Germans called the CAESAR LINE.

A brief background of history follows giving the major events that led to the scene of action, in order that the reader may be familiar with the theater and front line of the United States Army at the time.

The invasion of the Italian mainland began on 3 September 1943, by the British Eighth Army landing the major portion of its force at REGGIO on the southwestern tip of the peninsula.

(1) (See Map A) This operation preceded the main Allied attack of the Fifth Army by six days. Thus on 9 September, the beaches of SALERNO were invaded.

Hard and continuous fighting brought the two Armies together around the end of September. The joining of these forces meant the beginning of a co-ordinated advance to the north.

After the PORT of NAPLES fell and during the slow but steady advance to the north, the Allies encountered the GUSTAV LINE. In an effort to flank this line from the sea, two divi-

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(1) A-2, p. 56



sions made a landing in the ANZIO-NETTUNO area on 22 January 1944. (2) It was not until 25 May that this force and those advancing from the south made contact.

The 91st Infantry Division had been training in NORTH AFRICA. The 361st Regimental Combat Team (part of the Division) had been detached, sent to NAPLES and on 1 June 1944, landed at ANZIO. For two days the RCT was attached to the 36th Infantry Division, then to the 34th Infantry Division. ROME fell on 4 June and the 361st continued to fight with the 34th Infantry Division and the 1st Armored Division until the Allied Forces reached the ARNO RIVER. In the meantime, the remainder of the 91st Division arrived in ITALY. After a brief waiting period\* on the south banks of the ARNO, the attack across the river and to the north was resumed. A few weeks prior to arriving on the ARNO the 361st RCT had rejoined the 91st Infantry Division to fight with its parent unit.

Early in September 1944, the Fifth Army crossed the ARNO to continue the attack to the north. The 91st Division was in the section north of FLORENCE where HIGHWAY 65 runs generally north of BOLOGNA. It was not too far from FLORENCE that the troops encountered the enemy's most formidable defensive positions in ITALY. This was the GOTHIC LINE, (See Map B) a line that took thousands of men more than a year to construct. (3) However, in twelve days the Division cracked the defenses of the main line, captured FUTA PASS in order to push on toward BOLOGNA.

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(2) A-3, Sec. V

(3) A-1, p. 92

\* During this halt, units were pulled from the Italian Theater in order to make a successful invasion of southern France.

To those that participated it was only "a lifetime of mud, rain, sweat, strain, fear, courage, and prayers." (4) The Germans did not intend for American troops to break this line because it was their last natural barrier of defense south of the PO VALLEY. So against the defensive fire plan, made doubly hazardous by rain and fog, and the determination of the enemy, the 91st Infantry Division at this time was about three-fourths of the way toward BOLOGNA from FLORENCE and at the approach of the second winter in ITALY.

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

During the drive to the north toward BOLOGNA after the GOTHIC and MONGHIDORO LINES were cracked, the campaign for October was divided into three phases. The Germans had fallen back and established the LOIANO LINE which was to be the first phase of the attack. (See Map B) The second phase was the approach to the LIVERGNANO escarpment and finally the securing of this line.

The NORTHERN APENNINE MOUNTAINS stretched through the area of the Fifth Army. The terrain itself, where no roads existed, was almost impossible to cross even if there had been no enemy, let alone the prepared defenses. The vast mountain region begins in the northwest (south of GENOA) and extends to the southeast like a huge backbone across the peninsula. Deep valleys, spurs and broken ridges have been formed by the eroding effect of mountain streams. The majority of these run generally northeast and southwest. (5) The average crest elevation is 3,000 to 4,000 feet. In order to visualize the hugeness, these heights start at around 300 feet on the south

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(4) A-1, p. 92

(5) A-4, p. 4



side of the broad, fertile PO VALLEY. There is a continuous rise southly and some peaks reach 6,000 to 7,000 feet.

Fall rains begin in September in ITALY; small streams become torrents and intermittent streams become small rivers. The cloudy days, mist and fog make observation almost impossible the majority of the time. Along with all this comes mud -- the mud that makes life and walking so miserable for the Infantryman -- mud that will not permit tanks to operate when and where the Infantryman needs them.

The Fifth Army was attacking with two Corps abreast; the II Corps on the right astride HIGHWAY 65 and IV Corps on the left; the main effort being conducted by the II Corps, to which the 91st Infantry Division was assigned. HIGHWAY 65 was included in the 91st Division sector and since this road was the main route from FLORENCE to BOLOGNA, it was the most heavily defended. (See Map B) The II Corps advance had bulged the Allied line out like a spearhead. Since progress was being made, the 91st Division (and flanking units) was ordered to push the attack along the highway in its zone and had made contact with the LOIANO LINE. The 362d Infantry cleared the village of LOIANO by savage house to house fighting. The 361st Infantry was to pass through elements of the 362d Infantry (right zone) and attack initially with one Battalion on the right of the Division sector. The 363d Infantry continued on the left. However, the 362d would continue the attack to the north, gradually moving west to pinch out the 363d Infantry. (6)

The main highway offered an excellent supply route though often under enemy observation and consisted of many dangerous

curves while winding up and down the ranges. Supply was only difficult when units were great distances from this route. Although trails existed they were often too muddy to withstand vehicle traffic, but logistical support was considered sufficient. On the right of the road just north of LOIANO was a dominating peak, <sup>NIS</sup>MT. BASTIA, and on the left at a greater distance west was <sup>NIS</sup>MT. VENERE. Enemy positions on this ground, as on the other strongly prepared lines, were prepared by forced Italian labor.

The flanks of LOIANO broke while all three regiments of the 91st Division were on line. (7) By the end of the day of 6 October 1944, the 362d Infantry had completed its part of the mission by cutting out the 363d Infantry and taking over the left half of the Division sector. The 363d Infantry then passed to Division reserve. Beyond this point the 362d together with the 361st Infantry on the right would continue on to LIVERGNANO.

HITLER'S favorite troops, the 4th Parachute Division, along with the 362d Grenadier Division were defending the sector in front of the 91st Division. However, these units were in a critical condition. (8) The Germans had been unable to disengage these units but were succeeding in increasing their strength along this sector. The whole 65th Grenadier Division was shifted from in front of the IV Corps Zone to take over astride HIGHWAY 65.

The 91st Division had suffered over 300 battle casualties and almost an equal number of non-battle casualties. Generally, the combat efficiency of the enemy was excellent and better than

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(7) A-4, p. 124  
(8) A-4, p. 122



the American unit considering that a comparatively fresh Division had taken over the sector and once again held the commanding terrain, but the Americans were considered equal to the task.

#### THE REGIMENTAL SITUATION

The 361st Infantry was making the main attack on the LIVERGNANO escarpment, a natural line of defense which was the most formidable north of the GOTHIC LINE. (9) The 1st Battalion was on the right and 3d Battalion on the left. Advance was slow for the first two days because of deep, muddy ravines running eastward into ZENA RIVER and also enemy delaying positions were strong around the mountain villages. The attacking battalions moved rapidly on 8 October since enemy observation was restricted by mist and fog. The 3d Battalion made a wide sweep east of HIGHWAY 65, then cut across it at LA FORTUNA deep behind enemy lines as the 1st Battalion was stopped by the base of a huge escarpment. (See Map C) The Regimental plan was to have the 1st Battalion cut northwest attacking through the gap in the mountains (where the highway enters LIVERGNANO) to pinch out the 3d Battalion. The 2d Battalion would be employed in the other break one and a half miles east just above the village of BIGALLO. These were the only two breaks that occur within the sheer rock wall which the Regiment now faced. It was nearly 1,500 feet high in places and over three miles long.

The flanks of the Regiment were wide open. The 85th Division on the right boundary was a considerable distance behind and Company A was employed on this flank for (Regimental and

Division) protection leaving an attacking battalion with no reserve. In view of this fact, the plan was to attach Company K to the 1st Battalion and when the 3d Battalion was pinched out, Company A would be attached to the 3d Battalion.

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

The 1st Battalion was operating on the right of HIGHWAY 65 where weather and terrain were the principal delaying factors. (10) Company A had been employed on the right flank of the battalion which was the Regimental boundary. Company B and C continued in the attack and were engaged in a stiff fire fight at TREBBO. (See Map C) Tanks were supporting the attack by fire alone since the recent rains had caused so much mud they could not operate in the battalion zone. With this effective fire in addition to artillery support, TREBBO was cleared. Eight prisoners were taken and the remainder of the garrison killed. (11) In an effort to cut off a village to the south, Company C proceeded immediately to VALLE. In one of these villages, (presumably TREBBO) (12) the Battalion Commander contacted the Commander of Company B and pointed out a location on the map. (Also seen on the ground from the observation post.) Company B Commander then received an order to move his company to the position. The place was known as LE CRETE and at the base of the escarpment over a mile and a half forward from the front line. This was about all of the information given to Company B, except to move out immediately. Company B Commanding Officer contacted the Commander of Company C but found that he (C) had received no further orders.

(10) A-1, p. 155

(11) A-1, p. 155

(12) Personal knowledge

when?  
date?



Then contact was made with the Artillery Liaison Officer in order to work out the means of artillery support to cover the advance and for protection when the company took the objective. No contact could be made with any units on the left, and Company B assumed the movement was being made alone and both flanks and rear would be exposed. The Company pushed out as soon as final, detail plans were made and orders issued. The move was almost entirely over open country under direct observation of the enemy from high ground to the front and from towering MT. DELLE FORMICHE to the northeast in the 85th Division Zone. It was only by the grace of the Heavenly Father that the move was a success, because here a miracle happened.

It was still early in the morning and so far the weather was clear and visibility excellent -- yet no sooner had the company entered open country than a heavy fog closed in and the move was made entirely unobserved. The objective was occupied without meeting any resistance but a large number of the enemy was by-passed.

From this point Company B established an all-around defensive position extending to PRATO DI MAGNANO, which place had to be cleared of a few enemy. They were taken so completely by surprise that they were not able to fire a shot. During the night, Company C moved into the east and south of Company B. This was at the close of 8 October. During the night the by-passed enemy moved over to HIGHWAY 65 to withdraw through the 3d Battalion.

The mission of taking the escarpment was close at hand and for the Battalion as well as the Regiment, the next few

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days were to mean only heart-breaking, bitter fighting and difficulties which were well-nigh insurmountable. (13)

#### NARRATION

#### COMPANY K'S ATTACK ON LIVERGNANO

Late in the afternoon of 8 October, Company I had cut across HIGHWAY 65 and Company K moved up on the right. During the night 6 - 8 enemy tanks and a column of Infantry (not less than two companies) were withdrawing to the north of HIGHWAY 65. These troops evidently had no idea that the highway contained Americans on their route or certainly they would not have been in march column. With the exception of one platoon led by Lieutenant Mervin Krieger, Company I just pulled away from the highway and let the enemy pass. When the enemy discovered this platoon, their tanks just blasted through, practically killing the entire group. (14)\*

The next morning Companies I and K received a heavy counterattack by the enemy operating with tanks from their positions in LIVERGNANO. The attack was beaten off after a desperate fire fight. The enemy was able to withdraw all tanks successfully. Losses were heavy as many of the enemy were

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(13) A-1, p. 159

(14) Personal knowledge

\* This was reported to the Commander of Company B by one of his patrols he had sent out to make contact with the units on the left. The patrol contacted the platoon leader and at the time he had around three of his men left with him. The remainder of Company I made no attempt to stop or delay the retreating Germans.

After the war was over, the writer by coincidence met this Lieutenant in Charlotte, North Carolina. (He had been promoted.) Captain Krieger confirmed the fact that the tanks shot and killed most of the platoon. He also stated he was in contact with the 3d Battalion Commander and reported what was happening. The BG told him to, "Stop them". It was impossible for one beaten platoon to stop an enemy.



killed and a few captured. The battle was also costly to Americans since a number were killed, but not so many as to destroy the power to attack or the will to close with the enemy.

The Division Commander had ordered that the 3d Battalion hold its position at 1040 hours until their left flank was more secure. (15) Since the counterattack was in progress at the time and beaten off mainly by Company K, a platoon of that company pursued the enemy into the outskirts on the south side of the village around 1500 hours. A hail of machine gun and sniper fire greeted them, but they were successful in occupying two buildings on the right side of the street. (See Map D)

This platoon passed through the gap within the mountain where on the right there is a perpendicular rock wall joining the road. On the left of the road the bank dropped away into a deep ravine which Infantrymen could hardly cross and which was absolutely impossible for tanks or vehicles. This very spot, only wide as the road itself, was then demolished and cratered by the Germans. This sealed off any and all possible mechanized approaches.

Company K then found it impossible to enter the village with the remainder of the company during daylight hours. The enemy had complete control of the approach by interlocking bands of fire, sealed tight by prepared mortar barrages. In addition to this their observation commanded the entire Division Zone for a depth of over 5 miles. Their tanks were in position to deliver very effective close range as well as long range fire.

Around 1900 hours the remainder of Company K launched another attack through the gap and succeeded in joining the platoon in LIVERGNANO. "Joining the platoon" is correct, because after getting through the mortar and machine gun fire, the defensive fires inside, assisted by pointblank fire of the tanks forced the company together in one extremely large house. This house was actually two houses which were joined together end to end. It was one of the two houses that the first platoon entering the city had taken during the day. The other house was small and contained a pig and cattle room on the ground floor which was typical of Italian homes. A platoon with a light machine gun section attached had taken this small house but only the machine gun and a squad remained there to protect the flank of the company. The rest of the company had established all around defense of the large house.

#### THE ORDERS AND MANEUVER OF COMPANY B

During 9 October, all was quiet in Company B's area, since the enemy was still unaware that the company was present. The commander of the company did not receive any orders throughout the day. These were to come later and unexpected. The day was spent by the Captain checking the men of the company and calling for artillery missions on observed enemy positions. Perhaps one reason the enemy failed to locate the company was due to the fact that smoke was called for often on known or suspected enemy observation posts in addition to the high explosives.

When darkness fell the company was resupplied. A hot meal was fed to the men and hard rations were issued. When

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this was completed, the guard was inspected. After satisfying himself that security was excellent for the night, the company commander retired at his command post. No sooner than his eyes were closed, a guard awakened him with a message that he was wanted at Battalion. This was between 2230 and 2300 hours. When he arrived at the Battalion Command Post he was informed by the Battalion Commander that Company K was in LIVERGNANO and given oral orders that Company B would pass through Company K at 0600 hours the next morning. The mission was to finish clearing the village of all enemy. The line of departure would be the line held by Company K at that hour. The Battalion Commander stated that he thought that Company K would have the village in hand before morning. (16)

The captain of Company B then contacted the Battalion S-2 and S-3 in hopes of learning more details as to the present situation. These staff officers did not furnish any more information than had already been learned, except that the S-2 figured the enemy was not strong and would give in without too much fighting. The strength of the enemy was estimated at less than a company. The S-3 stated that Company K was temporarily under command of the 1st Battalion. Company B should find the routes used by Companies I and K and enter the village by HIGHWAY 65. (17)

When the Commander of Company B returned to the Company, the men were alerted. Individual rolls were stacked and the company was prepared to move soon after the Captain issued his order. The order was fragmentary and based on the information received at the battalion. The tentative plan was

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- (16) Personal knowledge
  - (17) Personal knowledge

to have two platoons abreast and the third platoon in support. When the Company reached HIGHWAY 65, the 1st Platoon would take the right side and the 2d Platoon the left side of the road. The platoons would be deployed and prepared for street fighting.

High ridges, a stream, and canyons, were between the company's present position and the Village of LIVERGNANO. By following passable terrain features the distance was approximately two and a half miles. The map indicated a little over one mile. Not being familiar with the route over which the Company was to travel, the Captain made a map reconnaissance and plotted the azimuth toward the objective. This reading (generally northwest) was set on all company compasses. (See Map C) The Company moved out at 0200 hours. (18) The Company Commander was leading his unit in an attempt to reach LIVERGNANO prior to 0600 hours.

The move was made in total darkness. It was raining during the early hours of the morning and the creek which had to be crossed was almost waist deep in places. The ridges were very muddy and often the company had to move in a single file along slippery ledges. Daylight broke before the company reached HIGHWAY 65. The column was still climbing when 0600 hours appeared on the Captain's watch. Radio contact was made with Battalion and the situation reported. There was no change in orders, and instructions were given for the company to continue on the mission. (19) At 0645 hours the company contacted Company I at LA FORTUNA, and was halted to the right

(18) Personal knowledge (Taken from notes which are in possession of the author. The notes are part of Captain Anderson's report of capture and statement of return rendered to the Department of the Army on his return from Russia in 1945)

(19) Personal knowledge



behind a bank. (It is well to note here that Company I was packed into one house on the right side of the road.)

This halt was about 1000 yards south of LIVERGNANO. (See Map C) The Commander of Company I told Company B Commander that he could move his company right up the highway without any trouble since Company K was still in the village and held the south side.

Leaving the Commander of Company I, the Captain looked to the north but sensed something was wrong with all the information he had received thus far. The morning was so very quiet. No shots or shells were being fired, nor could any be heard anywhere. The dead from both forces could be seen strewn throughout the battleground all the way from LA FORTUNA to the entrance of LIVERGNANO. A reconnaissance was necessary so the company commander selected four riflemen, two radiomen, one with the SCR 300, the other with a SCR 536, to accompany him to make contact with Company K. Instructions were left with the Executive Officer of Company B, that if the Commander did not return within an hour, that the company should carry out the plan contained in the orders issued during the night.

Company B Commander, with his small party, proceeded toward LIVERGNANO by the HIGHWAY. About half way to the village, an officer of Company K was discovered with a number of bullet holes in his body, face down and his equipment still on. He was groaning and still alive. He could not give much information, so after rendering first aid, the Captain let one rifleman remain with the Lieutenant and sent another back to Company I to get a stretcher and a medic. The party then continued on to the village.

The road made a curve to the left and here the rock wall was discovered on the right and the deep canyon on the left. Beyond the crater the road made a sharp "U" bend to the right. (See Map D) On entering the village the Captain informed his men to keep at least 30 yards behind him. The radiomen kept closing up, then waited and close up again. They did not seem to want to stay very far from their leader. No shots, shells, nor any signs of life appeared to this point. Three buildings were passed since they were built on a bank above the street and could not be searched. On rounding the bend, the Captain stopped cold in his tracks beside a building, for in front of him, no more than 50 yards was a German assault tank. The tank started the engine and then all hell broke loose. Another tank fired a shell that burst just above the Captains head. Shrapnel from this shell killed the two radiomen and destroyed the radios. The Captain was knocked down by the concussion, yet uninjured. He yelled for the two riflemen to go back, but they came running up to the radiomen. Another shell burst in the same place, and killed them. The small arms and machine gun fire was blazing from every direction in the village. On the left side of the street a squad of Germans were firing at the Captain, but at the same time, men from Company K opened fire on the enemy. This covering fire permitted the Captain to crawl to the small building held by Company K on the right side of the street.

#### THE BATTLE FOR THE VILLAGE

The men in this first house were quite low on ammunition. The light machine gun section was knocked out at the entrance.

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The ammunition belt was salvaged and the bullets were distributed among the squad. The men of this group told the Commander of Company B that their Captain was all right but was supposed to be in the next house. A large shell hole existed on the north side of this house. Company B Commander waded through knee deep, slushy, refuse of the stable and crawled through the hole. He made a dash to the next building. It was discovered here that Company K's Commander was in the next building. There was no entrance to it except through the enemy's line of fire. Captain, Company B, had several men start breaking a hole through the wall in order that the Company would have a means of communication. Realizing this would take a long time, he left the building, ran through enemy fire to the east side and entered the other half of the house. It was exactly 0730 hours when contact was made between the two Captains. (99) In the meantime the Germans had opened fire from every direction around the position, including heavy mortar and direct tank fire.

A desperate battle was on and during this fight the leading elements of Company B started up HIGHWAY 65, in accordance with old orders. Company B, could get no closer than the crater in the road. They were observed and blasted with well placed fire which caused them to fall back into a defensive position between Company I and the village.

It was really heart-breaking for their commander to be in the center of the enemy's lines and observe the surprise fire the Germans placed on the 1st Platoon. Mortar fires appeared to completely destroy the platoon. The units in LIVERGNANO had no means of contact with them since the enemy

(20) Personal knowledge

had closed the gap that existed when the Commander of Company B entered the village.

The Captain of Company K was very tired after the sleepless night. His men were united only because of his presence and all of his efforts in his weak condition were utilized in keeping the morale of his men high. He did not know that he was temporarily under command of the 1st Battalion until later in the morning when the 3d Battalion so informed him.

(21) After this the 3d Battalion gave no further assistance, advice or instructions to the unit in LIVERGNANO.

Realizing this the Commander of Company B assisted in the command of Company K. One of the two SCR 300 radios that Company K was fortunate in having was switched from the 3d Battalion to the 1st Battalion channel. Contact was made with the 1st Battalion Commander. During this time the counterattack of the enemy increased. Some of the Germans entered the buildings but were stopped by bayonets and trench knives. Several Germans were captured and one young soldier among them spoke very good English.

The Captain of Company B took this prisoner to the 3d floor and persuaded him to talk. The prisoner was not hard to convince that the unit intended to hold until the last man was killed, if necessary, and that he would remain there to die with the Company.

He was informed that his assistance may save the situation for the Americans and consequently his life. This soldier told the Captain everything that was in the village and pinpointed positions on a hastily drawn map. The Captain then reported all positions by map coordinates to the third



decimal place and informed the 1st Battalion Commander that a Battalion of the German 65th Division was in the village, reinforced with a Company of Engineers, four assault tanks and two Tiger tanks. (22) Artillery missions were pleaded for but the artillery refused to fire stating it was too close to friendly troops. Actually the troops remaining in the village did not care if their own artillery fell upon them. The enemy was placing such a heavy concentration on the troops that they felt a few more shells could not hurt. Both the Commanders estimated about 30 to 40 men were left and this compared to the number of enemy that would be killed was certainly a <sup>[reasonable]</sup> sacrifice. The price was great but the chance had to be taken. Therefore, the artillery was requested to be placed on the position. (23)

#### THE SURRENDER

The men in LIVERGNANO were able to withstand the enemy's fire and attack for three hours. The majority of this time was without ammunition and fighting hand to hand. On many occasions the enemy yelled for the Americans to come out and surrender or the buildings would be knocked down and set on fire with flame throwers. The Americans held their ground waiting for a decision from the Battalion, which was responsible for them. The Commander of Company B had requested the 1st Battalion to send another radio to Company B and to give instructions to the Company Executive, not to try to enter by the HIGHWAY since it was only a trap. He requested that the company be informed to move to the east and scale the

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(22) Personal knowledge and confirmed (shortly after being captured) by the German Colonel, commanding the unit. His command post was less than 100 yards from Company K's position.

(23) Personal knowledge

mountain. That was the only weak point and from the top, the village could be attacked from higher ground. (24) (See Map D)

During the last hour both of the company commanders made requests to withdraw, feeling certain that at least half of what was left could be saved. All requests were ignored and the Company B Commander was definitely told not to withdraw. At 1000 hours the Captain of Company B ordered all letters, maps, platoon radios, and anything that would be of value to the enemy, destroyed. Weapons that were out of ammunition were damaged beyond the useable stage, but retained with bayonets fixed. The radios in Battalion net remained in as long as possible. Within the half hour both captains met and decided it was finished. The company would be demolished if an attempt was made to hold another ten minutes. Captain, Company B told the Commander of Company K to put the English speaking German prisoner in front of him and walk out of the door with his hands up. The rest of the company was ordered to follow their commander if the enemy ceased firing. (25)

The Captain of Company B then went to the third floor of the building where the radio was still in contact with the 1st Battalion. A report was made that the Company\* was being surrendered. The last words that the Captain could think of were "goodbye and good luck." He looked out of the window

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(24) Personal knowledge

(25) Personal knowledge. The English speaking German had kept Capt Anderson informed of what the enemy was talking about outside. It was through this knowledge and through observation of the enemy's maneuver, especially when the flame thrower was placed in position, the decision to surrender was made. Capt Sigmen, (CO of Co. K) personally elected that he would go out first.

\* Not known at the time but the German court indicated 79 Nov 1944



and all firing had ceased. The surrendered men were being rushed through the village street to a cave back of the town. In the process of destroying the last radio, two well fed Germans entered the room and ordered the Captain downstairs. He took one last look at his watch before the captors removed it. The time was 1030 hours.

### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

#### 1. INFORMATION

On the night that the Commander of Company B received orders to pass through Company K and clean out the village, the Battalion Commander and the S-2 assured the Captain that the enemy was weak. They estimated their strength at less than a Company. When the Captain arrived in the village he discovered that a reinforced Battalion existed. This enemy was neither weak, disorganized, nor with any intention of withdrawing. On the contrary, they were well organized, strong, and in addition had Company K in a trap. Had the Commander of Company B realized the strength of the enemy, he would certainly have been more cautious. At PRATO DI MAGNANO, the enemy did not have a chance to fire a shot because the Company Commander did not know the enemy situation. He called for artillery smoke on suspected enemy observation posts when the fog lifted. The enemy was completely surprised. However, when the Captain was furnished with false information that Company K was in the village and expected to have most of the "weak" enemy out by daylight, the Captain was the one that received the surprise and not the enemy.

## 2. RECONNAISSANCE AND COMMAND

While the Commander of Company B was on reconnaissance, he discovered a perpendicular rock wall on the right of the road and a deep ravine of the left side. This gap was almost impossible for infantrymen to cross. The orders for the type of deployment issued were likewise impossible after it was discovered that the enemy, and not Company K, dominated this ground. At this point the enemy did not expose himself and since the Captain was so close to the village, he continued on expecting to contact the Commander of Company K within a short distance. He should have terminated the reconnaissance at the gap because this warranted a change in company orders. Had the Captain returned to the Company (provided he wasn't shot in the back by the enemy when he turned) he would not have been a loss to the Battalion within the next three hours. In either place it is doubtful if Company B could have saved Company K that day. Likewise the Company K Commander was too far forward. Both officers should have been to the rear of their companys in order to commit support units or call for supporting fires. The only difference here was the fact that Company K had no reserves.

## 3. COMMUNICATIONS

Somewhere along the line Company K had acquired an additional radio SCR 300 that was netted in with the 3d Battalion. This enabled the Commander of Company B to switch one of them to the 1st Battalion. Company B had only the one radio, for the Battalion net, which was destroyed by enemy action. This left Company B without communication with the Battalion and



also the Company Commander since the company net radio with him was also destroyed. In addition to this, one Battalion did not know what channel the other Battalions operated on and as a result Company B could not communicate with Company K prior to personal contact. Company B was over two miles (distance straight back) from the Battalion forward observation post. Wire lines had not followed any unit this far out and communication depended on radio. If Company B had possessed two radios netted in with Battalion, the Company Commander could have directed his unit through the second radio.

#### 4. THE OBJECTIVE

The village of LIVERGNANO was considered to be one of the only two gaps that existed in the three mile escarpment. Company K had entered this gap by the HIGHWAY and was trapped. The Company did not move forward during the night nor did it move after daybreak. It is believed that one of the two Battalions involved or the Regiment knew the situation of Company K (existed) prior to Company B being committed. However, Company B was employed into the same gap and over the same route where one company was already stuck. It is not believed that other entrances were absolutely impossible and the 1st Battalion should have tried a flanking move. The Commander of Company B, after he was trapped, requested the Battalion to inform Company B to move to the east and scale the mountain. Ordering Company B to enter by the HIGHWAY only promoted failure.

#### 5. COMMAND OF COMPANY K

Within the Division and even higher echelons, Regiments

and Battalions were continually cutting right or left to "pinch out" a unit and then employing the third unit on a flank when the sector was widened. This was not always a good policy because the unit being pinched out was well informed of the situation, thus losing momentum knowing they were to fall back. This often exposed the flank of the unit that was squeezing the other unit out and caused the enemy resistance to be greater. This, because the enemy did not have to concentrate on a unit that was no longer aggressive. In such a case, it is believed that it would be better to let the third unit pass through the unit desired to be pinched out. That is, provided the unit is not pinned down.

Such was not the case with the Regimental plan for the 1st Battalion to pinch out the 3d Battalion at LIVERGNANO. Company A was employed protecting the right flank of the Regiment. Company K, part of the Battalion being pinched out, was attached to the 1st Battalion -- but Company K was engaged in combat and pinned down. The command of this unit was passed during a moving situation and the company was not informed. When Company K learned of this change it was in the morning and during a critical stage, by then neither Battalion wanted to accept the responsibility.

#### 6. THE FAILURE OF FLANK PROTECTION

No place on record can it be found that after Company I cut across the HIGHWAY, that during the night the Company permitted the enemy to withdraw through their road block. The next morning when Company I was contacted, the unit was packed in one house. Company K was in the village almost 1000 yards north of Company I and no contact had been main-



tained between the two units. It is imperative that the flanks of any unit be protected at all times to prevent the enemy from making an envelopment. If Company I and K had coordinated their efforts, the ground gained may have been held. Perhaps Company I could have prevented a bloody battle the next day had they stopped the column of enemy during the night. It is conceivable that the tanks could pass through the company. In any event it is felt that Company I should have at least made an attempt to join flanks with Company K.

#### 7. LACK OF MANEUVER

In any offensive action units must be able to maneuver. Within the village Company K maintained an excellent base of fire until their ammunition ran out. One reason the battle was lost was due to the fact nothing was available to maneuver. Had Company B been able to receive the Captains information to move east and scale the mountain, the maneuver element would have been present. The plan might have worked at the time because when reported, the Captain knew a weak spot existed. The enemy mortars and artillery could not have landed on the Company because the cliff was too steep. The shells would have burst in the valley below. If the maneuver had been a success, then an attack could have been made from higher ground.

#### 8. ANTITANK DEFENSE

*no cut* | Although not mentioned in the text, but worthy of thought, is the antitank measures within a rifle company. Defense was not mentioned against the six tanks firing point blank

at the Company because nothing was available to stop them. The 2.36 inch rocket launcher was employed until the ammunition was expended. However, the hits scored merely bounced off of the heavy armor like fire-crackers. During the campaign in ITALY and on many occasions, this weapon and the rifle grenade knocked out many tanks, but the hit had to be in a certain spot. Fighting in terrain where tanks cannot close with the enemy, it is felt that the front line companies should have a more powerful antitank gun or weapon. Such a weapon available on the road block established by Company I could no doubt have eliminated the tanks during their night withdrawal. Company K could have used one in LIVERGNANO. If the six tanks had been knocked out, American armor could have rolled into the village without any trouble. The streets were not mined and the crater could have been leveled with an armored bulldozer.

#### 9. CONFIDENCE IN SUBORDINATE COMMANDERS

Two Captains were present in the village and both asked for permission to withdraw, yet the Battalion Commander desired the position he held and refused to authorize a withdrawal. The officers knew the situation from A to Z and felt certain that it was time to pull out, but remained because of their devotion to duty and discipline. They knew the next higher commander should have been the person to authorize such a move. Both knew that a withdrawal would mean certain death to at least half that attempted the risk. This would be the price to pay but at least they felt that some of the "manpower" would get through and live to fight another day. They also knew their case was hopeless in LIVERGNANO and their



benefit to the Regiment was finished unless they could loose ground. It would have been better to let the position go, then come back and take it again, perhaps from a different direction or with closer coordination. The decisions and requests of these leaders were ignored. Then all were overpowered by the enemy and the entire company lost.

### LESSONS

1. (a) Information of the enemy should not be given unless it is true.

(b) Surprise is a vital weapon to the attacker.

2. (a) A reconnaissance should be concluded when enough information has been gathered to warrant a change in orders.

(b) Commanders should remain behind the men they lead in order to commit their reserves and call for supporting fire.

3. Front line companies should have two radios that will contact the Battalion net.

4. A Company should not be employed in the same place and over the same route where another company is already stuck.

5. (a) Front line units should not be "pinched-out" but passed through unless pinned down.

(b) Units engaged in combat should remain under command of their parent unit until the action is completed.

6. The flanks of a leading unit must be protected at all times.

7. The best means of taking an objective is "Fire and Maneuver".

8. Attacking front line units need a powerful antitank  
weapon of their own.

9. Decisions and requests of subordinate leaders should  
not be ignored.





Gothic Line

BOLOGNA

ARNO R. FLORENCE

ADRIATIC

SEA

CORSICA

ROME

ANZIO

III ACR 361

1 JUN 44

ALLIED FORCE  
ATTACK 22 JAN 44

Gustav Line

NAPLES

SALERNO

FIFTH ARMY  
ATTACK 9 SEP 43

SARDINIA

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

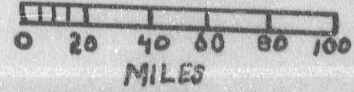
EIGHTH ARMY  
ATTACK 3 SEP 43

REGGIO

SICILY

MAP "A"  
ITALY

SCALE

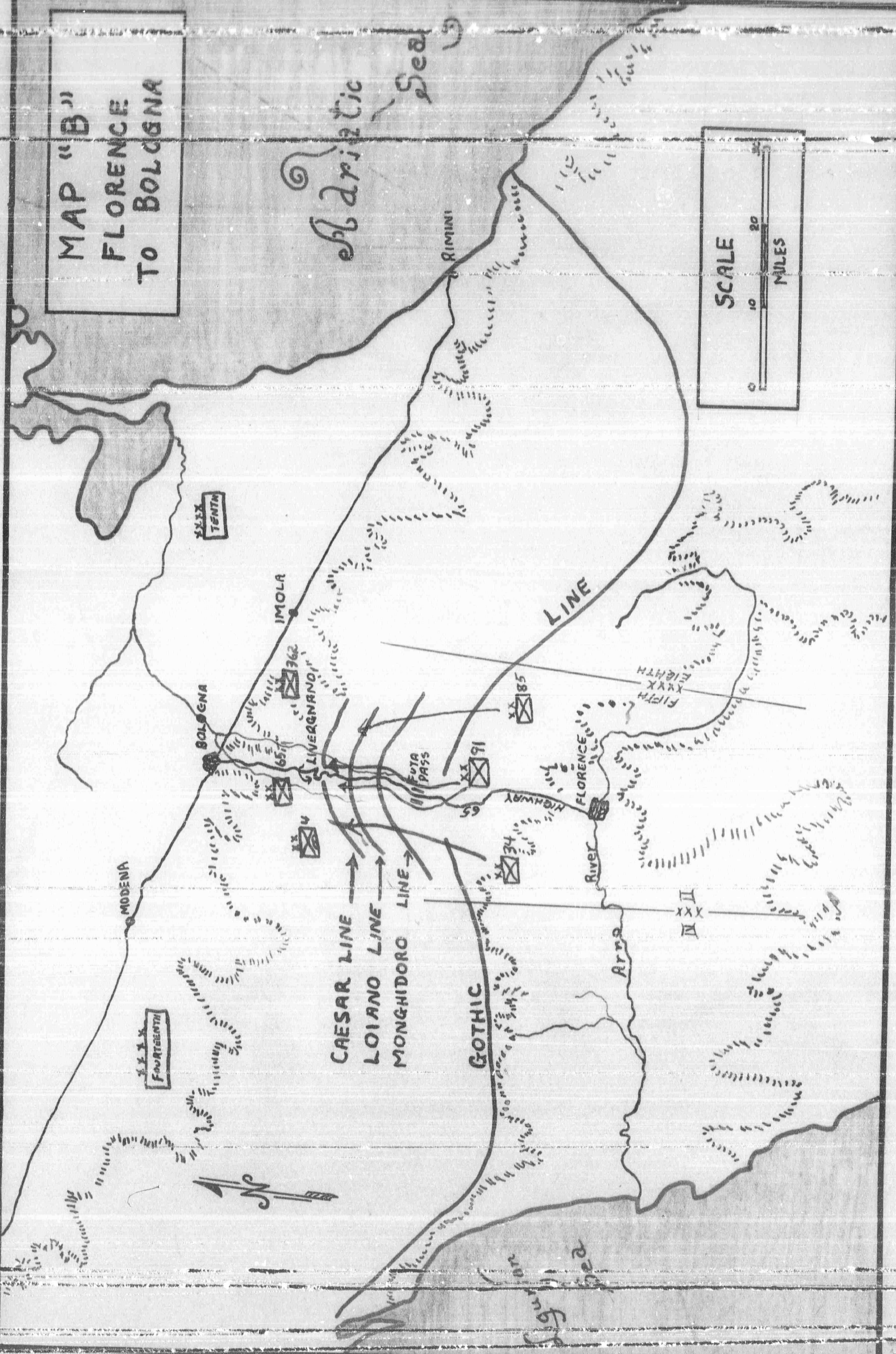
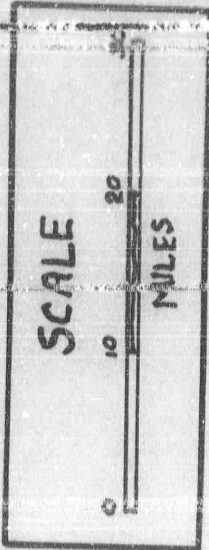


MILES

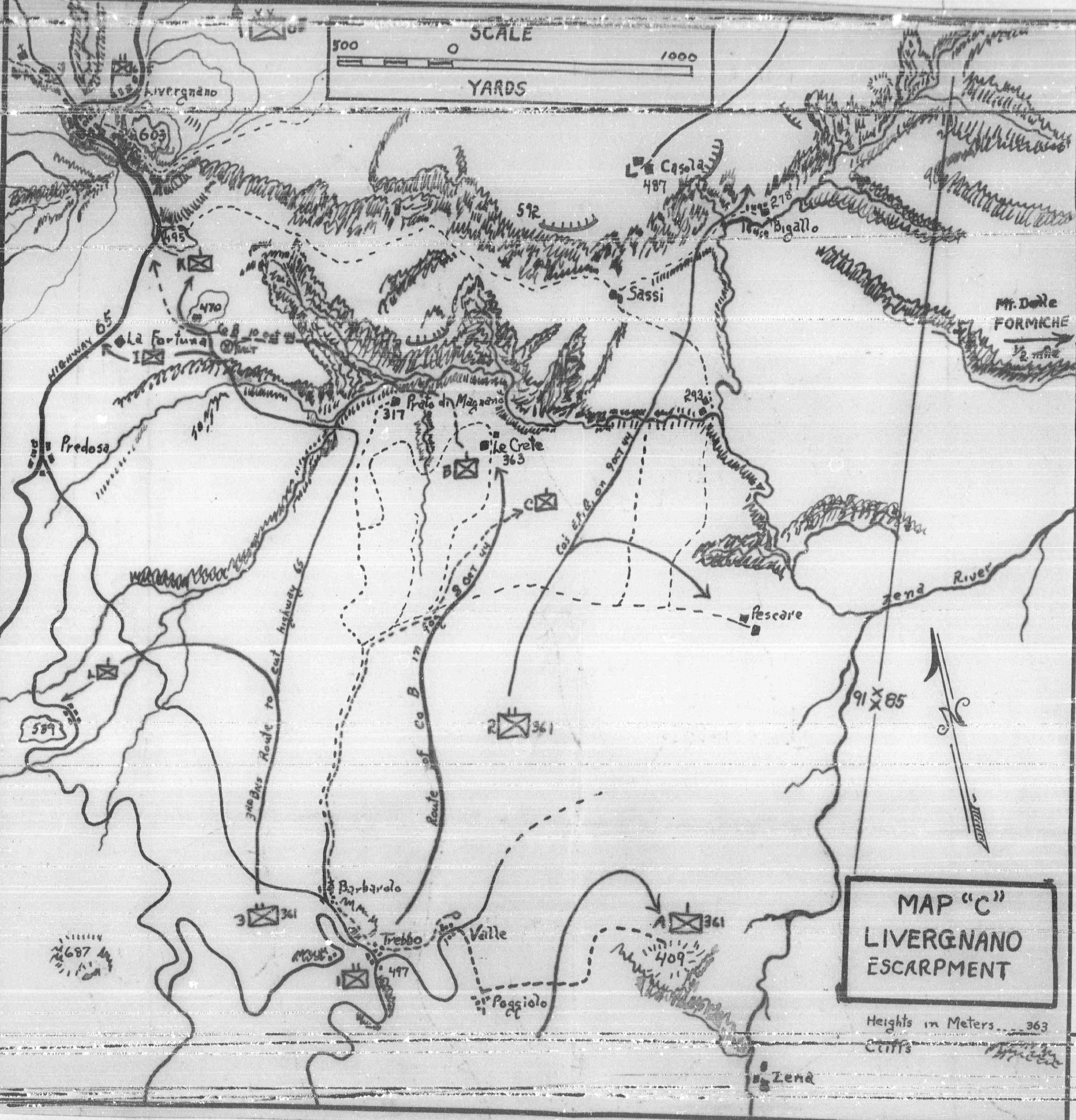
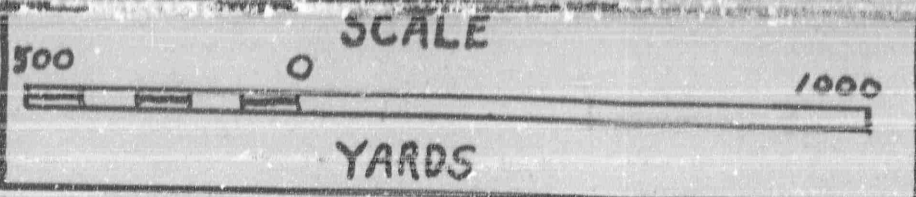


MAP "B"  
FLORENCE  
TO BOLOGNA

Adriatic Sea







MAP "C"  
LIVERGNANO  
ESCARPMENT

Heights in Meters... 363  
Cliffs



MAP "D"  
LIVERGNANO  
ITALY  
10 October 1944

