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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 135TH INFANTRY  
(34TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT ALGIERS, NORTH AFRICA,  
7 NOVEMBER - 10 NOVEMBER, 1942  
(THE ALGERIA-FRENCH MOROCCO CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: BATTALION LANDING OPERA-  
TION ON HOSTILE SHORES

Major Leslie W. Bailey, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

This personal experience monograph covers the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment, 34th U. S. Division during the Allied Landings in the Algiers area of the North African Theatre of Operations from 7 November to 10 November, 1942.

In order that the reader may have a better understanding of what follows, it is essential to review briefly some of the pertinent, international politico-military and strategic considerations which dictated a landing operation in French North Africa at that time.

In July, 1942, at a conference in Washington between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, the two Allied leaders decided to make an amphibious invasion of North Africa instead of a direct attack across the English Channel. This attack against French North Africa was to transpire during the month of November, 1942, in conjunction with a determined westward drive by the British Eighth Army in Egypt whose mission was to clear the entire North African area of Axis troops. (1)

At that time it seemed that the following seven important strategic advantages would accrue to the Allies if Operation "TORCH" as the invasion plan was called, could be successfully accomplished in conjunction with the clearing of all Axis troops from North Africa:

(1) A-1, p. 1.

Mediterranean sea under the protection of land-based aircraft" and could reach Egypt, Suez, and India without making the long 10,000 mile journey around the Cape of Good Hope. (2)

2. The occupation of French North Africa would enable the Allies to complete their blockade of the Axis powers. (3)

3. It would place the Allies in a position to hit directly at the "Soft underbelly of Europe" by giving them advanced land and bomber bases from which an invasion could be launched with the mission of knocking Italy out of the war. (4)

4. The occupation of North Africa would make Suez and the Middle East safe from a possible invasion by Axis forces from the west through Spain. (5)

5. "Dakar would no longer be a threat to South America." (6)

6. The French Army could be reanimated for later active operations in driving the Nazi invaders from France. (7)

7. By forcing the Germans to send some of their combat divisions from the Russian Front to engage the Allies in North Africa, it would relieve pressure from the bitterly resisting Russian Forces then engaged in the heroic defense of Stalingrad. (8)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

At the time of the launching of Operation "TORCH", French North Africa was not an active combat theatre for American troops. For this reason the feelings of the local inhabitants were considered to be favorable to the people of the United States. (9)

(2,3) A-1, p. 1; (4) A-3, p. 13; (5,6,7) A-1, p. 2; (8) A-1, p. 15; (9) A-3, p. 1.

On the other hand, the French people in North Africa were deeply embittered at the British because of the combat action which British Naval Forces had taken after the fall of France, against French Naval Units at Dakar and Oran. Although the action was taken to forestall the possibility of having the Nazis seize the French Fleet it strained relations between the two former Allies almost to the breaking point. Because of the delicacy of these relations it was decided that the British Navy would furnish only Naval Vessels and Naval Personnel for implementing Operation "TORCH" while the major part of the assault landing forces would be furnished by the United States. (10)

These combined British and American land, sea and air units were organized into three separate task forces which were placed under the overall command of Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, U. S. Army. The three task forces were assigned missions of striking simultaneously at the French North African cities of Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers. (See Map A) (11)

The Western Task Force comprising 34,000 troops under the command of Major General George S. Patton, Jr., was to sail from the United States and seize the important Naval Base of Casablanca on the northwest coast of French Morocco. (12)

The Central Task Force under command of Major General Lloyd Fredendall, comprising 30,000 U. S. troops, was to sail from the British Isles and capture the port of Oran and adjacent airfields on the Mediterranean Coast of Western Algeria. (12)

The Eastern Task Force comprising 42,000 American and British troops under command of General K. A. N. Anderson of

(10) A-3, p. 5; (11) A-1, p. 1,4; (12) A-1, p. 4, Personal Knowledge.

... mission of capturing the city of Algiers. In the Eastern Task Force the assault troops were designated as the Eastern Assault Force and were placed under the direct command of Major General Charles W. Ryder, U. S. Army, second-in-command to General Anderson. (13)

The Eastern Assault Force consisted of the 39th Regimental Combat Team from the 9th Division, the 168th Regimental Combat Team from the 34th Division, one Battalion of American Rangers, and some British Commando troops. Each of these units was to take part in the assault landing on Algiers at approximately 0100 hours, 8 November, 1942. (14)

The 39th Regimental Combat Team was to land 15 miles east of Algiers at Ain Taya and seize the airfield at Maison Blanche. (See Map B) (14)

The 168th Regimental Combat Team was to land on beaches near Sidi Ferruch, about fifteen miles west of Algiers, make an overland march to the west and south of the city and capture the high hills which dominated the city from the rear. (14)

The Ranger Battalion was to seize Fort Sidi Ferruch, west of Algiers. (14)

The British Commandos were to seize several important coastal batteries which dominated Algiers Harbor, and prevent the French Naval personnel who manned them from using them against our landing forces. (14)

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

Although the original invasion plan of the Eastern Assault Force had not called for their employment, nor had they received any specialized amphibious training for such a mission, it was suddenly decided during the last few days

(13) A-1, p. 4, Personal Knowledge; (14) A-1, p. 6, 8, 9, Personal Knowledge.

Isles, to use the 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry of the 34th Division to make a frontal assault landing on the port installations of the harbor at Algiers. To accomplish this mission the 3rd Battalion was to be loaded aboard the two British destroyers, HMS Malcolm and HMS Broke, which were then to steam to Algiers and debark the troops directly on the city docks. (15)

In order to prepare for its mission the 3rd Battalion, which was at that time stationed in Northern Ireland, moved on 18 October, 1942 to Sunnylands Camp near Belfast. As a counterintelligence measure, word was spread among the other two battalions of the 135th Infantry that the 3rd Battalion had departed on routine maneuvers in the Sperrin Mountains near Lough Neagh. (16)

The 3rd Battalion was commanded by Lt. Col. Edwin T. Swenson, a dynamic, aggressive officer from Stillwater, Minnesota. Due to the limited space for personnel aboard the two British destroyers provided to transport his men, Lt. Col. Swenson had only a skeleton staff, consisting of Captain Wilhelm Johnson, Surgeon, Captain William F. Snellman, Executive Officer, and Captain Emory J. Traywick, Communications Officer. No chaplain was provided. (16)

During the last few days prior to its embarkation the 3rd Battalion engaged in an intensive training program which stressed physical conditioning, individual combat proficiency, and specialized assault techniques. To assist them in their training a small party of approximately forty British Naval Troops were attached to the battalion and furnished with U. S. Army uniforms to deceive the French later as to their true identity. Several joint British-American boarding parties

(15) Personal knowledge; (16) Personal knowledge.

were organized and trained to seize any enemy ships in Algiers harbor which might threaten the success of our mission.

As part of the training program each day, the entire battalion was loaded on trucks and hauled to the Belfast dock area. This action was taken both for the purposes of training the men and preventing the local people from knowing the day of our departure. As a climax to the training at Sunnylands Camp, a practice operation was made during the hours of darkness in Belfast Harbor, at which time the troops were loaded on and unloaded from the two destroyers, HMS Malcolm and HMS Broke. (17)

On the morning of 26 October, 1942, 21 officers and 613 enlisted men of 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry boarded the British Cruiser, Sheffield, in Belfast Harbor. These numbers when added to the 2 officers and 50 enlisted men of Company "M" who had already embarked on the Malcolm and the Broke brought the total strength of the battalion to 686 officers and men. (18)

During the afternoon of 26 October the Sheffield set sail on a voyage which was most pleasant, and singularly uneventful all the way. In sharp contrast to the cold, dreary climate of Northern Ireland, the weather for the entire voyage was clear and mild. Moreover, no enemy aircraft or submarines were sighted at any time. These pleasant conditions contributed greatly to the high morale and enthusiasm of the troops. (19)

On the second night after our departure from Belfast we joined a large convoy of aircraft carriers and troop transports heavily loaded with troops and landing craft of varied sizes, which we accompanied as part of their escort. (19)

(17) Personal knowledge; (18) A-9, p. 2; (19) Personal knowledge.

Not until 29 October, during the third day of the voyage, did we receive the slightest inkling as to our destination or our mission. This secrecy was necessary because the itinerary of the Sheffield included a one-day stop at the port of Gibraltar. (19)

The first briefing for our mission took place in the wardroom of the Sheffield with all British and American officers present. To each of us was issued a large scale map which showed in great detail the harbor and port installations of a certain French city, but from which all marks of identification had been carefully clipped out. (See Map C) (19)

Amid an atmosphere of hushed expectancy, Captain Fancourt of the Royal Navy then told us that, under his command, we were soon to participate in a decisive action expressly planned, "To open the Mediterranean Sea to Allied ships; to chase the German Army out of Africa; to knock Italy out of the war; and to shorten the ultimate length of the war in Europe by at least two years." (19)

Captain Fancourt then told us that the 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry and its attached British Naval Personnel had been designated as "THE TERMINAL FORCE", and that we would remain on board the Sheffield until after we passed through the Strait of Gibraltar, after which we would transfer to the destroyers, Malcolm and Broke, in order to accomplish a mission which Lt. Col. Swenson would now explain to us. (19)

Lt. Col. Swenson then gave us the general plan for the attack of the 3rd Battalion, as follows:

(19) Personal knowledge.

Upon arriving within two days journey of Gibraltar, the Sheffield would increase her speed, push out ahead of the convoy, and rendezvous with the destroyers, Malcolm and Broke, somewhere east of the Strait of Gibraltar. At the rendezvous area, Company "K" and the first two platoons of Company "I" would go aboard the Malcolm, while the remainder of Company "I" and all of Company "L" would go aboard the Broke. The attached Medical personnel and the Heavy Weapons personnel from Company "M" would be split equally between the two destroyers. (20)

Upon completion of this transfer, the TERMINAL FORCE was to proceed at top speed to the French city shown on our maps (This city was Algiers but we had not yet been told its name) for the purpose of having the two destroyers ram a hole through the heavy steel boom stretched across the entrance to its harbor, and land their troops on the docks to prevent sabotage to the port installations. In approaching and ramming the boom, the Broke was to precede the Malcolm by a time interval of 15 minutes. (20)

From our maps it was evident that the city of Algiers is situated on ground fairly level at the seashore, but which rises sharply to the west into a series of rounded hills and steep ridges with heights in excess of 200 meters above the level of the Mediterranean Sea. (See Map C) The harbor is shaped like a large crescent with the open side facing to the east. Our maps showed it to be protected from the waves of the open sea by artificially constructed breakwaters or jetees which jutted out to sea for distances of 2000 to 3000 yards. According to our intelligence sources these jetees were concrete (20) Personal knowledge.

walls with an average height above the water of from five to ten feet. Several large piers which the French called Moles jutted from the shore into the harbor. From north to south these moles were in the order, Mole Lyvois, Mole de Peche, Mole al de Djefna, Mole des Passegeurs, Mole al Mouchez, Mole aux Minerais, Grand Mole, and Mole Louis Billiard. (See Map C) (21)

The objectives assigned to the 3rd Battalion extended from the Port Offices and Graving Docks near Mole al Mouchez, south along the shore to the Jetee, Brise Lames Est, a total distance of more than 3000 yards. These objectives were to be reached by ramming the destroyers through the boom stretched across the entrance to Bassin de Mustapha, from Jetee de Mustapha to the north end of Brise Lames Est. (See Map C) (21)

Our map indicated that the shore batteries situated in the city could inflict heavy casualties on us if the French offered determined resistance to our attack. We noted that the Batterie des Arcades, located south and west of the harbor on a small rounded hill about 100 meters high, could probably cover most of the harbor with fire. It was also evident that batteries located on Jetee du Nord and Ilot de la Marine could inflict severe damage on us as we entered the harbor. Captain Fancourt relieved our fears with the statement that British Commandos had been assigned missions of capturing and destroying all those batteries prior to our landings. It was also calculated that Jetee du Nord and Ilot de la Marine batteries could not be depressed enough to fire over the jetees to the south with any degree of accuracy. (21)

(21) Personal knowledge.

In attempting to evaluate the terrain from our map and photo study we were greatly handicapped by our complete lack of trained aerial photograph interpreters. Several features on our aerial photo maps appeared to our untrained eyes to be positive locations of coastal defense guns, but when we inspected them later at close range we discovered that they were outdoor latrines. (22)

Since our landing was to transpire two hours later than those of the Eastern Assault Force, we were informed that we probably would meet little or no resistance because most of the enemy troops defending the harbor would be withdrawn immediately to meet the threat to the flanks of the city. (22)

The detailed attack plan of the 3rd Battalion consisted of three modifications, A, B, and C, to the same overall scheme of maneuver. (See Map C) (22)

Plan A was the assault plan to be adopted by the 3rd Battalion in the event that both HMS Malcolm and HMS Broke would succeed in passing through the boom. It provided that the Broke would discharge her troops (called the Broke Force) directly onto the Quai de Dieppe. The 1st Platoon, Company "L", had the mission of capturing Mole Louis Billiard and the adjoining Electric Power Station. The 2nd Platoon, Company "L" had the mission of capturing Morey's Oil Depot near the Power Station. The 3rd Platoon, Company "L" was to capture the small seaplane base west of the oil depot, and make contact with Company "K" at the base of the Grand Mole. The two platoons of Company "I" which had been on board the Broke, the 4th Platoon of Company "L", and the heavy weapons troops of the Broke, were to be in mobile support of the Broke Force (22) Personal knowledge.

from positions at the base of the Grand Mole. The Broke Force was to make contact with Company "K" on the right, and organize its objectives for defense against attack from the south and west. (22)

The Malcolm was to follow the Broke by 15 minutes, and berth alongside the Grand Mole, debarking her troops (called the Malcolm Force) directly onto it. The 2nd Platoon, Company "K" was then to run at top speed along the shore and capture the Port Offices, the Graving Docks, and Mole Al Mouchez. The 3rd Platoon of Company "K" had the mission of seizing and occupying Mole aux Minerais. The 1st Platoon had the mission of seizing and occupying the Grand Mole and effecting a junction with the Broke Force on the south. The 4th Platoon of Company "K", and the remainder of the Malcolm Force were to remain in support near the base of the Grand Mole. The overall mission of the Malcolm Force was prompt seizure and occupation of their objectives which were to be defended to the north and west. (23)

Plan "B" was predicated upon the supposition that the Broke would penetrate the boom while the Malcolm failed to make it. In this eventuality the Broke forces were to seize the objectives assigned to the Malcolm Force as well as their own. (23)

Plan "C" was based on the eventuality of success for the Malcolm and failure for the Broke. In this case the Malcolm Force was to seize the Broke Force objectives in addition to their own. (23)

The fourth eventuality provided for complete failure after both forces were landed. In case the troops could not (23) Personal knowledge.

ashore, the destroyers were to sound three long blasts on their ships' sirens as a signal for them to execute a retrograde movement and reembark upon the Malcolm and Broke, which were then to put back out to sea. (23)

The joint British-American boarding parties were to seize the ships in the harbor in conjunction with either or all plans. (23)

All units were instructed not to fire unless fired upon, but if resistance was encountered the Sheffield and other heavy units of the British Mediterranean Fleet, would give us prompt fire support. (24)

#### FROM GIBRALTAR TO ALGIERS

After our passage through the Strait of Gibraltar the detailed plans and maps were issued to all N.C.O.'s down to and including assistant squad leaders. At that time all personnel were informed that our destination was the city of Algiers. This new information stimulated much detailed study and discussion of all parts of the plans. (25)

At about 1630 hours on 6 November, HMS Malcolm came alongside the Sheffield and the force detailed to board her made the transfer without incident. The transfer to HMS Broke was made in like manner at about 1730 hours. Lt. Col. Swenson and Captain Fancourt accompanied the force on HMS Broke which was under command of Commander Layard. Captain Snellman, the Battalion Executive Officer, went aboard HMS Malcolm which was commanded by Lt. Comdr. Sears, Royal Navy. (25)

The night was dark, the sky was slightly overcast and visibility was fair. There was no moon. (25)

(24) Statement of Capt. Fancourt; (25) Personal knowledge.

The decks of each destroyer had a belt of quarter inch thick armor plate three feet high extending around its perimeter to protect those on board from small arms fire as they approached the docks. The prow of each destroyer was equipped with armor plate to facilitate cutting the boom which stretched across the harbor entrance. (25)

Because of the limited space on the destroyers the troops had to remain on deck packed closely together, but since the weather was clear and warm most of the time this was no hardship. All hands were instructed to lie down early and attempt to sleep, on the night of 7 November, as it was planned to awaken them at midnight. (26)

They were awakened at 2400 on 7 November, and by 0100 hours, 8 November everything was in readiness to carry out the assigned mission. (27)

At 0220 hours Captain Fancourt received a message stating that the landings of the Eastern Assault Force had been successful and that the TERMINAL Force would prepare to go in immediately. (28)

The two destroyers steamed for approximately one hour toward the port of Algiers until the lights of the city were clearly visible a few hundred yards to the starboard. (29)

Upon closer approach we could see at irregular intervals the orange flashes of artillery fire to the rear of Algiers but not from the batteries within the city limits. Suddenly all lights were extinguished, leaving only the dim outline of the higher buildings visible through the dusky gloom.

Almost immediately searchlights on the Ilot de la Marine and

(25, 26, 27) Personal knowledge; (28, 29) Personal knowledge.

the Batterie des Arcades began to search the harbor to seaward. (See Map C) (29)

At that time both destroyers were steaming at full speed toward what they thought was the correct location of the boom, HMS Broke leading the way. For a few minutes they managed to elude the searchlight beams, but the blinding glare soon caused them to be thrown off their course. As a consequence both destroyers headed outside Jetee de Mustapha to the north, and had to turn seaward for another try, HMS Broke still in the lead. Meanwhile the searchlights converged on HMS Malcolm which was taken under heavy shellfire from the Batterie des Arcades. (29)

HMS Broke made a second attempt to breach the boom but missed again and was under fire from both the Batterie des Arcades and Jetee du Nord. Captain Fancourt signaled HMS Malcolm to go in if she could. The Malcolm also missed the boom on its second attempt and on turning seaward again received several hits from the Batterie des Arcades. Fire broke out on HMS Malcolm amidship. Captain Fancourt received a message from her Commander stating that she was badly hit, and was attempting to withdraw from action. (29)

Both destroyers were flying large size, easily recognizable United States Flags at the top of their masts, but this action was not producing the desired psychological result of reducing the fierce resistance of the French Naval personnel who manned the coastal defenses of Algiers. (30)

(29) Personal knowledge; (30) Personal knowledge.

Upon learning that HMS Malcolm had been knocked out of action, Captain Fancourt directed that Plan "B" be adopted immediately. Accordingly HMS Broke proceeded toward the boom for the third attempt at breaking through. Terrific fire from the shore batteries again caused her to miss her target and turn back for a fourth try. (31)

As the artillery shells whizzed past her, HMS Broke rushed forward with an irresistible burst of speed and cut through the boom with almost no sensation of hitting it. She then proceeded toward the Grand Mole until Commander Layard noticed that this area was filled with ships. He therefore changed his course and berthed the Broke alongside the Quai de Falaise on Mole Louis Billiard. (32)

Almost immediately a small enemy vessel beside the Grand Mole delivered several bursts of what appeared to be .50 caliber machine gun fire at the Broke, wounding some of the British Sailors. Heavy machine gun fire was also received from other ships and from the warehouses in the vicinity of the oil depot. The British Naval Personnel returned the fire with their Oerlikons with the apparent result of silencing the hostile fire. (32)

Although badly shaken up by the heavy bombardment, the troops aboard the Broke recovered quickly. Within a few minutes they succeeded in occupying Mole Louis Billiard, the Power Station, and Morey's Oil Depot. Whether they would be able to extend north and seize the objectives assigned to the Malcolm Force under Plan "A" would depend on the resistance encountered. (See Map C) (32)

(31) Personal knowledge; (32) A-8, p. 2.

The landing had finally been accomplished in broad daylight at approximately 0520 hours. (33)

Enemy automatic weapons fire from various parts of the city was directed toward street intersections and open lanes in the vicinity of the landing area, but it was very ineffective against the American troops. (33)

Everything seemed to be going according to plan in the 3rd Battalion area until about 0800 hours when two policemen and two civilians contacted the Americans. They requested Lt. Col. Swenson to send an emissary with them to arrange for the formal surrender of the city to the U. S. forces. At almost the same time one of the British Naval boarding party commanders informed Lt. Col. Swenson that a French Army Officer had contacted him with information that the landing forces were almost surrounded by enemy troops who were definitely opposed to cooperation with the Americans. (33)

Before Lt. Col. Swenson could decide what to do several rounds of artillery fire from the direction of Jeteé du Nord landed in the area. The third round passed through the bow of the Broke, forcing her to move over beside the Quai de Dunkerqua. Artillery fire completely covered the area between the landed forces and the Broke, disrupting all communications between them. This rapidly deteriorating situation became still more desperate when the Batterie des Arcades suddenly adjusted on HMS Broke, and after firing six rounds, delivered five direct hits. (34)

In view of the increased intensity of the shell fire Captain Fancourt decided that HMS Broke must leave port immediately or be sunk. He therefore had the ship's siren

(33) A-8, p. 2; (34) A-8, p. 3.

sound the prearranged signal for the withdrawal of the troops on shore. (34)

When Lt. Col. Swenson heard the recall signal he noted that it was then about 0930 hours. He thought that the Combat Teams of the Eastern Assault Force ought to be nearing the city and that it should surely be possible for the Broke Force to hold out until their arrival. He therefore decided that any attempt at withdrawal would only result in heavy casualties for the troops and unnecessary delay for the Broke. He therefore ordered his men to remain on shore and continue to defend their positions. (34)

Meanwhile Captain Fancourt was desperately trying to get the Broke out to sea beyond the range of the shore batteries, but before he could do this it became necessary to have her taken under tow by another British destroyer which was with the other British Naval Units in the vicinity. After some difficulty both destroyers cleared the harbor. (35)

Water poured into the hold of HMS Broke through the many holes below her water line. (According to a statement made later by Lt. Col. Swenson, the Broke suffered 22 direct hits from the shore batteries, some of them more than a foot in diameter.) Since it was now evident that she was about to sink, Captain Fancourt ordered all hands to abandon ship, and go aboard the towing destroyer. Shortly after this transfer of personnel was made, HMS Broke disappeared beneath the waves, carrying with her all reserve mortar and small arms ammunition, and all personal equipment and supplies of the troops whom she had debarked on the docks. (36)

At that time, the situation on the docks was undergoing

(34) A-9, p. 2, 3; (35) A-9, p. 1, personal knowledge;  
(36) A-8, p. 3.

a slight improvement. The warehouses near the Louis Barrault contained large quantities of baled hay and wooden boxes filled with miscellaneous goods which our troops used as breast-works in organizing a perimeter defense with all avenues of approach covered by fire. (See Map C) At about 1100 hours, six Allied planes dive-bombed the batteries on Jetee du Nord and Ilot de la Marine and silenced them. Our troops now regrouped themselves and poured an accurate fusillade of small arms fire into the ranks of the enemy.

Because of the impending exhaustion of their ammunition supply it was impossible for the Broke Force to sustain for very long its heavy volume of fire. The tide of battle was about to turn in favor of the enemy. (37)

With each passing second, the situation of our troops was now becoming more critical. Shortly after 1130 hours, about ten enemy Renault tanks, circled the Broke Force defense area, covering it effectively with 37-mm and machine gun fire, which caused some casualties among the Americans and set several of the protective bales of hay on fire. This caused some mortar ammunition to explode in addition to threatening the destruction of the entire dock area by fire. There was no artillery support for our Infantry; the promised Naval gun fire support had not materialized; and the battalion commander could not use either his mortars or his machine guns because of the danger of injuring the French civilians and inflaming the people. Our troops had no anti-tank guns to use against the enemy armored vehicles. They could neither escape their devastating fire by digging foxholes in the concrete streets nor by retreating into the sea. Moreover, at this time the

(37) A-8, p. 3.

absence of the sound of firing from other parts of the city indicated that something must have gone wrong with the Combat Teams which should have arrived in the city long before then. (38)

Rather than subject his gallant troops to certain annihilation, Lt. Col. Swenson surrendered his positions to the attackers at about 1230 hours on 8 November, 1942. (38)

The victorious French troops consisted of three companies of Sengalese Infantry and one company of Mobile Guardia Naval Forces reinforced by 12 armored scout cars and tanks. (38)

Following their surrender, the American prisoners were lined up in the streets and disarmed. While the wounded on both sides were being brought in for treatment the Sengalese troops commenced systematically to strip the Americans of their rings, watches and billfolds. When Lt. Col. Swenson, protested vigorously at this vandalism, the French Commanding Officer lined up several of the Sengalese soldiers and told the rest of them that unless everything was returned to the U. S. soldiers in two minutes he would shoot those he had lined up. Everything was returned with alacrity. (39)

Our enlisted men were separated from their officers and marched off to a barracks where they were imprisoned. (39)

The American officers were loaded on a large van and taken to the Admiralty Offices on Ilot de la Marine for questioning. Shortly after their arrival, a French Commander of the Navy walked up to Lt. Col. Swenson, arrogantly jabbed a .45 caliber pistol into his stomach, and with much verbal castigation, threatened to throw the Americans into an

(38) A-9, p. 2, 3; (39) A-9, p. 3.

underground dungeon unless information was immediately given about the plans of the Eastern Assault Force. This action was prevented by the arrival of Captain Viso Tangears, also of the French Navy, who roundly reprimanded all who had failed to render the fullest degree of courtesy to the American officers. After that incident the U. S. officers were given comfortable quarters and the best of food from the French Officers Mess instead of the bucket of edible garbage which was about to be served to them. (39)

The American forces were not released until Tuesday afternoon, 10 November, 1942. (39)

#### THE ACTION OF HMS MALCOLM

One of the heavy shells which hit the Malcolm amidship on her second attempt to ram the boom exploded on contact with her smokestack, hurling shell fragments in all directions and causing heavy casualties in killed and wounded among the tightly packed troops on her decks; as she was hit again, HMS Malcolm listed so violently to starboard that the water line was only six inches below her weather deck. Still another shell arced down through her center hatch, knocked out three of her four engines, reduced her speed to four knots, and damaged her hull so badly that water poured through several holes in her sides. (40)

Meanwhile the flash from the exploding shells had ignited the tarred pasteboard containers of a large pile of mortar ammunition stacked on the center hatch. Immediately a raging inferno of crackling flames flared skyward, sharply delineating the Malcolm against the ebony background of sky and sea. (40)

(39) A-9, p. 3; (40) Personal knowledge.

She was now such a perfect target to the French artillerymen on shore that the life expectancy of the troops on the Malcolm seemed little better than that of a 90-year old man with hardened arteries, high blood pressure, and a leaking heart. (40)

At this crucial moment, 1st Lt. William E. Muir of Company "I" rushed forward with a display of extraordinary heroism and hurled several of the burning mortar cases over the deck rails into the sea. His prompt example of aggressive leadership inspired so many others to come to his assistance that only a few seconds were required to get rid of all the burning material and thus avert the possibility of a catastrophic explosion. (40)

Only through the consummate skill and determination of Lt. Comdr. Sears was it possible to maneuver HMS Malcolm out to sea beyond the range of the shore batteries. When this had finally been accomplished the destroyer cruised slowly back and forth just outside the harbor until dawn. (40)

During the morning, her dead were buried at sea with an appropriate mass funeral ceremony. (41)

After reorganization had been accomplished, HMS Malcolm pulled up beside the Invasion Headquarters ship, Bulolo, and her officers and men were permitted to go aboard for a hot meal. (41)

Upon their return on board HMS Malcolm, the troops were ordered to stand by for another attempt at landing directly in the harbor. However, the damage to the Malcolm was so

(40) Personal knowledge; (41) Personal knowledge.

extensive she could not raise sufficient steam to complete such a move. (41)

During the afternoon, several LST's were made available to unload the troops from HMS Malcolm. Three platoons of Company "K" boarded these LST's and were landed on the friendly beaches to the west of Algiers. On their return to the Malcolm for the rest of the troops of the 3rd Battalion, the LST's were tossed so violently by the rough waves it was necessary to postpone the unloading until the next morning. (41)

Meanwhile in Algiers, due to the uncertainty of the situation, the troops who had debarked from the Malcolm were ordered to make a forced march of approximately ten miles with full field packs and equipment into the city. This was successfully accomplished, but several of the men fell exhausted along the road due to their poor physical condition caused by their lack of physical exercise during the long ocean voyage from Ireland. They were too late to assist in capturing Algiers as all organized resistance in the city had ceased at approximately 1900 hours, 8 November, 1942. (42)

The Malcolm attempted to enter the harbor on 9 November but her damaged engines could not supply enough steam for such a move. Late that afternoon enough repairs had been made to enable her to get underway, but she was again prevented from entering the harbor, this time, by a large formation of JU-88 German Bombers which made an attack under cover of approaching darkness and scored several direct hits on the ships in the harbor. (43)

(41) Personal knowledge; (42) A-1, p. 9; (43) Personal knowledge.

On the morning of 10 November, 1942, Lt. Malcolm at length succeeded in pulling up beside the Mole at Mouchez and unloading the last of the troops of the 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry. (See Map C) (43)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation, it is my opinion that the mission assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry was, by its very nature, ill conceived, foolhardy, and well nigh impossible of accomplishment. In its adherence to the correct principles of warfare, it should be placed in the same category as Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, and the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War.

The overall plan for this attack completely disregarded the element of Surprise, one of the Nine Principles of War.

It also violated the principle of never permitting Naval vessels to attack fixed harbor defenses. The unsoundness of violating this principle had been conclusively demonstrated by the disastrous action of the British Fleet in the Dardenelles during the Gallipoli Campaign of World War I.

In my opinion the estimate of the situation on which the plan was formulated was faulty. In the first place the estimate was faulty because it assumed that the British Commandos would succeed in capturing the shore batteries in Algiers and prevent their firing on the destroyers. Thus the success or failure of the whole plan hinged on the performance of the Commandos. In the second place the estimate was faulty because of the incorrect assumption that the landings of the two Regimental Combat Teams fifteen miles away from Algiers

(43) Personal knowledge.

would within two hours draw so many enemy troops out of the city that few or none would be left to oppose a landing at the docks. In the third place the estimate was faulty because it underestimated the enemy's capability to use his tanks against us.

Because of this faulty estimate of the situation, the plan of attack which was adopted was unsound. Instead of being a calculated risk it was a wild gamble against almost impossible odds. It resulted in the 3rd Battalion's having to make an unsupported frontal assault against an enemy who possessed great fire superiority. Such an attack was in direct violation of the fire and maneuver principles as taught for many years at The Infantry School.

In analyzing the action of the Malcolm and the Broke, I think that their experiences should be compared to those of the two British Corvettes, Walney and Hartland, in their attempt to make a frontal assault on the harbor of Oran. They met overwhelming resistance from shore batteries, with the result that both ships were sunk with 300 killed and 200 wounded out of a total attacking force of 582. Surely if results achieved are a measure of the soundness of plans used to accomplish them, the unfortunate experiences of the Walney, the Hartland, the Malcolm, and the Broke ought to act as a damper on the enthusiasm of all staff officers in future wars who may be tempted to recommend to their commanders the adoption of unsound plans which violate the proven principles of past wars. (44)

(44) A-3, p. 67, 68.

In the execution of the attack on Algiers, the commanders of supporting Naval echelons were apparently not impressed with the vital necessity of providing Naval gunfire support to the 3rd Battalion as promised.

The British Commandos for reasons unknown did not accomplish their mission of capturing the coastal defense batteries.

On the battalion level the preparation and issuance of orders were full, complete, and flexible. By providing for three alternate plans to accomplish their mission, these orders gave to the attacking units the necessary flexibility to meet several different exigencies which arose later during combat.

The cooperation of the British and American forces at the battalion level had been admirable. Captain Fancourt, Commander Layard, and Lt. Comdr. Sears had been remarkably cool during all phases of the attack. French Naval officers who saw the action stated that whoever commanded the destroyer which broke the boom had accomplished a magnificent feat in Naval operations.

Much credit is also due the officers and men who fought on the docks for the aggressiveness and skill which they displayed in seizing and holding their objectives under extremely hazardous conditions.

In my opinion the Battalion Commander deserves much praise for his wise decision in not permitting his men to go aboard HMS Broke when the recall signal was sounded. Such a retrograde movement would have invited disaster.

In analyzing his decision to surrender his troops to prevent useless bloodshed, it is difficult to see how anyone could criticize the Battalion Commander for this action. The plan for the capture of Algiers called for the arrival of the flanking Combat Teams in the city long before noon. For this reason the 3rd Battalion had not been provided with the necessary equipment, weapons and supporting arms to withstand a siege of but a few hours. Their mission of preventing sabotage to the port was accomplished, firstly because they held out three hours longer than originally anticipated, and secondly because the French were so jubilant at forcing the surrender of an American battalion that they forgot about sabotaging the port. Their honor had been satisfied.

To sum up the results of this operation: The 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry overcame almost insurmountable obstacles in capturing and holding its assigned objectives for seven hours without artillery support in an area where they could not dig foxholes to escape the heavy fire which they received from many directions. During its short engagement the 3rd Battalion had suffered 15 killed and 33 wounded. The British Naval forces aboard both destroyers had suffered approximately 25 killed and 25 wounded, bringing the total casualties of the TERMINAL FORCE to approximately 100 officers and men. Enemy losses were an estimated 70 killed and 100 wounded. By comparison, the 39th Regimental Combat Team had suffered 2 killed and 10 wounded and the 168th Regimental Combat Team 10 killed and 38 wounded. (45)

(45) A-8, p. 4; A-2, p. 186; A-9, p. 5; Personal knowledge.

As a token of their exemplary conduct and outstanding services during the landing operations, the 3rd Battalion was designated a guard of honor for 34th Division formal affairs.

### LESSONS

Some of the combat lessons demonstrated during this operation are:

1. Surprise is a desirable element of any attack plan.
2. An attack plan should be sufficiently flexible to be instantly modified to meet the rapidly changing conditions of combat.
3. Naval ships cannot successfully attack fixed coastal batteries with guns of superior caliber to their own.
4. Enemy artillery fire causes excessive casualties to exposed personnel closely grouped together.
5. A straight frontal attack against fortified positions is expensive in manpower.
6. Infantry weapons are of little value until they can be brought close enough to their targets to be effectively used.
7. A poor attack plan boldly executed will often achieve success.
8. Artillery support is essential for Infantry troops to hold a defensive position against a determined enemy attack.
9. Infantry troops cannot hold a defensive position against armored attack without anti-tank weapons.
10. Physical conditioning exercises should be given troops on a long sea voyage when they must make an assault

landing at their destination.

11. Skilled photo interpreters should be provided for the staffs of commanders making an amphibious operation.

12. Specialized training should be given to Infantry troops required to perform specialized missions.

13. Extensive, detailed planning is required on an amphibious operation.

14. Infantry troops are highly flexible and adaptable.