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THE OPERATION OF COMPANY B, 363d INFANTRY
(91st INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON
MT. MONTICELLI, ITALY, 14-18 SEPTEMBER 1944
(NORTH APENNINES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Company Commander)

Type of operation described: RIFLE COMPANY ATTACKING
A KEY POSITION IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of Company B, 363d Infantry, 91st Infantry Division in the Attack on MT. MONTICELLI, ITALY 14-18 September 1944 during the breaching of the GOTHIC LINE.

The major events, in sequence, immediately prior to this action will be discussed briefly for the purpose of orienting the reader.

Operations of the U.S. Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army early in September of 1943 resulted in the successful invasion of the ITALIAN PENNINSULA. (1) By 1 October, the city of NAPLES and the great port had fallen into the hands of the U. S. Fifth Army. (2) The FOGGIA AIRFIELDS, the main objective of the British Eighth Army, had been occupied on the same date. (3) Thus, the initial objectives of the ITALIAN invasion had been achieved and the destruction of the Axis Armies in ITALY was successfully under way. (See Map A)

The Fifth Army advanced rapidly through the German fortified positions and up the boot of ITALY, capturing ROME on 4 June, LEGHORN on 18 July, and by 23 July 1944 was in possession of the south bank of the ARNO RIVER on a 35 mile front extending from the sea to the ELSA RIVER, 20 miles

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- (1) A-1, p. 8; A-6, p. 46
(2) A-6, p. 44; A-1, p. 36
(3) A-1, p. 37

west of FLORENCE. (4) The Eighth Army, advancing more slowly than the Fifth Army, occupied FLORENCE south of the ARNO on 4 August and completed the work of securing the remainder of the river line in the next few days. (5)

Once on the ARNO RIVER, Fifth Army temporarily assumed the defensive to permit a period of rest, regrouping, and building up of supplies and supply lines, which was necessary before a coordinated sustained attack could be launched across the ARNO and against the GOTHIC LINE. (6)

Having landed in ITALY in June, 1944, the 91st Infantry Division entered combat just north of ROME on 12 July. The newly indoctrinated Division, assigned to IV Corps of Fifth Army, advanced in stride, taking its proportionate share of objectives, resulting in the withdrawal of the Germans north of the ARNO RIVER. Having reached the ARNO, the 91st Division was detached from IV Corps and assigned to II Corps for the next offensive action. (5) (7)

On 12 September, after crossing the ARNO RIVER at FLORENCE and advancing north for a distance of about 20 miles, the 363d Infantry had crossed the SIEVE RIVER, pushed the enemy outpost to the GOTHIC LINE back, and were poised in front of the main defenses of MT. ALTUZZO and MT. MONTICELLI — two highly fortified strongholds in the GOTHIC LINE. (8)

(See Map B)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The GOTHIC LINE, 170 miles long, running generally east-west from coast to coast across Italy, was sited to take

(4) A-1, p. 293

(5) A-1, p. 295

(6) A-1, p. 294

(7) A-3, p. 23

(8) A-1, p. 315; A-4, p. 97

maximum advantage of the high, rugged APENNINE MOUNTAINS and the limited roads across them. Construction of the defenses began when the Fifth Army was still engaged in breaking the WINTER LINE, approximately 200 miles to the south. The work was performed under the direction of the Todt organization by 15,000 Italians herded into labor camps and forced to dig antitank ditches, gun emplacements, machine gun and rifle pits, trenches, and personnel shelters. No single emplacement had been left unsupported by adjacent equally well-placed fortifications.

All positions were protected by anti-personnel minefields and barbed wire entanglements. No portion of the line presented a favorable penetration point. (9)

Since landing in ITALY, the 91st Division had fought almost continuously over rugged mountainous terrain, and had received many casualties. However, replacements had been received, and key personnel replaced. A training period from 17 August to 5 September, during the regrouping of the Fifth Army, aided replacements in quickly acquiring the fighting spirit of the battle-experienced veterans, and morale was high. Our units were approximately at full strength and were supplied sufficiently to meet requirements for any normal action, though front line delivery would be difficult once the troops were in the mountains, due to lack of roads beyond the lower slopes. On the other hand, the German troops facing the 91st Division had for the most part been in combat much longer, and their morale was somewhat lower, because of successive defeats and forced withdrawals. The 4th Parachute Division alone

(9) A-1, p. 305; A-2, p. 7

was responsible for most of II Corps attack zone. The division was spread thin with no available reserves. It had all three of its regiments in line; the 10th in the MT. FRASSINO area, the 11th in the MT. CALVIN area, and the 12th Parachute Regiment in the MT. ALTUZZO area. Taking these things into consideration, the combat efficiency of our forces was somewhat higher than that of the opposing forces. However, their opportunity for preparing strong fortifications, stockpiling supplies on the spot, and their determination for holding at all costs promised a long, hard battle for II Corps troops. (10)

Fifth Army's plan for attack divided the operation into two phases. In the first phase, II Corps would make the main effort through the British 13 Corps and capture MTS. MORELLO, SENARIO, and CALVANA, while 13 Corps was taking MT. GIOVI. In the second phase, II Corps would breach the GOTHIC LINE at the FUTO PASS, later modified to IL GIOGO PASS. Thirteen Corps on the right was to follow the axis of the SAN PIERO IMOLA ROAD ^{N. 65° E.} to the east of Highway 65. During the first phase of the attack, IV Corps was to simulate a crossing of the ARNO RIVER on the left between MT. PISANO and MT. ALBANO, and be prepared to follow up any enemy withdrawals. (11) (See Map B)

In accordance with Fifth Army plan, II Corps planned to use the 91st Division on the right and the 34th on the left for securing the hill line south of the SIEVE RIVER, and then introduce the 85th Division on the right to make the penetration of the GOTHIC LINE on a narrow front in

(10) A-1, p. 313 and 314

the vicinity of IL GIOGO PASS. The 88th Division was to be prepared to exploit any breakthrough. (12) (See Map B)

The 91st Division planned to attack with two regiments abreast, 362d Infantry on the left and 363d on the right, with 361 in reserve. Successive objectives for the 363d were MT. CALVANA and Highway 65 just south of SAN PIERO; for the 362d Infantry, BIVIGLIANA and MT. SENARIO and the area from the SIEVE RIVER southwest to CARTONE and to TREBBIO. (13) (See Map B)

Smooth development of II Corps attack was hindered both by weather and enemy withdrawals. A two-day rain 6 and 7 September caused the streams and the ARNO RIVER to reach flood stage. More serious was the enemy withdrawal which began the night of 5-6 September. The Germans yielded the hill line south of the SIEVE RIVER without a struggle, thus ending phase I of the operation. On 9 September, General Clark ordered the beginning of Phase II of the operation. Among other details, the boundary between II and 13 Corps was shifted to a line midway between Highways 65 and 6521 to the SIEVE RIVER, and then continued northeast approximately two miles east of Highway 6524. (14)

In accordance with the Fifth Army order of 9 September, the 91st Division drew up new plans for the attack. The line of departure would be the lateral road running from a point south of VALLIA to BIVIGLIANO. The 363d Infantry relieved the 3d Brigade of the British 1st Division just south of BIVIGLIANO early on 10 September, and the 362d Infantry

(12) A-1, p. 310; A-2, p. 41

(13) A-4, p. 92 and 93

(14) A-1, p. 310

relieved the 2nd Brigade in the vicinity of VAGLIA. (15)

(See Map B)

The attack jumped off at daybreak. The advance was so rapid that during the day further objectives of MT. ALTUZZO and MT. CASTEL GUERRINI were assigned to 363d Infantry; and for the 362d, MT. CALVI, MT. ALTO, MT. GAZZARO, and the FUTA PASS. The rapid advance continued until 12 September when, after crossing the SIEVE RIVER, the 363d Infantry was slowed down considerably by mortar and artillery fire in front of MT. ALTUZZO and MT. MONTICELLI. (16)

(See Maps B and C)

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 1st BATTALION, 363d INFANTRY -

(See Map C)

On 12 September, the 1st Battalion advanced north with two companies abreast, Company B on the left generally along the SAN AGATA ROAD, and Company A five hundred yards to the right moving up a northwest-southeast draw, and Company C was in reserve. By 1030, Company B had reached the north slope of MONTACCIANICO. A Company had moved to the head of the draw near HILL 443, and Company C moved its reserved position to COMPISANO, north of SAN AGATA. From these positions, the 1st Battalion planned a coordinated night attack with the 3d Battalion with the object of taking CASACCE on the slope of MONTICELLI RIDGE during the night and keeping continuous pressure on the enemy. The attack was to be led by Company A followed by Company C, and Company B was to guard the left flank from its present position since 362d Infantry on the left was meeting great resistance from MT.

(15) A-4, p. 95

(16) A-4, p. 95 and 97

CALVI which was to the left rear of Company B. (17)

The top of MT. MONTICELLI was to be marked with white phosphorus to aid Company A in keeping its direction through the deep ravines during darkness. Company A found it impossible to see the white phosphorus marker, which was masked by high ground to the front. Lacking this guidance and hit hard by the enemy mortar and artillery defensive fires, Company A became disorganized. Having lost its path and not having heard from Company C, Company A withdrew to reorganize and reestablish contact. Here it was found that Company C had also been hit by defensive fires and was unable to advance. (18)

Lieutenant Colonel Woods (commanding 1st Battalion) reorganized the two companies after the night attack, and selected new routes to attack CASACCE and the western ridge again the next morning, 13 September, at 0800. Company B was again to protect the still exposed left flank and attack toward COLLE. Sending Captain Barry, his S-3, with Company A on the left, Lieutenant Colonel Woods led Company C east, then cut north up the trail along the western slope of POGGIO AL POZZO, the companion ridge to POGGIO DI CASTRO which the third Battalion had taken. In the valley at the foot of MT. MONTICELLI, Company A received a mortar barrage which killed 5 men and wounded 17. The column dispersed to take cover in the gully, became disorganized, and was again withdrawn for regrouping. Elements of Company B on the left advanced to MULINUCCIO. Company C was at POGGIO AL POZZO starting up MT. MONTICELLI when word was received by the

(17) A-5, p. 67; Personal Knowledge

(18) A-5, p. 67; Personal Knowledge

Battalion Commander from the Regimental Commander that the 361st Infantry, in reserve until this time, would be committed on the left between the 363d Infantry and the 362d Infantry. The 2d Battalion of the 361st Infantry was to pass through Company B, go into position west of MT. MONTICELLI, and attack to the northeast, cutting off the enemy to the immediate north of positions faced by 1st Battalion, 363d Infantry. Lieutenant Colonel Woods was also told that the 2d Battalion, 363d Infantry would go in on the right between 1st and 3d Battalions, 363d Infantry. (19)

It was now evident that the 363d Infantry had struck the main defenses of the GOTHIC LINE, and that the enemy was not going to give up without a hard, bloody battle. Lieutenant Colonel Woods returned to his Command Post to coordinate plans for the coordinated drive against MT. MONTICELLI on 14 September. The Company Commander of Company B was notified that the Battalion Commander of the 2d Battalion, 361st Infantry and his staff would report to Company B's Command Post at 0400 on 14 September for orientation on the current situation and make plans for passing his Battalion through at 0600. Company B would then go into reserve. (20)

The 2d Battalion, 361st Infantry, passed through Company B on schedule and the Company B troops were instructed by their Company Commander to get all the rest they could since they probably would be involved in the fight again before the day was over. (21)

At 1000, Lieutenant Colonel Woods called the Company

(19) A-5, p. 69; Personal Knowledge

(20) Personal Knowledge

(21) Personal Knowledge

Commander of Company B, and instructed him that the 1st Battalion in a planned coordinated attack would jump off at 1400 with Company B on the left, Company C on the right, and Company A in reserve. Company B would attack from its present position toward HILL 797, capture and secure the western ridge of MT. MONTICELLI in its section and be prepared to continue the attack. The 1st Platoon of heavy machine guns from Company D would be attached and the Platoon Leader would report within 20 minutes. An artillery forward observer and an 81 mm mortar observer would be sent to Company B's Command Post within one hour. The boundary between companies would be the draw running northeast up the slope just east of BORGO, Company C being responsible for the draw.

THE SITUATION OF COMPANY B

Company B, along with the other elements of 363d Infantry, had been in an assembly area near CERTALDO, ITALY from 18 August to 5 September for training, rest, recuperation, and reorganization. During this period, Company B had received replacements bringing the Company up to T/O strength. All men received plenty of rest, recreation, and relaxation. The new men quickly acquired the fighting spirit through their integrated training and association with veteran members of the company. All items of equipment, clothing, or supplies that needed it were repaired or replaced. The action since returning to the line on 6 September had been light, and very few casualties had occurred. Morale was good, and combat effectiveness was high. (22)

(22) Personal Knowledge

MT. MONTICELLI, towering to a height of 3,000 feet, is a long, steep backbone ridge with a slope which faces south and runs northwest. Extending south from the main ridge and connected to it by narrow saddles are the spurs of AL POZZO HILL on the west and DE CASTRO HILL on the east, along which runs Highway 6524. North of AL POZZO HILL, the long arm of MT. MONTICELLI swings out to the west. Between these ridges that go to the peak are steep draws worn by aged eroding streams. On the western arm of MT. MONTICELLI, the scrub brush and a grove of chestnut trees near the farmhouse BORGO afforded the only concealment, and cover was almost non-existent. In this area only small foot trails go beyond the lower slopes of MT. MONTICELLI. The steepness of the slopes and the lack of roads would make the supply of troops difficult once they advanced beyond the lower slopes. (23)

The defenses of MT. MONTICELLI were occupied by elements of the 4th German Parachute Division. (24)

It was typical fall weather with warm, comfortable days and chilly nights. The fall rains which usually come in September had not yet started. Except for a two-day rain 6-7 September which had already dried up, no rain fell during the period.

THE COMPANY PLAN OF ATTACK (See Map D) (25)

The line of departure would be the stream running southeast through MULINUCCIO; H-hour, 1400 hours 14 September 1944.

The company plan of attack was to cross the line of departure with two platoons abreast and move northeast straight up the southwest slopes of the western arm of MT. MONTICELLI.

(24) A-5, p. 64; Personal Knowledge

(25) Personal Knowledge

The 1st Platoon on the left and 2d Platoon on the right would lead the attack. The Weapons Platoon was to follow the leading platoons at 200 yards and be prepared to go into position to fire on targets of opportunity not covered by the supporting weapons. The 3d Platoon would follow directly behind the Weapons Platoon prepared to assist the front line platoons on either flank.

The 1st Platoon of Company D heavy machine guns would support the attack with overhead fire from positions on the northeast slope of HILL 535. When their fire became masked, one section would displace immediately to MT. MONTICELLI. The artillery and 81 mm mortars would fire 20 minutes of preparatory fires beginning at H-hour minus 20 minutes covering all pre-determined targets and likely targets. The artillery would then shift to the base of the mountain and fire a rolling barrage lifting 100 yards every minute. The leading platoons would follow this barrage at 100 yards.

The Company Commander, along with the field artillery and the 81 mm forward observers, would initially occupy an Observation Post on HILL 535. After the lead platoons had gotten well started up the slopes of the western ridge of MT. MONTICELLI, the Company Commander would leave the Observation Post and follow between the two lead platoons. The artillery and 81 mm mortar forward observers would remain at the Observation Post until their fires had been masked and then report immediately to B Company Commander on the western ridge of MT. MONTICELLI. The Company Administrative Group would follow the 3d Platoon.

The route of evacuation and supply would be generally along the route of advance.

Extra ammunition was brought up and distributed at the time the 1st Platoon of Company D's machine guns were delivered to Company B's Command Post. Each man had at least two bandoleers of ammunition.

No rations were available for issue other than the regular daily delivery which had been issued earlier in the day. Additional rations would be brought up by a Battalion carrying party that night.

Each platoon leader's 536 radio was checked to see that it was in working order. The Company Commander had his SCR 300 radio for communication to Battalion and his 536 for communication with platoon leaders.

All men were instructed to carry their blanket rolls since delivery to positions on the mountains would be impossible and the night air was sure to be chilly.

NARRATION*

THE FIRST DAY AND NIGHT OF THE ATTACK (26)

The 1st Platoon on the left, led by Technical Sergeant Charles J. Murphy, and the 2d Platoon on the right, led by Lieutenant Bruno Rosellini, crossed the line of departure abreast at exactly 1400 hours on 14 September 1944, following the artillery rolling barrage.

Shortly after B Company crossed the line of departure, the Germans succeeded in getting in on the Battalion SCR 300 channel. They put one of their English-speaking radio operators on, posing as C Company Commander, and complained that friendly artillery was falling on his troops. The Commander of Company B from his Observation Post could observe not only

* Personal knowledge of the author is responsible for any variation in this narrative from 363d Infantry Regimental History.

the leading platoons of his own company, but also the leading elements of Company C, and realized that the message was a fake one transmitted by the Germans. Neither B Company Commander nor the artillery forward observer was able to convince the artillery commander, and the artillery ceased firing. The Company Commander, no longer being able to influence the action to any extent from his present position, left his Observation Post to join the advancing elements. At the time he reached the rear of the 1st and 2d Platoons, he found that Sergeant Murphy's Platoon had just run into a mine field. Sergeant Murphy requested and was granted permission to guide his platoon around the mine field to the right through the 2d Platoon's area, and deploy again on the far side of the mine field. Advancing slowly against a hail of small arms fire and a shower of artillery and mortar barrages, the 1st and 2d Platoons, using every fold and wrinkle in the ground for cover and concealment, reached a position just north of BORGO about one third of the way up the western slope of MT. MONTICELLI just before dark. Here both Sergeant Murphy's and Lieutenant Rosellini's Platoons came under grazing machine gun fire at relatively close range. The lack of concealment coupled with the expert job of camouflaging that had been done prohibited observation for a long enough period of time to locate the guns. Every time a man would raise his head in an effort to advance or to observe to the front to locate the guns, he would receive a burst of machine gun fire before he had a chance to see anything. It was apparent that the enemy machine guns must be located and neutralized before further advancement could be made.

Casualties had been heavy, and ammunition was running dangerously low. The Company Commander, realizing that a continued night attack had little chance for success with the present state of ammunition supply, requested permission to dig in and hold for the night to permit resupply of ammunition and reorganization of the lead platoons. His request was approved by the Battalion Commander, and the platoon leaders proceeded to organize their defense for the night and reorganize their platoons for an attack at 0600 hours the next morning. The machine gun section was placed on the left of the 1st Platoon to protect the left flank of the Company during the night. After the night defenses were set up, Lieutenant John G. Kearton took six volunteers from his 3d Platoon and patrolled to the front in an effort to locate the machine guns which were holding up the advance of the Company. About 100 yards in front of the lead platoons, the patrol ran into barbed wire entanglements. Lieutenant Kearton ordered his men to cover him while he wormed his way 25 yards through the barbed wire, where he found himself at the base of a log-and-dirt entrance to a pillbox. Here the Germans detected Lieutenant Kearton and began tossing hand grenades at him. However, he managed to work his way out of the barbed wire, gather up his patrol, and return with no casualties to the Company area where he made his report to the Company Commander. During the night, guides were sent back to guide the Battalion carrying party forward with ammunition and rations, which were distributed upon receipt.

THE SECOND DAY OF THE ATTACK (27)

The Battalion carrying party was late and the attack

(27) Personal Knowledge

could not be renewed at the scheduled time. However, by 0700 hours 15 September, the Company had been reorganized, resupplied, and was ready to renew the attack. Movement forward proved too costly until the machine guns which had held up the advance the evening before could be neutralized. The exact location of the emplacement was pointed out to the Company Commander by Lieutenant Kearton. Not having the equipment in the Company to do the job against observed grazing machine gun fire, the Company Commander instructed all men to make the best use of the little cover available and the fortification would be neutralized if possible with a 155 mm gun using precision fire. The first round was thrown well beyond friendly troops for safety reasons. The range was shortened 50 yards at a time until a shell burst came within vision of the Company Commander, and then the range was shortened 25 yards at a time until one shell blew the lid off the emplacement and breached the barbed wire in front of it. Lieutenant Rosellini, with 10 of his men, immediately rushed the emplacement, forcing the five Germans occupying the underground compartment to surrender. His Platoon was then rushed through the gap in the barbed wire in column, and deployed to the right on the far side. Sergeant Murphy's Platoon followed, and deployed to the left.

With this obstacle out of the way, Company B was still faced with enemy fire from their right and left flanks and from the front. Company C on the right had been unable to advance more than a few yards beyond CASACCE, and the high ground to the left rear of Company B had not yet been taken by 2d Battalion, 361st Infantry.

At this time, the enemy began throwing in more mortar

and artillery fire on the lower slopes, catching the rear elements of Company B and causing several casualties, among which were the Company Executive Officer and the Artillery and 81 mm mortar forward observers. These two forward observers had left their Observation Post and were on their way to join the Company Commander in order to be available at the top of the ridge for the planning and adjustment of defensive fires against the inevitable German counterattack once the Company had reached its objective. The artillery liaison officer and the 81 mm mortar platoon leader were with the Battalion Commander at an Observation Post on MONTACCIANICO, in a position to adjust necessary supporting fires until new Observation Posts could be established by the forward observers.

The 1st and 2d Platoons, using fire and movement and taking advantage of terrain available, doggedly worked their way up the steep slopes through a hail of indescribable enemy fires. The Company mortar and machine gun sections assisted the movement by firing at targets of opportunity not covered by supporting fires and targets too close to be fired on by artillery or 81 mm mortars.

By 1500 hours, the lead platoons had reached the comparative safety of a small embankment about one foot high at the left flank of Sergeant Murphy's Platoon and gradually increasing in height as it extended to the right at a slight angle to the crest of the ridge until it was about three feet high and 75 yards from the crest at the right flank of Lieutenant Rosellini's Platoon.

Sergeant Murphy's Platoon fixed bayonets and assaulted the crest of the ridge which was only a few yards in front

of the left flank. His successful assault routed the Germans from two dugouts, capturing five men. The Company Commander with his radio operator immediately moved to this area where observation was good, and began to adjust artillery fire on the withdrawing Germans and laying in defensive fires. It was discovered that the back side of the ridge was very steep, and the Germans had constructed dugouts well into the ridge with entrances from the rear and very narrow slits at the top in front where the dugout came near the surface of the ground, thus enabling them to place their machine guns in positions impossible to locate even a short distance from the front. A typical emplacement on MT. MONTICELLI was a dugout constructed of concrete with three feet of logs and dirt for a roof. From the underground compartment a passage was tunneled to the front far enough to permit the construction of an aperture through which to fire guns out of the side of the mountain.

Lieutenant Rosellini's Platoon could not participate in the assault with Sergeant Murphy's Platoon, as Company C had still not been able to advance more than a few yards beyond CASACCE, thus exposing Lieutenant Rosellini's men to heavy fire from their right flank and right front.

The Company Commander's optimism ran high as he watched the Germans in what appeared to be a disorganized withdrawal across the valley below through the artillery fire he was adjusting. Suddenly Sergeant Murphy pointed out a group in an area to the right reorganizing for a counterattack. Artillery fire had no sooner been adjusted on this group than the Company Commander with his radio was spotted and forced back from his Observation Post by machine gun fire, with no

more serious damage than three holes through his radio. However, the counterattack had been broken up.

Realizing that ammunition was again running low, and that the casualties suffered had cut the effective strength of the Company down to about 70 men, the Company Commander decided to move the 3d Platoon to extend the right flank and to reinforce the position of the 1st and 2d Platoons. The attached machine gun platoons had already displaced forward, and their guns were in firing position on the edge of the embankment.

The Company Commander transmitted a request to the Battalion Commander for a new radio battery, additional ammunition, and for reinforcements to strengthen the present position of Company B and participate in further advancement. The understrength Company was in no condition to repulse many counterattacks, much less advance farther against heavy resistance.

Seventeen men from Company A, consisting of a light machine gun section, and riflemen under Lieutenant Ross A. Notaro arrived in time to participate in repulsing a counterattack in strength at 1700 aimed expressly at Sergeant Murphy's position for the purpose of retaking the dugouts the Germans had lost. The counterattack was repulsed only by the calm, effective leadership of Sergeant Murphy and Lieutenant Notaro.

Again at 1800 hours the Germans launched a second counterattack, this time a flanking move from the left which was also stopped before it gained momentum, principally by the men of Company A, who had been placed to protect the left flank after the first counterattack.

The next counterattack, preceded by artillery and mortar preparatory fire, came in strength at 2000 hours as a frontal assault on Company B positions. The Company Commander of Company B called for the supporting fires of the 81 mm mortars, the artillery, and the cannon company, which had been registered in just after the 1st Platoon's assault on the crest of the ridge. Minor adjustments of the prearranged fires were made drawing them closer to Company B's position, in fact, so close that an occasional round would fall in the Company area. The men, worn down by the brutal fighting imposed by the Germans, were not complaining. They were willing to take a chance on anything that was likely to stop the onrushing Germans.

Sergeant Earl R. Conn, machine gun squad leader in the platoon of heavy machine guns attached from Company D, immediately took over the number 1 gun and began firing at a squad of advancing Germans and at two enemy dugouts to the right front which had opened fire with the attack. When a piece of shrapnel from a mortar shell destroyed the tripod, Conn placed the gun on the embankment and maintained a steady stream of fire at the attacking Germans. When another piece of shrapnel completely destroyed the gun, Conn grabbed a nearby M 1 Rifle and continued to fire. The heavy fire delivered from all along the line of Company B was taking a terrific toll of the advancing enemy, some of whom were coming so close that when hit their momentum carried them on into Company B's position. All men had their bayonets fixed for close combat, but no live Germans got that far. On the left flank, the charging Germans were being stalled off by

Lieutenant Notaro's and Sergeant Murphy's men firing continuously and throwing hand grenades. Sergeant Higdon, section leader of Company A light machine guns, cradled a machine gun in his arms and charged into the onrushing Germans, firing as he went. He completely routed the attack and sent the fleeing Germans back screaming for him to cease firing. When the enemy fled, Higdon, having been wounded three times, managed to make all but 30 yards back to his position, where he fell. When his comrades reached him a few minutes later, he was dead.

The attack had been repulsed with a heavy toll taken on both sides. Sergeant Murphy, realizing that the few men he had left would not last long in their present exposed position against another counterattack, requested and was granted permission to move his men slightly to the rear and to the right, closer to the 2d Platoon. Notaro remained in his position for the night. Ammunition was collected from the dead and wounded and redistributed in order to partially solve the problem of the diminished supply of ammunition.

During the night of 15-16 September, there were no more than 40 yards between the German lines and Company B's lines. The Germans kept a flare in the air continuously during the night, and there was a constant exchange of small arms fire and hand grenades.

At 0400 on 16 September, the men who were sent back earlier in the night for supplies arrived with a supply of ammunition and a new battery for the radio which had not yet gone out in spite of the three holes through it. The Battalion plan of getting supplies to the Company with a Battalion

carrying party was failing to work.

The ammunition was distributed, and an attempt was made to evacuate all the wounded before daylight. The task proved too great for the two litter-bearer teams which had been attached to the Company at the beginning of the operation. The large number of casualties received and the long haul over rugged terrain created more work than was physically possible by two litter-bearer teams.

Meanwhile, since the first of the counterattacks had been repulsed the previous afternoon, Company C had advanced up the slope behind and to the right of Company B, and after passing through a minefield and overcoming some opposition which had been bypassed by Company B, arrived at a point on the slope 200 yards to the rear of Company B, where they dug in and set up their own and attached machine guns from Company D.

Late in the evening of the 15th, Company G, then located near CASACCE, had been ordered to move up and fill the unprotected gap between Company B's right flank and Company F's left flank. Guides had been sent back by Company B to guide the reinforcements up. The company arrived and was in position slightly to the right rear of Company B by dawn. Company G was attached to the 1st Battalion.

THE SITUATION ON THE THIRD DAY OF THE ATTACK

At dawn on the 16th, the men of Company B were lured into a false hope for a slight letup in activity by the lull in firing. At 0645, enemy machine guns and small arms fire opened up again. The Company Commander, in an attempt to get where he could observe and adjust artillery fire on the machine guns, was shot through the right shoulder. Command

of the Company was turned over to Lieutenant Rosellini, and the Company Commander was evacuated. (28)

The left flank of Company B was now the most vulnerable spot, and this was known by the enemy, as evidenced by his repeated attacks against it. The enemy had re-entered the emplacements which Sergeant Murphy's Platoon had previously taken and found untenable. Sergeant Murphy, with the remaining 17 men of his Platoon, again reorganized his position to protect the left flank by shifting positions and placing men in foxholes vacated by casualties. In an effort to further strengthen his position, he took a mortar squad which had fired all of its ammunition and found no more obtainable, using them as riflemen. (29)

Among the mortarmen placed on the left flank as riflemen was Private First Class Oscar G. Johnson, who later was awarded the Medal of Honor for his action. When the enemy resumed its counterattacks at dawn, putting its main effort again on the left flank, Johnson coolly occupied his position, standing at times to get a better view, maintaining a steady stream of fire at the Germans. During lulls in firing, he gathered all available weapons and ammunition from dead and wounded soldiers and stacked them near his position. When one weapon would fail to function or run out of ammunition, he would pick up another and continue his fire. At times he found it necessary to disassemble one to get working parts for another. (30)

Further advance of Company B on the 16th was made impossible by an enemy determined to destroy the Company or

(28) Personal Knowledge

(29) A-5, p.76; Statement of Sergeant Murphy, 30 October 1944

(30) A-5, p.76

force it off the ridge. The severe fire and infiltration tactics, supported by mortar fire and grazing machine gun fire from the crest of the ridge continued all day. Twice men had been taken from other critical positions of the line to help Johnson, the only remaining member of the original group which had been placed in position to protect the left flank. Lieutenant Kearton had been seriously wounded shortly after the Company Commander had been evacuated. (31)

Company B, now down to a strength of about 50 men commanded by Lieutenant Rosellini, the only officer left in the Company, was in no condition to do more than make an effort to hold the ground gained until action could be taken elsewhere in the line to relieve the pressure. (32)

THE SITUATION ON THE 4th DAY OF THE ATTACK

At dawn on the 17th, two Germans with a white flag came out of an emplacement on the crest of the ridge. A cease fire order was given and the two Germans came down to the slope as if to surrender. They were met by Lieutenant Rosellini. The one identified himself as the Commanding Officer of the troops facing Company B. He requested a truce until 1100 hours for the purpose of evacuating the many wounded on each side. Lieutenant Rosellini immediately got in touch with Battalion to get a decision on the request. Some time later, Lieutenant Rosellini was notified that the request was disapproved. Meanwhile, a group of 24 German soldiers who were not informed of the proposed truce saw their Commanding officer approaching the American line and assuming

(31) Statement of Sergeant Murphy 30 October 1944

(32) Statement of Sergeant Murphy 30 October 1944

that he was going to surrender, raised their hands and came down the slope to the left flank of Company B where they were taken prisoner. The German Commander, seeing that several of his men had surrendered, decided to give himself up. (33)

Over to the right in the remainder of the 363d Infantry sector, every rifle company in the Regiment had at some time or other during the past three days tried to fight its way to the top of MT. MONTICELLI, only to be beaten back, suffering heavy casualties. Now all Battalions were on line with their diminished companies, still butting their heads against a wall of fire. (34)

An assault at 1530 hours toward the crest of MT. MONTICELLI just to the right of Company B by Companies E and G had cost Company E seven killed, 27 wounded; Company G, 25 killed and 32 wounded. Captain Conley was the only officer left in Company G, while Company E had no officers. Lieutenant Rosellini, the last officer in Company B, had been killed as he attempted to return to his Command Post after coordinating with Captain Conley to support G Company's assault by fire. (35)

Captain Conley took command of the remnants of Companies B, G, and E, and organized them into one unit because there were not enough left of any one of the Companies for independent action against such resistance. (36)

The many wounded men lying around the area could not be evacuated until after dark because the litter bearers had

(33) Statement of Sergeant Murphy 30 October 1944

(34) A-5, p. 77 and 78; Statement of Sergeant Murphy 30 Oct 1944

(35) A-5, p. 83

(36) A-5, p. 84

also become casualties in their attempts to evacuate the wounded. (37)

After dark on 17 September, while the wounded were still being evacuated, Company F, 361st Infantry, which had been attacking west and north of the 363d Infantry, was attached to the 1st Battalion to protect the still exposed flank of Company B where heavy casualties were still occurring and where Private First Class Johnson was still holding for his third sleepless night. The Company, guided by men sent back from Company B, arrived in position on the left flank at 0530 hours on the morning of 18 September. In an assault on the same emplacements Sergeant Murphy had taken and found untenable, F Company captured two prisoners and found that the other occupants had been withdrawn shortly before the attack. Elements of the 3d Battalion farther to the right had attained the peak of MT. MONTICELLI late on the afternoon of the 17th. (38)

MT. MONTICELLI had fallen, though a high price in lives had been paid.

To sum up the results of this battle: Company B, 363d Infantry, while it failed by a few yards in capturing and occupying its objective, did succeed in dislodging the enemy from the mountain in its sector. Company B's attack cost the enemy a high price in lives and forced him to expend large amounts of ammunition and material which might well have been directed elsewhere in defense of his line. His losses, though not definitely enumerated because there was

(37) A-5, p. 84

(38) A-5, p. 85; Statement of Sergeant Murphy 30 October 1944

no way of determining the number evacuated, are known to be much greater than our own. Private First Class Johnson alone was credited with killing forty Germans. After the mountain had been secured, the 1st Battalion Commander counted 150 enemy dead in the area in which Company B had made its attack. A total of 40 prisoners had been taken by B Company. Company B's losses totaled 14 killed and approximately 126 wounded. Though the total amount and types of ammunition expended is not known, a further indication of the heavy fighting on MT. MONTICELLI is brought out by the fact that Cannon Company alone fired 700 rounds in defense of Company B during the counterattack at 1700 on 15 September, and the artillery fired 4000 rounds on 17 September to prevent serious counterattacks on K Company until the peak of MT. MONTICELLI could be occupied in strength. (39)

The following wire received by the 91st Infantry Division Commander from General Keys expressed his satisfaction on the capture of MT. MONTICELLI:

"Congratulations upon the capture of Monticelli stop the successful accomplishment of this tough assignment is fitting tribute to the dogged determination and courage of the 91st stop"
(40)

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- (39) A-3, p. 101 and 110; A-5, p. 74; Statement by Lieutenant Colonel Woods 30 October 1944
(40) A-3, p. 55.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. THE PLAN OF ATTACK

The plan of attack was a sound and good one. It is believed logical to assume that the attack, had it been carried out according to plan, would have resulted in Company B's accomplishing its mission the first day of the attack. However, the enemy's success in altering the plan to the extent of stopping the rolling barrage with a fake message resulted in slowing up of the attack. With the rolling barrage stopped, the enemy was allowed to get his head up, observe and place aimed small arms fire on the leading elements of Company B, inflicting heavy casualties, weakening the company, and slowing up the advance by forcing the troops to make maximum use of the cover available.

2. CONDUCT OF THE ATTACK

The attack jumped off on time and by employing fire and movement progressed at a relatively good speed, considering the resistance met and the nature of the terrain over which advancement was necessary. It is believed that, had reinforcements or reserves been immediately available at 1500 hours on 15 September when Company B reached the vicinity of the crest of MT. MONTICELLI and Sergeant Murphy's Platoon dislodged the Germans from their last foothold in a small portion of the line, the battle would not have lasted four days. Company B had been depleted to the extent that it was not capable of delivering the final punch which would have rendered a counterattack by the enemy impossible. The reinforcements sent from Company A were too few in number and did not arrive in time. As a result, the attack was

stopped and the enemy was allowed to chip away at the already diminished Company B for another three days, causing additional loss of lives.

3. THE FAILURE OF ADJACENT UNITS TO ADVANCE

The failure of units on the flanks of Company B to advance aggressively toward their objectives resulted in the position of Company B's becoming a salient which drew all available fires. The failure of Company C to keep abreast of Company B on the right permitted the enemy to place observed flanking fire on Company B's troops and their supply lines to the rear. The 361st Infantry's slow advance on the left flank permitted the enemy to make counterattack after counterattack against Company B's left flank. Had these adjacent units pressed the attack against the enemy with the same vigor and aggressive determination that Company B did, it is believed that the GOTHIC LINE would have been broken in much less time and with a great many fewer casualties.

4. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

The supply of small arms ammunition constituted a serious problem. Several times during the operations, ammunition became dangerously low. Had there been sufficient ammunition available when the advance of Company B was stopped in the late afternoon of 14 September, it is believed that a push forward in a night attack might have been successful. Several times it became necessary to send ill-spared men back for ammunition and supplies. The original plan of supplying the Company by carrying parties from Battalion was a good one. However, the inevitable incidents

of men getting lost or being hit by the enemy concentrations of high angle fire greatly altered the plan.

5. ENEMY INFORMATION

In making a study of this operation, it is my opinion that the exact location of the GOTHIC LINE was not known until after the enemy had inflicted heavy casualties on the attacking elements. Front line troops did not know the location or type of obstacles to be encountered in order that adequate steps could be taken to insure a timely and efficient method of neutralizing them. Furthermore, the failure to accurately estimate the enemy strength presented a great problem to front line troops. It is difficult to determine just how this situation could have been improved. The enemy had withdrawn without putting up much resistance, thus almost eliminating the capture of prisoners for interrogation. Some of the prisoners taken had been brought to Italy recently and actually knew nothing about the construction of the GOTHIC LINE. Camouflaging had been so efficiently accomplished that aerial photographs failed to reveal the much-needed information. Had the necessary information been available so that full advantage could have been taken of the available fire-power and troops in an initial all-out assault before the enemy was allowed to chip away at the assaulting elements, the battle would have ended sooner with fewer casualties.

6. ENEMY POSITIONS

It is difficult to imagine how a position organized as thoroughly as MT. MONTECELLI could be penetrated. Every pillbox or dugout was placed so as to give mutual support

to the adjacent ones. They were so well constructed that neutralization was possible only by entering the emplacement and forcing the Germans out. The nature of the terrain permitted large sectors of grazing fire from practically every emplacement. The positions were further protected by bands of barbed wire and mine fields. The lack of cover and concealment available to attacking troops permitted maximum effectiveness of the well-placed weapons.

7. PREPARATORY FIRES

The 20 minutes of preparatory mortar and artillery fire before the attack served only to force the enemy inside his dugouts and warn him of a coming attack. As soon as the preparatory fires ceased, he came out of the lower compartments of his dugouts unharmed, ready to man his weapons. Not a single emplacement was neutralized by the twenty minutes preparation fired before the attack began. The effect of artillery fire on enemy occupying underground emplacements was brought out by the precision fire of a 155 gun on the position halting Company B's attack on the afternoon of 14 September. After the lid had been blown off the dugout, five unharmed Germans were routed out.

LESSONS

- Partly included*
1. Proper precautions should be taken against the success of any attempt of the enemy to alter a plan of attack against his defenses.
 2. Initial successes must be rapidly exploited either by the attacking unit or by reserves if full advantage is to be gained and momentum of the attack maintained.
 3. Attacking units must press vigorously and aggressively

forward in their assigned zones in order to accomplish a mission in the minimum time with a minimum of casualties.

4. The movement of supplies -- ammunition, food, and water -- to the front line soldiers must be a continuous operation.

5. An all-out effort must be made to obtain and furnish to the front line troops accurate locations of enemy troops and defenses.

6. The strongest defenses can be penetrated by a determined, well disciplined, and well trained attacker.

7. Preparatory artillery and mortar fire is ineffective against a well dug-in enemy with overhead cover.