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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION,
179TH INFANTRY (45TH INFANTRY DIVISION)
13 - 14 JULY 1943 SOUTH OF GRAMMIGELE, SICILY
(Personal experience of a Regimental S-2)

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Type of operation described: BATTALION IN THE DEFENSE

Major Ellsworth Cundiff, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION,
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the 3d Battalion, 179th Infantry, 45th US Division south of Grammicele, Sicily, 13 - 14 July 1943.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to go back and give a brief resume of the events leading up to the action.

The decision to invade Sicily, after the completion of the Tunisian Campaign, was made by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943.

(1) The decision for an early invasion of Sicily was made for the following reasons:

1. With the Axis in control of the Mediterranean Islands and the southern coast line of Europe, from Franco's Spain to the Dardanelles, the Allied supply line to the Middle East was forced to detour around the Cape of Good Hope, a detour of 12,000 miles. (2)
2. An advance base was needed for assembling troops for the invasion of the Continent. Allied artillery firing across the narrow, treacherous Straits of Messina - the ultimate objective of the Sicilian Campaign - could give close support to an invading force establishing a beachhead on the Italian mainland. (3) (See Map A)
3. Sicily had numerous airfields from which heavy and medium bombers could readily attack industrial and military installations in Europe. (4)
4. The conquest of Sicily would be the first defeat for the enemy on his home ground, and it could be a devastating blow to the morale

(1) A-2, p. 1; A-5, p. 121; (2) A-2, p. 2; A-5, p. 156; (3) A-2, p. 5; A-5, p. 163; (4) A-2, p. 2.

of the Italian people and might precipitate political disaster for the Axis. (5)

5. There was an urgent need to relieve some of the tremendous pressure the Germans were applying all along the Russian front.

Originally, the invasion plan was for the British Eighth Army to land on the east coast from Syracuse south to Tela. One American division of the Seventh Army was to land on the southwest coast at Sciacca-Mezzarina on D plus 2, with the remainder of the Seventh Army to land on the west coast, D plus 5. This plan was discarded because the wide dispersion of our forces would work more to the advantage of the enemy than to the accomplishment of the Allied mission. (6)

The final invasion plan concentrated the Allied forces on the east and southeast coasts. The British Eighth Army was assigned the eastern sector and the American Seventh Army was assigned the southern coast. (See Map A)

German forces in Sicily consisted of the Hermann Goering Division, the 15th Panzer Division, elements of the 29th Motorized Division, the 3d and 4th Parachute Regiments, and approximately 24,000 Air Force personnel, the majority of which had been evacuated from Tunisia. There were also several thousand miscellaneous troops, mostly from the Russian front, in various rest areas or convalescent camps scattered throughout the island.

Italian and Sicilian "Home Guard" Divisions made up the bulk of the enemy forces. The Sixth Italian Army was charged with the defense of Sicily. It was composed of the 202d, 206th, 207th, 208th, and 213th Coastal Divisions and four Field Divisions, the 4th, 26th, 28th, and 54th, which were strategically located inland as a counterattacking or containing force. (7)

Several weeks before D-day, strategic bombing was increased against targets in Germany, northern Italy, and other parts of Europe with a two-fold mission. One mission was to destroy important industrial and military in-

(5) A-5, p. 163; (6) A-2, p. 4; (7) A-13, Plate 6; A-2, p. 9-10.

stallations and the other to prevent Axis aircraft from being diverted to the Mediterranean area. At the same time, Sicily, Crete, Italy, Sardinia, Corsica, and other Mediterranean areas were being bombed often so the enemy could not determine the location of the next Allied invasion. (8)

Fighter bombers disrupted communications and supplies of the various possible invasion areas. Naval ships and planes were also used to gain the element of surprise so successfully achieved in this operation. The Italian Navy was hunted and harassed and forced to remain east of the Straits of Messina. (9) The Allies had started a full scale psychological war against the Italian people.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The 45th Infantry Division made the initial assault with three regiments abreast: the 157th Infantry on the division's right, the 179th Infantry in the center, and the 180th Infantry on the left. The first wave reached the beaches at 0345. Close supporting fire was given by American destroyers who accompanied the assault waves to well within 3000 yards of the beaches. In some instances, it seemed as if the destroyers themselves were making the assault. (Reference Map B for General Situation)

The primary mission of the division was to secure the beachhead; however, each regiment was also given other specific tasks to accomplish. The 179th Infantry was to secure the small port of Scoglitti, take Vittoria, and capture the Comiso Airfield. The 157th Infantry was to seize the town of Comiso, contact the 1st Canadian Division in the vicinity of Ragusa, and assist the 179th Infantry in capturing the Comiso Airfield. The 180th Infantry, less one battalion in corps reserve, was to capture Biscari and the Biscari Airfield, maintaining contact with the 179th Infantry on their right and the 1st Infantry Division on their left. (10) The 180th Infantry's mission of establishing

(8) A-5, p. 99; A-2, p. 5-6; (9) A-1; A-2, p. 9; (10) A-1; A-8, p. 13-14.

contact with adjacent units was made relatively simple by the navy. The assault waves and also elements of the regiment, landing in broad daylight, were scattered from Gela to the right beach in the 179th Infantry sector. (11)

The 179th Infantry had the 1st Battalion on the right and the 3d Battalion on the left. The 2d Battalion was initially held afloat for division reserve. Enemy resistance on the beaches varied from none at all to massed fires of artillery, mortars, and small arms.

The 1st Battalion, upon reaching the beach, pushed inland several hundred yards, quickly reorganized and swung to the south, clearing out the beach defenses on their drive to secure the small port of Scoglitti seven miles away. The 3d Battalion drove inland to the high ground, approximately a thousand yards, quickly reorganized, and struck straight for Vittoria. With the regiment making such good progress, division released the 2d Battalion which the Regimental Commander immediately ordered to aid the 3d Battalion in its drive on the Comiso Airport. (12)

By 1400, the 1st Battalion had captured Scoglitti and was ordered northeast to protect the regiment's right flank. Vittoria was entered by the 3d Battalion early in the afternoon; however, it was not cleared of snipers for several days. (13)

The 180th Infantry on the left, thoroughly mixed and scattered, had met considerable resistance from Italians at some sections of the beach. (14) The 157th Infantry, on the right, had landed with little resistance, but had lost several landing craft, with most of their personnel and equipment, on some rocks offshore. The 158th and 160th Field Artillery Battalions were in position and giving supporting fires before noon of D-day. The 171st Field Artillery Battalion, landing with the 180th Infantry, was as badly scattered as the regiment, but was able to give some supporting fire, and by 1900, most

(11) A-1; A-8, p. 17-18; A-11, p. 1-5, Chap 4; (12) A-1; (13) A-1; A-9, p. 5; (14) A-1; A-11, p. 5, Chap 4.

of the battalion had been assembled.

The 180th Infantry, especially its 1st Battalion, was roughly malled by a combat team from the Hermann Goering Panzer Division composed of infantry, self-propelled artillery, and Mark IV and Mark VI tanks. German fighter-bombers were also very active. This strong German force pushed the 180th Infantry back to the Gela-Vittoria Highway after elements of the regiment had been in Biscari. (15) Because of this stiff resistance, they had not been able to keep up with the 179th Infantry on their right, and there was a gap in depth of several miles between the leading elements of these two units.

On the left of the 180th Infantry, the 1st Infantry Division had been contained by the enemy and a determined effort was being made by combined German and Italian forces to destroy the beachhead at Gela. Naval gunfire is generally credited for stopping the attacking armor. (16) The inability of the 1st Infantry Division to advance kept elements of the 180th Infantry busy protecting its left flank. (17)

The 157th Infantry, right regiment of the 45th Division, entered the town of Ragusa but withdrew when the 1st Canadian Division started shelling it. Contact was established, however, at 1600 D-day. (18) The 157th Infantry, after D plus 1, had little opposition and advanced rapidly inland cutting Highway 124 before receiving the division order limiting the advance to 2000 yards south of the highway. The troops were withdrawn and later when the Canadians came to Vizzini, they met stiff resistance from enemy units that had reoccupied the town when the 157th Infantry was ordered out. (19)

The 2d and 3d Battalions of the 179th Infantry were given a little rest the night of 10-11 July. Some elements of the 3d Battalion were detailed to hunt snipers throughout the night in Vittoria. Early on the morning of the 11th, the drive on the Comiso Airport continued, with the 3d Battalion

(15) A-11, Chap 4, p. 5-6; A-8, p. 18; (16) A-1; A-12, p. 152; (17) A-1; A-11, p. 7, Chap 4; (18) A-8, p. 18; (19) A-8, p. 23.

striking from the southwest, the 2d Battalion closing in from the northwest, and the 3d Battalion of the 157th Infantry advancing from the southeast. As the two 3d Battalions approached the airport, enemy resistance increased. German infantry, reinforced by Air Force personnel, fought furiously to protect the 120 airplanes still on the field. Mortar and artillery supporting the enemy small arms, held off the two 3d Battalions until two light artillery battalions displaced to within range of the airport. The artillery battalions were ordered to fire until 1630; however, the Commander of the 179th Infantry's 3d Battalion noticed the enemy's small arms fire was slackening and sent a message to lift the artillery fires and ordered his companies to attack. Some of the retreating enemy troops, caught off guard and badly disorganized, were forced back into the path of the 2d Battalion which was just completing its flanking maneuver. The 2d Battalion, after a vicious encounter, forced the enemy from the airfield. The first major airport on Sicily had fallen. (20)

The morning of the 12th dawned with the 3d Battalion stalking snipers around the airfield. The 2d Battalion, covering the airport on the north, was hit by an enemy counterattack supported by intense mortar and artillery fire. The 1st Battalion was rushed to their aid by the Regimental Commander and together the two battalions repulsed the attackers. Enemy prisoners and dead were identified as elements of the Stammkampf Panzer Grenadiers and the Hermann Goering Panzer Division. (21)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

By 0900 12 July, the 3d Battalion had started north toward Highway 124, which runs generally parallel to the coast at the town of Grammicele.

Enemy troops were delaying stubbornly, attempting to keep the battalion deployed, but were unsuccessful because their delaying forces were of insufficient size to cause the Battalion Commander to commit his unit. (22)

(20) A-1; A-11, p. 21; (21) A-1; A-7, p. 13; A-16, Incl #5; (22) A-1.

The troops were worn out. Few had been able to sleep on the transport because of the rough sea and only a few hours had been allowed for sleeping thus far. None of the men had received their blanket rolls from the beach and, although the days were extremely hot, it was very cold at night. The Battalion Commander, realizing the condition of his troops, halted the column about 1400, deployed a platoon across the front, and gave his men a short rest. A battalion quarter-ton truck and trailer, bringing up some ammunition and demolitions, drove by as the column was resting in the shade. The road guard was off the road in a vineyard watching to the front for enemy armor and did not see the vehicle in time to halt it. About thirty minutes later, the driver, wounded and suffering from shock and exhaustion, came running down the road. He could give little information, only that he had driven around a curve and had come upon several enemy tanks. His vehicle was destroyed and he had run all the way back, approximately five miles. (23)

The battalion again took up the pursuit.

The 2d Battalion, after repelling the counterattack north of the airport, advanced north along the right of the regimental zone, meeting the same type delaying action the 3d Battalion was facing. The 1st Battalion was in reserve.

In the middle of the afternoon, the two leading battalions, as was expected, ran into tanks that were supporting the enemy's rear guard. A machine-gun section of M Company supporting the advance guard, which was engaged in a fire-fight with the retreating enemy, directed their fire at a straw stack from which they thought enemy troops were firing. The tracers ricocheted out, much to their surprise, and a Mark VI tank backed out and opened fire as it withdrew. The 2d Battalion also had several sharp fire-fights during the day. (24)

Just before darkness, in the twilight period, the 3d Battalion was hit by several Mark IV and Mark VI tanks accompanied by infantry. A 105 mm howit-

(23)(24) A-1.

ser from Cannon Company fired several times at a Mark VI tank but missed and withdrew from the action. (25) K Company, the lead company, was momentarily scattered, but quickly rallied and forced the enemy to withdraw. Nightfall found the battalion tired and dirty, probing north.

The regiment halted about midnight to give the men a chance to rest, but at daylight they were on the road having been issued ammunition and a K-ration prior to leaving the bivouac area.

Division headquarters was still using the 3d Platoon of L Company as a security platoon protecting the division's rear administrative section in Vittoria. (26)

THE APPROACH MARCH

On the 13th of July 1943, the 3d Battalion was leading the 179th Infantry on its drive to cut Highway 124 at Grammicele. Elements of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division, one of the best divisions in the German Army, were fighting stubbornly in front of the battalion. Enemy forces had been in Sicily for some time and had acquired excellent knowledge of the terrain over which he was fighting. The battalion was delayed often by a few troops and supporting armor which were left on each critical terrain feature. To dislodge them, the battalion either had to deploy or wait for the security elements the Battalion Commander had on the flanks to catch up and, by fire and maneuver, drive the enemy out of position. The enemy had a considerable force in front of the battalion and, on especially good terrain features, would counterattack sharply before withdrawing to the next hill. (27)

The 3d Battalion had grown into a small combat team. The 160th Field Artillery Battalion was in direct support of the 179th Infantry with priority of fire to the 3d Battalion. The forward observers and the liaison officers with the 2d and 3d Battalions, like all artillery officers, enjoyed firing and very seldom needed to be asked for their supporting fire. The artillery

(25) A-1; Statement by Capt Bex, Co K Comdr, 13 Jul 43; (26) A-1; A-3, p. 12; (27) A-1.

liaison planes were not yet in operation for they had been taken apart and crated for the voyage from the States, but they were now in the process of being assembled as the parts were retrieved from the jumbled mass of crates and equipment on the beach. A 4.2 Chemical Mortar Platoon from the 2d Chemical Battalion was attached to the 3d Battalion and had no difficulty in keeping up with the infantry. The devastating power of the 4.2 high explosive and white phosphorus shells was known and so appreciated by the infantry that they took turns in helping to pull the mortar and ammunition carts. A platoon of 75 mm self-propelled howitzers from Cannon Company was also attached to the battalion.

After one particularly vicious counterattack the battalion, partially deployed, overran a good size tank repair and supply park. (28) Considerable equipment and supplies were captured, including a large quantity of fuel and ammunition.

About 1100, the Battalion S-2 reported to regiment that two Sicilians, formerly from the United States, had told him the Germans had assembled a force of approximately 500 troops and about 35 tanks in an olive grove several kilometers in front of the battalion. The two Sicilians, hating the Germans and knowing the value of their information, had marked the spot well and pinpointed the location of the enemy concentration on the map. The Battalion S-2 then sent another group to verify this information. The regiment had received similar information from another Sicilian. This informer had also lived in the United States. The Regimental Commander sent his S-2 to division headquarters for help in destroying the enemy force. The Division G-2 upon receiving the information, informed the G-3 and they determined the exact location of the enemy concentration on their situation map. In the meantime, the Division Artillery Commander joined the group and the situation to the front of the 3d Battalion was told once again. The General sent word to the

(28) A-1; A-3, p. 10.

Division Commander who came immediately, accompanied by the Assistant Division Commander and a General from corps headquarters. Again the information was given and the location of the enemy group shown. (29)

The Division Artillery Commander suggested calling on corps to displace a battalion of 155 mm rifles to reinforce the fire of the division artillery. At the rate the 3d Battalion was advancing, the division artillery should be in position to fire on the olive grove within three hours, but the Division Commander and the Corps General decided an air strike would be more effective. The Regimental S-2 was told to inform his Commander that division was securing an air strike to destroy the enemy concentration. At approximately 1630, the 3d Battalion S-2 received this information. The battalion at this time, still several kilometers from the enemy force in the olive grove, was advancing against increasingly stubborn infantry-tank delaying action. (30)

The attached Cannon Platoon fired a number of rounds at enemy positions but at such long range and at such small targets that little damage was done. Enemy armor usually fired from hull defilade positions. The enemy's advantage of range and armor penetration forced the Cannon Platoon to be very cautious.

At 1900, the battalion had been unable to advance as far as was planned, and so the attack continued into the night. A ridge line about four kilometers away was the objective. At approximately 2330 the objective was taken and the troops went into position on either side of the narrow dirt road. (31)

It is necessary at this time to call attention to the condition of the men. As previously stated, very few had been able to sleep the last few nights aboard the storm-tossed transport and now, after four days and nights of fighting and marching, every one was completely exhausted. (32) The blanket rolls had not been brought up and the only rations available to the battalion were K-rations. Grapes, figs, and any other food the men could find were eaten

(29) A-1; (30) A-2; (31) A-14; A-15, Incl #2, p. 1; (32) A-14)

and, in violation of medical instructions issued at sea, the local well water was drunk. (33)

THE BATTALION IN DEFENSE

The area the battalion organized (see Map C) was a rolling hill cut in the center by a sunken narrow dirt road. The road, continuing north, crossed a small shallow valley and turned sharply to the left in a "cut" that divided a hill similar to the one occupied by the battalion. The two hills, roughly parallel, were about 450 yards apart. Large olive groves almost covered the area and along the road between the two hills, geranium plants were growing six to eight feet high. (34)

Company I organized the west (left) end of the hill and Company K organized the east (right) portion. Company L, in reserve, organized the southern slope of a small hill about 300 yards to the right rear of K Company. The 3d Platoon of L Company was still being used to guard the division rear command post. A platoon of Company M's heavy machine guns was in direct support of K Company and I and L Companies each had a section from the other platoon.

The 81 mm Mortar Platoon and the 4.2 Chemical Mortar Platoon set up together in battery about 150 yards to the right rear of I Company and both were using the same observation posts in the front line companies. (35)

The battalion motor pool was established about 500 yards to the rear of the mortar batteries. Many of the battalion weapon carriers were scattered about the area so the attack could be quickly resumed in the morning. The 37 mm towed guns of the Antitank Platoon (Battalion Headquarters Company) and the Cannon Company platoon were left in the motor pool. (36) I Company did not help in this particular battle because it was in position to repel an attack from the west. (37)

(33) A-1; (34) A-1; A-3, p. 9; (35) A-14; (36) A-1; Statements by Capt Lloyd Bex, K Co Comdr, 14 Jul 43, and 1st Sgt John R. Moore, former K Co 1st Sgt, 2 Dec 47; (37) A-1; A-13.

Company K organized its sector, put out listening posts, and attempted to dig in. The exhausted men, knowing they would be in this position only a few hours, dug their slit trenches about a foot deep. The 60 mm Mortar Section set up in battery and laid wire to the observation post on the forward slope of the hill. (38) One 57 mm antitank gun from the Regimental Anti-tank Company was placed in the 3d Platoon sector in position to fire across the road toward I Company. Company L dug the same type slit trenches as K Company, but the 60 mm mortars were not put in position to fire. The light machine-gun section was placed in the platoon areas in position to repel an attack from the south.

After giving his orders for the night positions, the Battalion Commander told his Company Commanders and attached Platoon Commanders that he would issue an attack order in the morning at 0600. It must be remembered that neither the Battalion Commander nor any of his officers had seen the terrain they were occupying or the terrain to the front, in daylight. The officers and men of the battalion knew they were to continue the attack in the morning.

The Battalion S-2 had informed his commander of the enemy concentration, and where he secured the information, shortly before notifying regiment, but he had not convinced him of its accuracy nor had he told him of the air strike planned by division. (39) The companies were not told of the presence of this strong enemy force. (40)

While the companies were digging in, the Regimental Commander ordered the 3d Battalion to send out two strong reconnaissance patrols from each rifle company. These patrols were to search up to 2000 yards for the enemy and were to be active all night. The Battalion Commander was not in the command post and the order was given to the Battalion Executive Officer and to the Battalion S-2. (41)

(38) A-1; A-3, p. 8-9; A-16, Incl #5, p. 15-A; (39) A-1; A-13; (40, 41) A-1.

Division attached A Company, 753d Tank Battalion (Medium Tanks) to the regiment late in the afternoon. The tanks arrived at the regimental command post about dark and were immediately attached to the 3d Battalion. The Tank Company Commander reported to the Battalion Commander after dark and about the same time the troops were going into position for the night. He was briefed on the night defense plan and was told that the order for continuing the attack would be given in the morning at the observation post in K Company's area. It was decided to put the Tank Company in the motor pool and plans would be made for its use in the morning. Most of the infantrymen were already asleep and tanks moving around in the areas would be extremely dangerous as the men's slit trenches were, as a rule, fairly well concealed. (42)

During the night, the one report received was that a patrol had gone out about a mile and returned by a different route, finding nothing. (43) It was later determined that Company L sent a patrol to contact Company K, but the patrol went in the wrong direction. (44)

While the men were sleeping, the enemy started working on a stalled tank to the left front of K Company. The Germans guarding the tank and repair crew, nervously fired automatic weapons into the night. The 4.2 Chemical Platoon Leader, tired of the noise, crawled within a 100 yards of the tank and used a radio to adjust his mortars on the enemy. When the first mortar round fell, the Germans wildly sprayed the night with their automatic weapons. The tank engine sputtered and coughed while the Platoon Leader was adjusting his fire so he called for all mortars to fire continuously. About the fourth volley all enemy fire had ceased and a terrific explosion shook the night. Late the next afternoon, it was discovered that a 4.2 high explosive shell had dropped into the open turret of a Mark VI tank, while part of the crew was in it, and had caused its ammunition to explode. There was also evidence of

(42) A-1; Statement of Capt Fowler, Tk Co Comdr, 14 Jul 43; A-15, Incl #5, p. 6; (43) A-1; (44) A-3, p. 13.

other casualties in the vicinity.

At 0600, 14 July, the Battalion Commander was giving his operations order for the attack. The sun was not yet up and a light fog hung low over the ground. The majority of the men were still asleep. (All of the action that follows is shown on Map D) While the order was being issued, a Mark III tank came out of the early morning mist, surprising and overrunning the security squad, killing two men and wounding four others. (45) The tank halted momentarily and when the fog started breaking up advanced toward the 3d Platoon position. About fifty yards behind it were two Mark IV tanks with a platoon of Panzer Grenadiers deployed to their rear.

The company was alerted by a member of the security squad running back to the company calling for the Weapons Platoon Leader and yelling "tanks". The mist was rising and as the tank started slowly forward, it was followed by the other two tanks and the rifle grenadiers. Two more Mark IV's with men deployed about them came into view in the vicinity of Hill D. The lead tank was very deliberate in its forward movement and as it approached the 3d Platoon at least two platoons of enemy riflemen with several machine guns started organizing Hills C and D. Until this time the only firing had been by the tank as it shot up the security squad of K Company. As the lead tank stopped again, about 35 yards from the platoon position, the Weapons Platoon brought down 60 mm mortar fire on the deployed grenadiers. (46) Then "all hell broke loose"; all German weapons, including those in the five tanks, opened up. The three leading tanks started forward again. (47)

A section of heavy machine guns commenced firing at the German troops and tanks. A direct hit from a tank destroyed one gun and killed its crew. (48) The tanks fired at individual slit trenches with their machine guns and cannons. The three leading tanks advanced into the 3d Platoon area and,

(45) A-16, Incl #5, p. 15-A; (46) A-3, p. 8; A-1; Statement by 1st Sgt John R. Moore, former K Co 1st Sgt, 2 Dec 47; (47) A-3, p. 8; (48) A-14.

as the position was about to be overrun, a rifle grenadier, in a clump of large cactus plants about 35 yards from the leading tank, fired an A-T grenade into its side but in his excitement he had failed to pull the pin and the grenade bounced off the tank. His next round, properly armed, hit just above the rollers and the tank caught fire. The crew was killed as they left the tank. (49)

The fire-fight had been in progress several minutes before the 81 mm mortars and the 4.2 chemical mortars got into action. High explosive and white phosphorus shells were used with great success on the enemy troops that had advanced with the tanks. When the enemy foot troops withdrew into the olive grove, the mortar concentrations were shifted to the enemy positions on Hills C and D. The 60 mm mortars, the light machine-gun section, and the three remaining heavy machine guns also fired on the hills. (50)

Two of the German mortars that had supported their troops attacking K Company were found later in the day behind Hill D.

The 1st Platoon position was not under direct fire from the enemy tanks and panzer grenadiers. After the initial surprise of the attack was passed, the Platoon Leader took a half squad, crossed the road, and worked north toward the flank of the enemy. This small group caught two squads of Germans that were attempting to flank K Company. The two squads, though moving south, were attempting to watch the battle and did not see the lieutenant and his group until they opened fire. The enemy after several minutes of firing withdrew, leaving eight dead. While searching the area for more enemy west of the road, heavy fire was received from Hill C so the group withdrew back to the platoon position. The lieutenant got the rest of the squad and started off to patrol the right (east) flank of the company. As the patrol approached the draw, they were fired on by enemy troops across the draw. The lieutenant

(49) A-1; A-3, p. 8; A-13; (50) A-3, p. 8; A-14; A-1; Statement by Lt Parrish, 81 mm Mortar Plat Ldr, 14 Jul 43.

was killed and several of his men wounded. The remainder of the squad was forced back to the protecting fire of the company and the enemy continued their advance to the south.

The 57 mm antitank gun was in position to fire west. The German tanks attacked from the north and were within a 150 yards of the gun before they were discovered. The crew made no attempt to get the gun in position to fire but took cover, as the area was being sprayed by many automatic weapons, as well as cannon and mortar fragments. A 75 mm self-propelled howitzer (half-track) came up from the motor pool but the crew jumped out and took cover from the flying steel without firing a shot. (51)

The Sherman Tank Company Commander had his radio with him when he went to receive the battalion attack order and was able to call his company into action. As he ran to meet his tanks, he decided to go around K Company and hit the enemy from the flank. Heavy firing heard in L Company's direction before the tanks arrived caused him to divert a platoon to help block any enemy flank attack. The Company Commander then led his remaining tanks in an attack on the enemy who was firing on K Company. Three enemy tanks were destroyed as they were withdrawing to the draw at B.

This had been a moving tank battle and the Company Commander's tank became separated from the others in the olive grove. Breaking over a small rise the lone Sherman tank found itself directly behind two Mark IV and two Mark VI tanks withdrawing from the battle. For some unknown reason the enemy cannons were all pointing away from the battle and three of the tanks were backing up. The fourth, a Mark VI tank, which was going forward, was set afire when the Sherman put two rounds in its motor. A Mark IV was also knocked out as the Sherman itself attempted to back out of the "hornet's nest" it had run into. The remaining Mark VI tank put two 88 mm rounds into the Sherman

(51) A-1; Statement by Capt Lloyd Bex, K Co Comdr, 14 Jul 43; Statement by 1st Sgt John R. Moore, former K Co 1st Sgt, 2 Dec 47.

and withdrew without waiting to finish off the crew. The Tank Company Commander and one of his lieutenants captured an English speaking German officer who had managed to get out of his burning tank. On their way back to K Company, the two officers walked on either side and slightly to the rear of the captured German and made him keep both hands above his head. They walked fast and asked questions about his unit opposing the 3d Battalion. When the group was approximately 50 yards from K Company, a rifleman killed the prisoner before the two American officers could stop him. (52) Three other prisoners also taken during this action were killed by division MP's in a gully at the head of the battalion motor pool while the Battalion S-2 was getting the German interrogation team from regiment. (53) This killing of prisoners had started because of a misunderstanding by some of the officers and non-commissioned officers of the division who had attended a blood and thunder pep talk in Africa prior to the invasion of Sicily. (54)

Several prisoners from K and L Companies taken by the Germans during this action were released three days later and rejoined the battalion. (55)

Very few of the men in L Company were awakened by the fire-fight in K Company's area. The first they knew of the attack was when a platoon of panzer grenadiers supported by a tank, firing from a position across the draw, enveloped the left squad of the 1st Platoon and started firing on the other two squads from a position (I) to the platoon's rear. The corporal of this squad reported to his platoon sergeant (the platoon sergeant had been acting platoon leader since leaving the States) that six of his men had been captured and the other members of the squad were in their slit trenches, but were not firing. The other two squads were busy engaging the enemy. The remainder of the left squad broke from their precarious position and took up a new position behind the center squad. One man was killed in the move. (56)

(52) A-1; Statement of Capt Fowler, Co A, 753d Tank Bn, 14 Jul 43; (53) A-1; (54) A-1; A-15, Incl #12; (55) A-1; (56) A-3, p. 12.

The 1st Platoon Sergeant turned his platoon over to the platoon guide and ran back to the company command post to get help. He was hit by six fragments from mortar shells, but made it to the command post. Here he found that the Company Commander was at battalion and the 2d Platoon Leader was not with his platoon. The 1st Platoon Sergeant took over the command of the company. Most of the men around the command post were asleep and didn't know what was going on. The Acting Company Commander found the 2d Platoon Sergeant and told him what had happened and that his platoon needed help badly. The 2d Platoon Sergeant realized how critical the situation was and with the help of his squad leaders alerted his men and moved to a position (E and F) further up the hill. Here the platoon was organized for an attack. Some of the headquarters personnel were used by the Acting Commander to support his 1st Platoon. He told the Light Machine Gun Section Leader to place his weapons where they would be able to support the riflemen. He also requested help from the battalion prior to leaving the command post. (57)

While the Acting Company Commander was organizing the company, at least another platoon of panzer grenadiers worked up the draw and reinforced the platoon already firing on L Company. Enemy troops also moved over to protect the tank across the draw and several more tanks could be heard approaching. The enemy's reinforcements enabled them to achieve fire superiority and the position of the 1st Platoon was rapidly becoming untenable when the machine-gun section went into position (G) and commenced firing. (58)

The Acting Company Commander, though badly wounded, took up a position near the light machine guns where he could control the company. He was able to increase the rate of fire of the 1st Platoon and, with the aid of the machine guns, the enemy's attention was held while the 2d Platoon crawled to within 100 yards (H) of the enemy. A 75 mm self-propelled howitzer that had been sent by battalion drove the German tank off after firing several rounds. (59)

(57) A-3, p. 12; (58) A-1; A-14; (59) A-3, p. 12, 13.

The 2d Platoon was discovered and the firing increased furiously with both sides suffering several casualties. Enemy mortar fire was very accurate and coming fast, so the 2d Platoon Guide, now commanding the platoon, decided the best way to dislodge the enemy was by an assault. He called for the men about him to pass the word along to fix bayonets. He gave the men time to pass the word and then jumped up and led the bayonet charge. The Acting Commander led the 1st Platoon in this charge, although he was so badly wounded in both arms that he could not raise them or hold a rifle. This assault, after a short hand-to-hand battle, drove the enemy from the hill and the enemy troops across the draw withdrew as the assaulting platoons approached. The position was then reorganized by the 2d Platoon Guide. (60)

The Company Commander, having finally worked his way out of K Company's battle, resumed command. The 1st Platoon Sergeant was sent to the battalion aid station and later given a battlefield commission and the Distinguished Service Cross. The 2d Platoon Guide also received the Distinguished Service Cross. (61)

During this entire engagement, Company L's 60 mm mortar section was not set up and did not fire a round.

The Sherman tanks that were sent to help L Company engaged several enemy tanks advancing along the draw to the northeast of L Company and chased them back behind Hill D where two Mark IV's were destroyed.

Why!

The 160th Field Artillery Battalion did little firing in this particular action, as they had been unable to register the night before and the suddenness of the action caught the forward observers and the liaison officer unprepared. After the German tanks had been driven off, our own tanks were scattered over the front and the artillery concentrations could only be fired far beyond Hills C and D.

(60) A-1; A-3, p. 13; (61) A-1, A-3, p. 13.

When the Battalion Commander reported the action to his Regimental Commander, he was told to reorganize his position against another attack and the 1st Battalion would pursue the enemy. (62)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

A study of this operation discloses some very glaring errors, many of which were immediately corrected by the Battalion Commander and the Company Commanders. Relying entirely on division to take care of the enemy concentration was primarily the fault of the regiment and not the battalion. Division headquarters should have notified the Regimental Commander if they were not going to supply the air strike as planned or be able to fire an artillery concentration. The attached company of Sherman tanks was probably division's help, although this was never mentioned when the notification of the attachment was received.

cc. sent of the S-2

The Battalion S-2 should be commended for securing and confirming the information from the Sicilians but he failed to follow through. He gave the Battalion Commander the information but made no attempt to convince him of its accuracy nor did he tell him of the steps taken by regiment to secure help from division. The Battalion S-2 also failed to disseminate the information to the Company Commanders.

*Major Cause for
Failure of the S-2
Commander*

The Company Commanders should not have been called away from their companies just prior to dawn. The men, although exhausted, should have been alerted prior to daylight in preparation for a possible German counterattack as the entire regiment had been warned in Africa that this was the usual time the Germans attacked.

Even though the 37 mm antitank guns were relatively useless against enemy armor, the antitank platoon should have set up a road block on the hill the battalion occupied. The rifle grenadiers had been placed well forward as part of the battalion's standard operating procedure.

(62) A-1.

The company officers should have supervised more closely the preparation of their areas. They should have seen that the slit trenches were deep enough and all weapons were in position to fire regardless of the fact that they knew the battalion was to continue the attack in the morning. The 60 mm mortars of Company L would have aided materially in repulsing the enemy if they had been placed in position during the night.

There should have been at least one officer with L Company, and at the command post in charge of the company, while the Company Commander was receiving the battalion order. The noncommissioned officers of L Company handled the situation perfectly. They took charge and ran the company, not only to their credit, but to the credit of the entire battalion. This was an excellent example of the degree of training attained by the battalion prior to combat.

The 4.2 chemical mortars and the 81 mm mortar platoon brought down a terrific barrage within a few minutes after the enemy attack was launched. A mixture of high explosive and white phosphorus shells falling about 100 yards from K Company soon drove off the panzer grenadiers accompanying the German tanks and caused many enemy casualties on the hills to the front. The Battalion Commander gave the mortars a large part of the credit for breaking up the attack.

The rifle grenadier, when he destroyed the leading tank, set a fine example for the other rifle grenadiers of the battalion. Not only did he prove the value of the antitank grenade, but his accuracy caused the other four tanks to falter.

K Company Commander and his officers disregarded their own personal safety entirely by working feverously among the men, directing mortar fire, switching the machine guns to appropriate targets, and in general moving about the area rallying the men in view of the enemy tanks and troops.

The Sherman Tank Company Commander and his men were the most aggressive

tankers the writer has known. They destroyed seven German tanks (two Mark VI's and five Mark IV's) and inflicted considerable casualties on the enemy troops accompanying the tanks.

The section of heavy machine guns directly in front of the attacking tanks should not have fired at the tanks. One gun crew was killed and the gun destroyed without having inflicted any casualties on the enemy.

Company L should not have been ordered to leave a rifle platoon in Vittoria to guard the division rear command post. Under the circumstances, however, L Company should have had a platoon attached to it from one of the companies of the reserve battalion.

The crews of the 57 mm antitank gun and the 75 mm self-propelled howitzer did not stay with their weapons and attempt to destroy the enemy armor. Instead they took cover when the enemy small arms and shell fragments started flying about the area. Neither weapon fired a single round, and neither weapon was hit by enemy fire.

The battalion had grown careless through a combination of success and fatigue. If the Germans had been more aggressive and had employed their tanks in mass, K Company could have been overrun in a matter of minutes. They would have been able to destroy the Sherman tanks and the antitank weapons sitting in the battalion motor pool with little trouble.

Much credit should be given to the front line infantrymen who held their positions when enemy tanks broke into their area.

The men were not allowed enough time to rest after the invasion started. Little consideration was given to the fact that few of them had slept at all the nights of 9-10 July and many of them were seasick because of the rough crossing. Arrangements should have been made for the blanket rolls to be delivered to the troops by at least D plus 2 as the temperature variation was so great most of the men were too cold at night to rest properly, when they had an opportunity.

*How far from back of
action
Tanks of the
Commander.*

LESSONS

Several of the lessons emphasized in this operation are:

1. Information must be disseminated down to the smallest units.
2. A subordinate's first responsibility is to his immediate commander.
3. A commander must not take anything for granted. He or his staff must supervise any order that he gives to enforce effective execution.
4. Artillery must register, even if it has displaced forward at night, in order to give close and continuous support.
5. Pre-planned fires should be made continuously in moving engagements.
6. All weapons available must be employed in the defense fire plan and anti-mechanized defense plan.
7. Know your enemy.
8. In the defense, even if the positions have been hastily prepared, mortar and artillery barrages may be brought in as close as 100 yards to the troops with very few casualties to the defenders.
9. If it is possible, hot meals, adequate clothing, and equipment must be furnished the men to maintain their fighting efficiency.
10. Surprise is essential in both the attack and the defense, but must be aggressively exploited or the advantage is soon lost.
11. Training must be thorough, comprehensive, and as realistic as possible. Riflemen and crew served weapons must work together so they can understand each other's capabilities and limitations.