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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY I, 133rd INFANTRY
(34TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK AT
FONDOUK GAP, NORTH AFRICA, 8-9 APRIL 1943
(TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: COMPANY IN THE ATTACK

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company I, 133d Infantry, 34th Division in the attack at FONDOUK GAP, NORTH AFRICA, 8-9 April 1943, during the Tunisian Campaign.

It is believed to be appropriate at this time to present some of the major events leading up to this engagement. In so doing it is believed the reader will have a better understanding of the action which is to be described.

~~In January 1942 the 34th Division landed in North~~
Ireland as representative of the first American Expeditionary Force in World War II. During the nine months stay in the Emerald Island the training of the division suffered greatly. This was due partly to the poor training facilities available and the supply of weapons and training material from the United States. (1)

On 8 November 1942 the 34th Division was part of the vast allied armada that successfully invaded the continent of North Africa. Troops came ashore at three strategic and widely separated areas, namely; Casablanca in the West, Oran in the Center; Algiers in the East. (See Map A) (2)

~~By 12 November all of the resistance had ceased. The~~
important ports for future operations were now in the possession of the allies. It was apparent that a strategic surprise had been effected. General Eisenhower, commander for the operation, was quick to exploit this success. Troops were moved by every available means of transportation

(1) A-4, p. 16

(2) A-5, p. 14

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located at PICHON, onto the plains of KAIROUAN capturing the vital road, rail and communication center and would cut a corridor between the enemy forces, thus preventing Rommel's Afrika Korps from joining von Arnim's forces in the north. In conjunction with this plan of attack the British Eighth Army would start offensive operations at Wadi Akarit. (5)

The 34th Division was occupying a defensive position at DJEBEL TROZZA some 8 miles west of FONDOUK GAP. Confronting the division on the dominating hills protecting the pass were elements of the German 961 Afrika Special Regiment which was part of 999 Special Infantry Brigade. This brigade was made up of hardened and bitter political and civil criminals from Germany. (6)

In this area the terrain was rugged and mountainous and any operation must be directed through this 1000 yard gap which was protected on the north by DJEBEL RHORAB and on the south by DJEBEL EL HAOUAREB. The advance to this pass had to be approached over flat, sandy and uncovered terrain. All north, south and west main roads converged forming one main road through FONDOUK GAP. Such main roads were constructed similar to black top roads in this country. All secondary roads in the surrounding area were dirt roads which deteriorated rapidly when exposed to heavy traffic. (7)

Up to this time the troops of I Company had been given little opportunity to engage the enemy. Other units of the division had attacked FONDOUK GAP the week before but were not successful. Therefore, the fighting spirit

(5) A-5, p. 38

(6) A-14, Sec XI, p. 18

(7) Personal Knowledge

to Tunisia were the new front line had been established.

The pressure of the British Eighth Army in the south was forcing the withdrawal of the German forces to the Tunisian area. (See Map B) (3)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The Tunisian Front was anchored on the left (north) on the Mediterranean Sea at a point about 20 miles east of TABARKA. The line then extended generally south along the confusing mountainous zone through MEDJEZ EL BAB, PICHON, MAKANSSY and faded into the SALT MARSHES. (See Map B)

The allied front stretched some 250 miles and was divided into three national sectors. The British forces occupied the north portion, the French forces occupied the center and the American forces were in the center and south sector. General Montgomery's Eighth Army was pursuing Rommel's Afrika Korps but had been stopped at WADI AKARIT by the defensive action of the enemy forces. (4)

At this time some 320,000 enemy troops had been pushed into an area some 250 miles in length and 80 miles in width. Located in the north portion of this area was the German Fifth Army under command of General von Arnim. In the south portion was the retreating Afrika Korps under command of Rommel. (See Map B)

The plan of attack was a simple operation in that the British 78th Division in the north would sweep south over the irregular mountains and attack FONDOUK GAP on the flank. The American 34th Division was to make the frontal attack and for this operation was attached to the British IX Corps. Such an attack would spring the British 6th Armored Division,

(3) A-4, p. 22

(4) A-5, p. 34

of the men of I Company to engage the enemy in an offensive operation was high. As for experience the company was considered in the category of "green troops" in comparison to the experience of the opposing forces. The Afrika Korps had been engaged in combat for many months and their morale was high despite the fact their army was suffering reverses and was withdrawing at the time. The American supply line had been over extended and many of the logistical problems were in the experimental stage. For example white bread was almost non-existent on the front line and when available the ration was one slice per man which was eaten as dessert. Cigarettes were plentiful but were the "off brand" variety. In many instances it had been impossible to supply American rations and to supplement this shortage rations were drawn from the British supply point. Clothing and equipment was extremely scarce. On the other hand the enemy enjoyed short lines of communication, warehouses full of supplies and his occupation of well fortified and strategic positions made him a tough opponent. (8)

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 133D INFANTRY

From 1-5 April the 133rd Infantry, less the 2nd Battalion, was in a defensive position at SBEITLA GAP some 30 miles from the parent unit. The 133rd Infantry operated throughout this campaign without the service of the 2nd Battalion.

On 5 April the regiment was released from its mission of protecting the SBEITLA GAP and ordered to rejoin the division in a defensive position in the vicinity of HADJEB EL AIOUN and DJEBEL TROZZA. The night 5-6 April

(8) Personal Knowledge

trucks arrived and moved the regiment to this defensive area. Since the regiment had been operating throughout this campaign with only two battalions, it was contemplated to make the attack with 2 battalions abreast, seize DJEBEL EL HAOUAREB as the first objective and continue the attack across to HILL A, which was less than 500 yards.

DISPOSITION AND PLAN OF THE BATTALION

On 7 April the battalion was in a defensive position at the base of DJEBEL TROZZA. (See Map C)

Reports had been received from personnel who were with elements of the division in the first attack on PONDOUK GAP that the terrain did not afford any cover and concealment in most of the sector. The side of the mountain was rocky and the enemy was on the forward slope of DJEBEL EL HAOUAREB in well fortified positions. Just behind this mountain was HILL A which provided protection for the enemy artillery, mortars and tanks from our fires which could not clear the crest of this hill and strike their position. Furthermore, the enemy had registered his mortars and artillery on every conceivable inch of the flat terrain. His infantry which consisted of a brigade was well protected by overhead cover of steel girders and concrete. The enemy realized that any attack upon the pass must necessarily be made over the flat terrain to the front. ~~Therefore care had been taken~~ in the selection of machine gun positions which would give the maximum amount of grazing fire.

The battalion commander planned to attack the assigned sector with two companies abreast. The battalion would be

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made on FONDOUK GAP the next morning 8 April. Company commanders would not be able to make a reconnaissance over the area to be attacked since the defensive area was some 26 road miles away and to move forward during daylight hours might reveal the plan. Information concerning this area was received from personnel that had participated in the first attack on this same objective and was as follows: the terrain was flat, sandy and very open with little or no cover for the troops all the way from the line of departure to the objective which would be some 4500 yards; the enemy was well entrenched and it had been very difficult to locate his positions; the enemy would be looking "down our throats" from the line of departure to the objective; the reconnaissance patrols from division were unable to give any information about location or disposition of the enemy, except that the high ground was well fortified and occupied.

At the time the company commanders were receiving the attack order all the members of the company were resting since they would be up all night preparing for and moving to the assembly area. The afternoons were hot and in complete contrast the nights were cold. The wearing of the overcoat was very comfortable. All of the problems concerning supply had not been corrected because the hot meal that was served at 1800 hours that evening had to be supplemented by the British ration of "hard tack" and "ox-tail soup" of the thousand bone variety. (9)

(9) Personal Knowledge

in the following formation: I Company on the left; K Company on the right; L Company in reserve; the heavy weapons of M Company would be employed to support the attack by fire from a central position.

THE COMPANY SITUATION

During the morning of 7 April a shakedown inspection of personnel and equipment was conducted in view of the "rumored" pending action. All weapons were inspected as to serviceability and the troops inspected to insure that they did not carry any information that would be of aid to the enemy. All members of the company were instructed to remain under cover and only platoon sergeants and messengers allowed to move around the area thus preventing the enemy from observing any unusual troop movement and concentration.

About 1100 hours 12 replacements arrived. The Executive Officer talked to these men and it was discovered they had been in the Army less than a month. They did not have any knowledge of tactics, furthermore, 10 of these replacements did not even know how to load or fire the M-1 Rifle. Realizing the morale effect this would have upon these men who were going into an attack without the basic knowledge of infantry tactics and means of self defense, the Executive Officer secured several clips of ammunition and took these men down in a wadi and showed each one how to load and fire the weapon with which he was going to be armed. The arrival of these 12 replacements brought the company strength up to 162 officers and men.

At 1500 hours all company commanders were called to battalion headquarters where they were given verbal fragmentary orders concerning the attack which was to be

THE COMPANY PLAN OF ATTACK (See Map D) (10)

The line of departure would be a dry wadi about 1000 yards in front of the assembly position; H hour, 0530 hours 8 April 1943.

Movement from the assembly area to the line of departure would be a column of platoons, with the 1st platoon in the lead followed by the 2nd platoon, company headquarters and light machine gun section, 3rd platoon and 60mm mortar section.

After crossing the line of departure the platoons would move into a spread diamond formation with the 1st platoon on the right, 2nd platoon on the left, company headquarters and light machine gun section in the center and to the rear about 50 yards, followed by the 3rd platoon and then the 60mm mortar section. The advance to the objective would be on a azimuth reading of 100 degrees for nearly 5000 yards. All company officers were further instructed that the unit on the left would be the 135th Infantry and the unit on the right would be K Company. The battalion aid station would be located in the wadi which was the line of departure. The platoons would be maneuvered by voice, hand signals and the unreliable 536 radio from the company commanders position in the center of the two assault platoons. Also, the officers were informed that the company would be supported by the heavy machine guns, 81mm mortars and 57 mm anti-tank weapons of M Company, as well as the supporting field artillery battalions. Upon arrival at the line of departure all extra equipment would be placed in a company pile, in-

cluding the overcoat.

After crossing the line of departure the attack formation would be as previously announced and the two assault platoons would occupy a frontage of about 250 yards each. The light machine gun section would move with the company headquarters and under the command of the Executive Officer until the initial employment. The 3rd platoon was instructed to have over 10 yards between each man. Lieutenant Wayne D. Frazier, the Weapons Platoon Leader, would be with the 60mm mortars and was instructed to follow the 3rd platoon about 50 yards.

MOVEMENT TO THE LINE OF DEPARTURE AND FINAL PREPARATION FOR THE ATTACK (See Map D) (II)

At 2000 hours 7 April trucks arrived and moved the company from the area near DJEBEL TROZZA to the detrucking area arriving about 2330 hours. The company then moved by foot to the assembly area which was about 1000 yards in rear of the line of departure arriving at 0230 hours. Here a check and physical count of all men was made and the men were again reminded to keep their overcoats on until passing the wadi. Two extra bandoleers of ammunition were issued to each man as well as the daily combat type "c" ration.

NARRATION

THE ATTACK ON FONDOUK GAP

Company I crossed the line of departure at 0300 hours with two platoons abreast in a wide diamond formation. The 1st platoon was on the right, the 2nd platoon was on the left, company headquarters and the light machine gun

(II) Personal Knowledge

section was in the center and to the rear about 50 yards, followed by the 3rd platoon and 60mm mortar section of the weapons platoon.

After going about 200 yards a messenger from battalion headquarters came running up to the company commander to tell him to have the company hold up the advance until the unit on the left caught up. This was done and the signal for the company to halt in position was given.

At 0600 hours the Battalion Commander ordered the units to continue their advance. By this time the sun was appearing over the formidable DJEBEL EL HAOUAREB and for the first time the company officers and men were able to see the terrain and the objective. The terrain was flat and sandy. The only available cover and concealment in the area was beds of poppies and blades of grass some four inches high growing in the hard sandy soil.

At 0630 hours the rocket signal was fired calling for artillery fire on the objective. The leading platoon was over 4000 yards from the objective when this friendly artillery fire was called for. All troops moved forward slowly but as yet had not been fired upon. The formation remained the same.

At 0745 hours orders were received over the 536 radio to halt in position to permit our bombers to work over the enemy position on and around the objective. The troops waited in this position until 0830 hours and the bombers never arrived. Later it was learned the bombing mission was cancelled since our troops would supposedly be attacking the objective at the time of the bombing.

The advance was continued and at 0900 hours I Company began to receive long range mortar and artillery fire from the direction of the objective. By 1000 hours the enemy artillery and mortar fire was being received in heavy concentrations. This fire forced the company and the two assault platoons to take up a deployed formation extending over 500 yards in width. The two assault platoons were being advanced by leaps and bounds until they were within 1000 yards of the base of the mountain. Gradually the enemy's fires became so intense the company was pinned down on the flat open prairie some 700 yards from the base of the mountain.

At this point the light machine guns were moved forward to support the attack and were placed between the two assault platoons. The guns opened fire simultaneously sweeping the forward slope of the rocky mountain and firing into all likely enemy positions. After firing for several minutes their position was detected by the enemy and with deadly accuracy enemy mortar and artillery fire began to fall around their position forcing them to cease firing.

At 1100 hours the battalion commander was informed of the situation and when asked for the location of the forward platoon it was necessary to find the company commander since he was the only one who had a map of the area. Upon reporting the location the battalion commander said that he would ask for artillery support. While waiting for the artillery support the enemy was sweeping the field with all his firepower and I Company was

receiving an unmerciful shelling while laying there on the open prairie. As requested the friendly artillery began falling on the side of the mountain but I Company was not able to advance.

While waiting for the artillery to support the advance, the two forward platoons had taken their entrenching tools, bayonets, lids from their mess kit and prepared individual shallow slit trenches.

At 1200 hours a report was made by radio informing the battalion commander that it was impossible to go forward without some kind of supporting fire. At 1230 hours the battalion commander advised I Company that friendly tanks were coming to assist the advance at 1300 hours.

At the appointed time 10 tanks came speeding up to our position drawing the enemy's attention. Consequently I Company was on the receiving end of the fire from all the weapons the enemy had available and would shoot. The Executive Officer counted some 30 rounds of enemy artillery that fell within a radius of 25 yards of his prone position and only 2 exploded while the others were duds. These duds can be the enemy's only excuse for the survival of the Executive Officer. In less than fifteen minutes 4 of these great Sherman tanks were burning some 200 yards in front of I Company's position. Upon the withdrawal of the remaining tanks I Company troops were again caught in the mist of artillery and antitank fire.

At 1400 hours orders were received that a coordinated attack of all units would be made at 1500 hours and seize the objective. This information was passed to the two

assault platoons. At the designated hour the 1st platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Padfield, moved forward by leaps and bounds and had gained about 100 yards when he was struck down and killed by withering machine gun fire. This platoon was the only platoon in the entire battalion area that actually made an attempt to carry out the attack order. The other platoons and members of the company did little more than look up from out of their slit trenches only to go back and dig a little deeper. The 2nd platoon was ordered to move up and join the 1st platoon. A few men did crawl up along side but everytime they were exposed they drew a terrific amount of machine pistol and machine gun fire, and while crawling forward two men were wounded.

By this time a position was dug for the employment of the company machine gun section of the weapons platoon. Fire was placed on the side of the mountain again, and after a few bursts from each gun enemy artillery fire rained down in such a concentration that prompted the company commander to direct that further firing of the weapon would cease.

The battalion commander advised I Company by radio that a tank attack with supporting artillery was going to be made at 1700 hours. The battalion commander ordered all officers to get up out of their foxholes and go forward with the tanks thus leading their men in an assault on the objective. At 1700 hours some 15 tanks arrived protected by the umbrella of supporting artillery fire. Even with this supporting fire the men of I Company

each patrol to go forward to determine the enemy's location, position and type of terrain which would offer more suitable protection for the next day since a night attack was not being planned. The first patrol was to start at 2100 hours and was to be sent out by the 2nd platoon, followed by the 1st platoon and 3rd platoon. Each patrol leader upon return would report to the company commander or the executive officer as to what was found, heard, observed and any other desired or helpful information.

At 2000 hours the combat type "c" ration was brought forward by the kitchen personnel and placed on the company position. It was necessary to open these boxes by force because the mess sergeant had failed to do this prior to bringing the rations forward. Soon it was realized that an unusual amount of noise must have resulted in breaking the boxes open and this noise had attracted the attention of the enemy, bringing about a barrage of artillery and mortar fire. Before the men could hit their foxholes three had been wounded by flying shrapnel. This indicated that the troops lacked knowledge or training of the importance of quietness when in contact with the enemy.

After the enemy artillery and mortar barrage had ceased the company commander ordered all platoon leaders to reorganize their platoons. The 1st platoon leader had been lost during the day and the personnel badly shaken so it was decided to put that platoon in support and have the 3rd platoon move up into the assault position. As the result of this reorganization it was discovered that each platoon was missing 10 or more men making a total of

could not be moved to join the tanks in the assault.

As the result the tanks proceeded on past the company by some 200 yards. By this time the artillery fire had lifted and was firing on the reverse slope of the mountain which allowed the enemy to return and man his gun positions.

As the result the flame from 6 of these tanks was lighting the sky while the sun began to set in the west.

Eventho there were some 8 to 10 known stretcher cases it had been impossible to render aid during the day because of the intensity of enemy machine gun fire.

After the wounded had been located the question arose as to how and by whom the evacuation would be made. Finally a litter was brought from the battalion aid station and the support platoon evacuated the wounded.

THE FIRST NIGHT AT FONDOUK

The arrival of darkness was a blessing in comparison to the days activities because this gave the troops an opportunity to get out of the prone position, where most of them had been, and get onto their feet without the fear of receiving enemy fire. All men of I Company now had been exposed to their initial fire.

A request was received from the battalion headquarters for a report on ammunition needed, status of personnel and further stated that rations would arrive about 2000 hours, but nothing was stated concerning any future attacks on the sending out of night patrols to the objective. Without waiting for instructions the company commander formed a five man patrol from each of the platoons and instructed

over 50 men unaccounted for in the company. Upon hearing this report the mess sergeant, who was standing by, stated that several of the men of the company had been noticed back in the kitchen area some 8 miles from the company position. The company commander instructed the executive officer to return to the kitchen area and bring back any stragglers that might be found. Five men were found in this area and to keep from getting lost the executive officer returned over the same route as the attack that morning. At the line of departure, which was the wadi, 45 men belonging to I Company were found seeking the only bit of cover in the whole area. They had snaked their way unnoticed by the platoon leaders, from the company position during the day until they reached the safety of the wadi. When asked for the reason why they were back in this area the answer was "we were lost and couldn't locate the front line". Of course it never dawned upon them that by going in the direction of the firing they would find the front line. This group of stragglers were turned over to the company commander about 2330 hours and after a very sound and understanding lecture they were returned to rejoin their platoons.

During the time the executive officer was on this "round up" mission, which was some three hours, the first sergeant had made the required status report on personnel. Since no one had seen the executive officer for quite sometime and intermittent artillery and machine gun fire had been received in the area, it was assumed that he had become another stretcher case somewhere on the flat prairie

and so reported to the higher headquarters as killed in action. It took the rest of the night to get this report cancelled.

By this time the first patrol had returned, but the patrol leader was unable to give any information concerning the location and disposition of the enemy or obstacles that may have been located to our front. It is a known fact that the enemy had patrols within 100 yards of I Company position because Lieutenant Padfield was wearing a gold nugget ring and this had been removed before his body was carried out at 2300 hours.

At 2400 hours all company commanders were summoned to battalion headquarters to receive orders for the following day. When the company commander returned he reported that all commanders from the division commander on down were thoroughly disappointed in that the objective had not been taken. Orders for the next day included breakfast at 0400 hours and a coordinated attack after the artillery had worked the enemy positions over. As the troops came to secure their rations they were informed of the action to take place the following morning. At 0430 hours a check was made of the two assault platoons by the Executive Officer and all was found in readiness.

THE SECOND DAY AT FONDOUK GAP

The sun rose over the formidable HECURAR this day the same as the day before. However, this time the hill looked bigger than ever and even more quiet and peaceful.

During the night all attached and supporting weapons had prepared dug in positions and it was felt that with this support the scheduled attack to seize the objective

have a terrific casualty effect upon the enemy. Even the few who would not become casualties would have been so stunned that only a feeble and half hearted resistance would be forthcoming. The forward progress of I Company was moving forward when all of a sudden a hail of artillery, mortar and anti-tank fire; accompanied by withering machine gun fire was received--not from the front as expected but from the left flank. I Company was again pinned down in the open prairie, and the anti-tank fire had forced the tanks to withdraw back of our position.

At this time I Company was less than 500 yards from the base of the objective, with a row of cactus for concealment. During this period of three hours some 10 casualties had been inflicted upon I Company and the enemy continued to deliver effective sweeping fire. The weapons platoon leader, Lieutenant Frazier, was about 25 yards away when he called over that he had been hit. The Executive Officer crawled over to him and sure enough found that two bullets had pierced dangerously close to his back. Upon further investigation it was revealed that the two bullets had pierced his musette bag on his back containing his "c" ration of meat and beans. The catsup and liquid from the cans had run down his side soaking his shirt. This coupled with the sting of the bullets started his imagination working to such an extent that he thought he had been hit.

From 1400 hours until 1530 hours it seemed the enemy had surrounded our position and was concentrating all his mortars, artillery and machine gun fire upon the company. Casualties were mounting with the passing of each hour.

The battalion commander advised the regimental commander

would be successful. At 0600 hours the artillery began to fall on the forward slopes of the rocky mountain. This was to be the signal for all units to start moving forward. Not a soul could be seen moving and furthermore enemy fire was not being received. Everyone continued to man their foxholes. At 0800 hours orders were received that the objective would be taken without delay and the commanders of I and K Company would coordinate the time of attack and report back to the battalion headquarters. This was done and time was decided upon as 0900 hours. At the approach of the appointed time for this attack enemy dive bombers arrived. The area on the left and to the front of the company position received scattered hits of 500 pound bombs. This upset the company commanders of both units so the attack was postponed.

At 0930 the battalion commander contacted the company commanders by the 536 radio and requested a report of progress of the attack. The company commander reported that his unit was going forward slowly but meeting stiff resistance when in reality hardly anyone had ventured to look up from his fox hole.

A radio message was received that friendly tanks would arrive in our position and for the troops to get up and move forward and assault the position. At 1130 hours the tanks arrived and since very little enemy fire had been received during the morning it was not difficult to get the platoons to move forward. The friendly artillery pounded the forward slope of the objective. The barrage appeared to cover every foot of the mountain and would

that it was impossible to advance against the murderous enemy machine gun fire and asked to be placed under arrest, rather than to face the enemy fire any longer. His request was granted.

In taking over the battalion the acting commander had the company commanders submit a strength report within an hour in order that he could determine the effective number of men available for the next attack which was scheduled for 1700 hours. I Company had an effective strength of 80 men. Upon learning of this the battalion commander decided to bring the reserve company forward and have them take up the attack instead of I Company. This relief was attempted at 1630 hours but could not be effected because of intensity of the enemy fire. At this time friendly tanks again moved into the company position and went forward to what appeared to be the base of the objective. Only spasmodic machine gun fire was received and before any plans could be made for the next attack orders were received to hold our position and prepare for a night attack. Such orders had not been received but a few minutes when on the left flank could be heard a terrific fire fight taking place. It was soon determined that the British had caught up at last and only two days late, but were "rolling" with such momentum that the enemy's position crumbled.

THE SECOND NIGHT AT FONDOUK GAB

At 1900 hours the company received orders to cover the withdrawal of the battalion which was moving back to the wadi which had been the line of departure the day

before. As soon as darkness arrived the company commander left the Executive Officer in charge of future operations. Only 50 men could be found and they were placed in groups of two or three and spread the width of the battalion sector to prevent enemy patrols from infiltrating. In the meantime a litter was brought from the aid station and with the assistance of service company personnel, I Company evacuated the casualties.

At 2330 hours I Company, ragged and exhausted from two days of intense enemy machine gun, artillery, mortar and anti-tank fire, was back to the starting point with some 80 men out of an original 162 men two days before. At 2400 hours the men of I Company were clustered around in small groups in the wadi eating their cold "c" ration of meat and beans but thankful that they were away from the fire of the enemy.

Eventho I Company failed to capture Fondouk Gap, along with all the other units, they did succeed in finding out some of their shortcomings which were to be corrected in later training. Even if viewed from the Corps level this operation still was not successful in that the enemy delayed the allied forces sufficiently long enough to allow the main forces of Rommel's Afrika Korps to complete their withdrawal to the north. There is no doubt as to the importance placed upon FONDOK GAP by the enemy since his positions were constructed out of solid rock and reinforced with steel girders and concrete.

The attack at FONDOK GAP may be classified as a well prepared plan poorly executed.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

I. DIVIDING AN OBSERVATIVE

In making a study of this operation, it is my opinion

that important terrain features around an objective should never be divided between two separate units when within the capabilities of either unit. The pass at FONDOUK GAP was flanked on each side by dominating hills and was not beyond the capabilities of a division objective. The overall plan of attack was sound in that the British were to attack from the north which would flank the position while the 34th Division would draw the enemy's attention by making the frontal assault. The British changed their plan of attack at the last minute and such a change was made too late for action by the 34th Division. Therefore, the American troops were left unnecessarily to the mercy of the enemy for two days while waiting for the British to move up along side, when in reality it is believed the objective could have been taken in one day by a flanking maneuver. This is a good example of a well prepared plan poorly executed.

2. THE USE OF ARMOR WITH INFANTRY

It has been said the "ignorance is no excuse" for the failure to perform a job satisfactorily. However, an excuse appears to be in order for this operation since the men of I Company had never been taught the value of tank-infantry coordination. Even though the infantry failed to assist the tanks in this attack it is believed that the employment of tanks can be criticized. Realizing the value of the vast amount of fire power, shock action and mutual support available; it must also be realized and recognized by commanders that armor is vulnerable and can not take an objective until the infantry has broken the initial crust of the enemy position. If armor is to be used it must be

frittered away.

3. FOLLOWING ARTILLERY BARRAGES

The lack of training in this phase of the operation may be termed the end result for not successfully accomplishing the assigned mission. At this time the capabilities of artillery were overestimated in that it was considered very dangerous for friendly troops to be within several hundred yards of exploding artillery. It is imperative that infantry, regardless of possible casualties, follow close upon the shadow of an artillery barrage. Had this procedure been followed by our infantry at FONDOUK GAP it is certain the pass would have been taken without delay and an unnecessary amount of casualties would have been avoided. The immediate capture of the pass might have conceivably forced a corridor to the sea preventing the junction of Rommel's forces with von Arnim's forces in the north. It is quite possible that such a seemingly unimportant incident of not closely following artillery barrages may have prolonged the Tunisian Campaign an additional month. Upon such minute happenings in the smallest of battles are often laid the foundation of a quick or delayed victory--perhaps no victory at all.

4. NIGHT PATROLS

Night patrols are essential to the security and reconnaissance of all companies. Such missions require a high degree of training and intelligence on the part of those selected to be the eyes and ears for the commander. The information as to the terrain, location and enemy disposition uncovered by the patrols during the night was less than nothing. To have a patrol that will bring back the desired information requires careful selection of personnel and such selection of personnel was not the case

in I Company. The company commander merely informed the platoon leader to send out a patrol to secure certain information. To be a member of a patrol requires every individual to be intelligent, aggressive, alert and accurate in everything unusual that has been seen or heard.

5. CONDUCT OF THE ATTACK AT FONDOUK GAP

The attack on FONDOUK GAP, which was not successful, did bring out the fact proper training had not been taught the troops prior to this operation. There was not the proper fire support from supporting weapons within the battalion because adequate positions for such weapons were non-existent. This coupled with the lack of aggressive leadership on the part of the officers by allowing the men to dig fox holes rather than encouraging them to go forward made an impossible situation even more impossible. Just because the company received somewhat of an initial setback right at first need not necessarily cause loss of the initiative. If proper training is conducted under competent leadership this situation should not exist.

6. FIRE AND MOVEMENT

During the limited phase of training the troops of I Company had never fired the weapons they were armed with as much as they should have because of the scarcity of ammunition. All training prior to this time consisted of road marches and defensive positions. If an attack is going to be successfully carried out then rehearsals with ball ammunition must be held in a realistic manner. The success of nearly every operation is the result of effective fire and movement.

7. RECONNAISSANCE

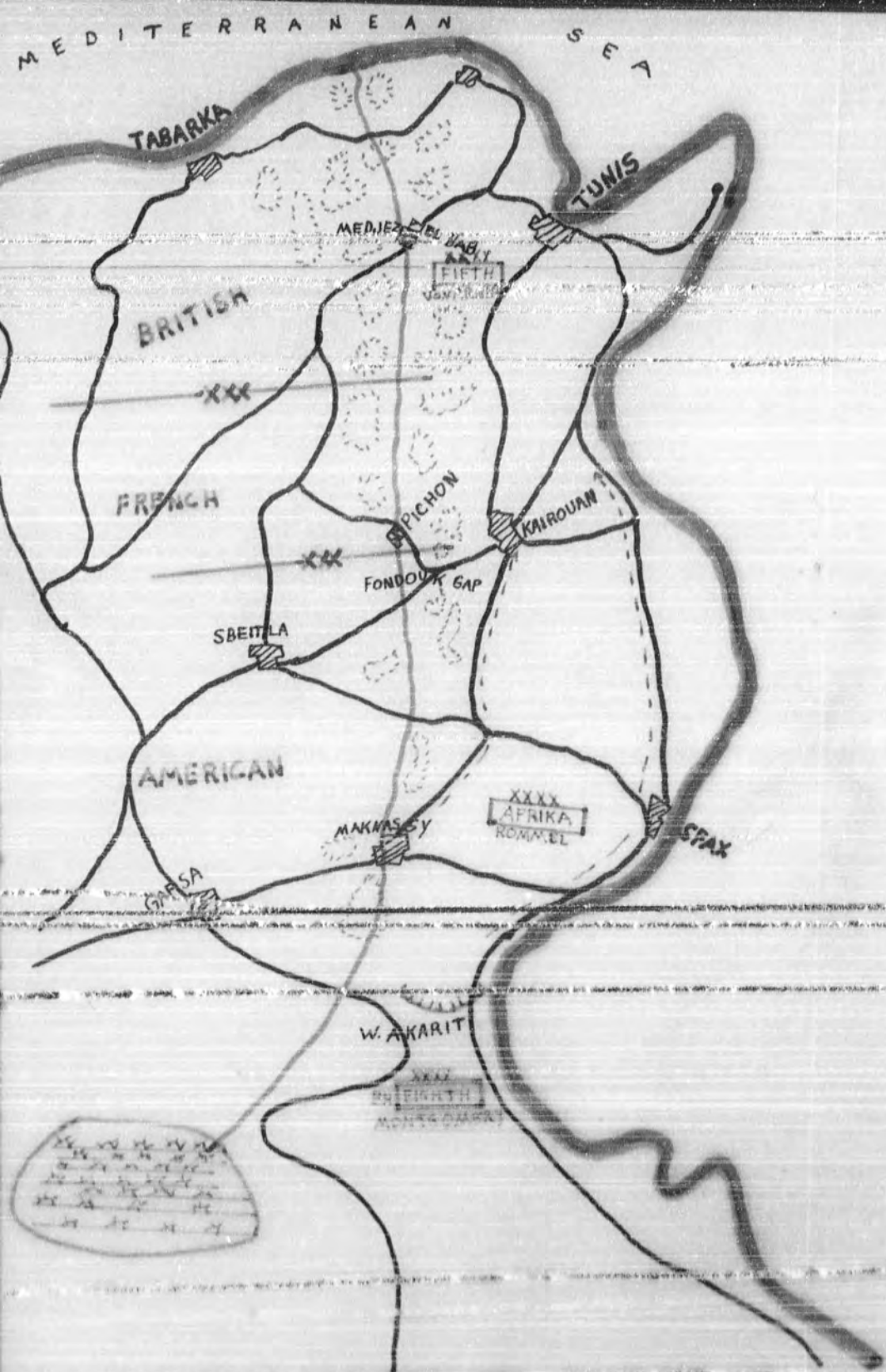
"Look before you leap" could have been the motto in this attack. When an attack mission has been assigned to a unit it is of paramount importance that personnel responsible for the proper execution of the mission be given a chance to look over the terrain. A commander should be allowed to make a personal reconnaissance either in daylight or darkness in order that the entire units will not be walking in blindly. At least the men will have confidence in their leader if they know they have been over the terrain and sized up the situation prior to the operation.

LESSONS

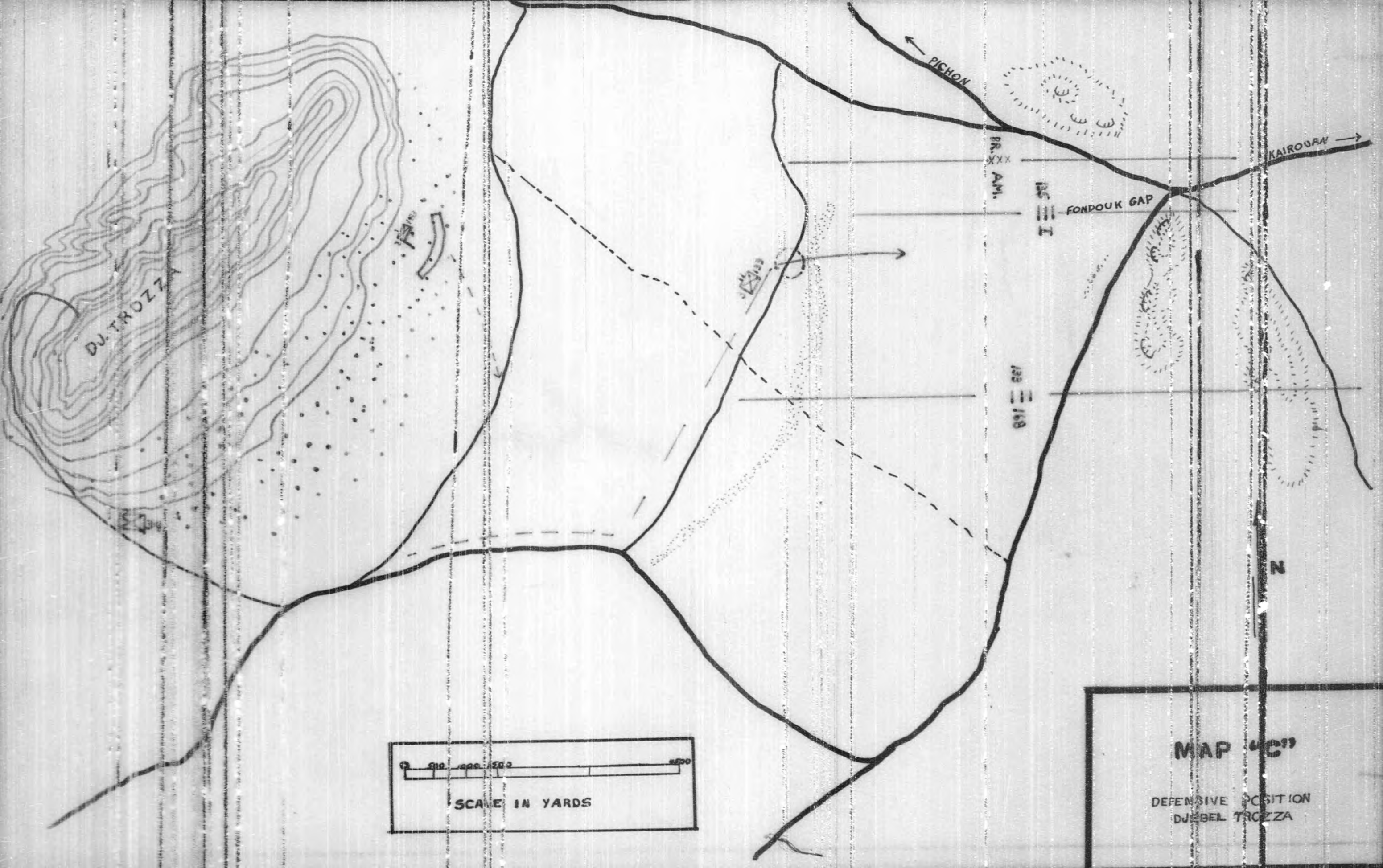
1. An objective should never be divided between two units when within the capabilities of either.
2. Armor and infantry must work together when attacking a well fortified enemy position.
3. Following an artillery barrage at a distance greater than 200 yards allows the enemy to re-man his positions and recover from the shock of fire.
4. Night patrols are essential to the security and reconnaissance of a company.
5. Aggressive leadership by commissioned personnel will prevent a defeatist attitude in the troops.
6. Training must be realistic prior to any operation to reap the benefits of success.
7. It is of paramount importance that commanders make a reconnaissance of the area prior to an attack.



MAP "A"
 THE ALLIED INVASION
 NORTH AFRICA



MAP "B"
TUNISIAN FRONT
 SITUATION APRIL 43



DJEBEL TROZZA

PICHON

PR. XX
AMI.

139 160

FONDOUK GAP

KAIROUAW

139 161

N



MAP "C"

DEFENSIVE POSITION
DJEBEL TROZZA

MAP No. D-11
ATTACK ON FONBOUK GAP

8-9 APRIL 1943

