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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D RANGER INFANTRY BATTALION
IN THE LANDINGS AT LICATA AND SUBSEQUENT ATTACK
ON PORTO EMPEDOCLE, 10-17 JULY 1943
(SICILIAN CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: RANGER INFANTRY BATTALION IN A
LANDING ON A HOSTILE SHORE AND IN THE ATTACK OF INSTALLATIONS
IN REAR OF THE ENEMY MAIN DEFENSES

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3d Ranger Infantry Battalion in the landings and subsequent capture of PORTO EMPEDOCLE, SICILY, 10-17 July 1943.

For orientation purposes we shall review briefly the Allied accomplishments in the MEDITERRANEAN area since the Battle of EL ALAMEIN in October 1942.

The first major Allied effort in all arms in the European Theater of Operations, since the British disaster at DUNKERQUE, cleared the southern shore of the MEDITERRANEAN SEA of all Axis resistance. Timed with the British offensive at EL ALAMEIN in late October, British and American forces successfully invaded FRENCH NORTH AFRICA in November 1942. This double barreled action forced the Axis to fight a losing battle in the barren wastes of TUNISIA. In May 1943 the battle of TUNISIA ended in the destruction of fifteen enemy divisions and large quantities of equipment.

(1)

Possession of NORTH AFRICA gave the Allies naval and air bases from which to cover shipping in the MEDITERRANEAN. This situation, however, was only second best. The island of SICILY stood as a tremendous aircraft carrier and submarine tender directly in the path of Allied shipping. With this threat in mind, the desirability of fighter cover for our bombers operating over the

(1) A-3, p. 180-192

rich oil fields and refineries of the BALKANS, and the need for a stepping stone to the Italian mainland planning was initiated early in 1943 for "Operation Husky". (2)

The need for air bases to provide fighter cover for the operation was filled with the fall of the islands of PANTELLERIA and LAMPEDUSA early in June 1943. (3)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Troops taking part in this operation were to comprise the Allied 15th Army Group under General Sir Harold Alexander. Specifically, this force was to consist of the U.S. 7th Army under Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr. and the British 8th Army under General Bernard Montgomery. The assault force was to be mounted from the UNITED STATES, THE UNITED KINGDOM, NORTH AFRICA, and the MIDDLE EAST. The invasion would consist of an amphibious-airborne assault on both the south and east Coast in the southeast portion of the island with the 7th Army on the left. (See Map A) (4)

The 7th Army plan provided for an amphibious-airborne assault on the southern coast from POZZALO, exclusive, west to the vicinity of LICATA. (See Map A)

Task force organization of the principal assault elements was as follows:

Joss Force

3d Infantry Division

Combat Command A, 2nd Armored Division

3d Ranger Battalion

- (2) A-9, p. 3
- (3) A-9, p. 1
- (4) A-9, Map 2

Shark Force (II Corps)

Dime Force

1st Infantry Division (-18th Infantry Regiment)

1st Ranger Battalion

4th Ranger Battalion

Cent Force

45th Infantry Division

753d Medium Tank Battalion

Parachute Task Force (Wolf Force)

505th Parachute RCT

3d Battalion, 504 Parachute Infantry Regiment (5)

Joss Force would land at H Hour on D Day in the vicinity of LICATA, capture and secure the port and airfield, extend the beachhead, protect the left flank, and contact Shark Force. (6)

Shark Force would land at H Hour on D Day with Dime and Cent forces abreast in the GELA-SAMPIERI area, capture and secure airfields at PONTE OLIVO and CAMISO, and the air landing field north of BISCARI, contact Joss Force, extend the beachhead, and gain contact with the British on the right. (7)

Parachute Task Force would drop on the night of D-1-D Day in the vicinity of PONTE OLIVO, and assist Dime Force in the landing and the capture of the airfield in the vicinity of PONTE OLIVO. This force was to become attached to Shark Force upon establishing contact with Dime Force after H Hour. (8)

Logistical support for the operation was deemed favorable. Supplies of all types were available in sufficient [?]quality for

(5) A-1, part I, p. d-8

(6) A-1, part I, p. d-7

(7) A-1, part I, p. d-7

(8) A-1, part I, p. d-7

combat loading. (9) Resupply depended upon proper unloading facilities. (10)

The beaches in the vicinity of LICATA were flanked by cliffs and hills rising sharply from the sea. The area in the vicinity of LICATA to a depth of approximately six miles consisted mainly of low rolling hills. Beyond this, however, the terrain was broken by hills ranging as high as 1600 feet. Small creek beds, usually dry at this time of year, ran through deep, rocky ravines. (11) Weather on the island was extremely hot with little or no rainfall at this time of year.

The LICATA area was being defended by elements of the 207th Coastal Division (Italian). (12) There were small German units stationed at strategic points in the area. A coastal division, with an average strength of 12,000, is designed for initial defense of the coast line in reasonable depth. There is insufficient transportation, however, to effect movement to a threatened area. The resultant scattered defenses can only delay opposing forces until a mobile reserve can counterattack. (13)

Just prior to this operation the 3d Ranger Battalion had completed a rigid eight weeks training program. Receiving its cadre and troops early in May, the battalion had undergone training in the ATLAS MOUNTAINS around NEMOURS, ALGERIA and in the coastal area of BIZERTE, TUNISIA. The cadre, obtained from the 1st Ranger Battalion, consisted of veterans of the Tunisian campaign. Some of the men had participated in the DIEPPE raid.

(9) A-1, part I, p. a-10

(10) A-1, part I, p. a-8

(11) A-7, p. 53

(12) A-1, part I, p. a-5

(13) A-1, part II, p. C-15

The battalion was in excellent condition. The enemy had recently suffered a decisive defeat in TUNISIA. The Italian units were not first line troops and contained a great number of untrained replacements. (14) The politically unstable situation in ITALY, at this time, had a marked ill effect on the morale of even the first line troops. (15) The German, on the other hand, could be expected to account for himself very well in battle. In comparing the combat efficiency of the opposing forces it may be said that the Rangers were far superior to the Italians and slightly superior to the German units. (16)

Beach defenses in the area were somewhat elaborate. Aerial photograph interpretation revealed wide bands of wire and pill-boxes located for water line defense. The beaches were known to be mined with both anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. Trenches and gun emplacements were detected in the rolling hills in rear of the beaches. (17)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF JOSS FORCE (See Map B)

Joss Force, of which the 3d Ranger Battalion was a member, was assembled in TUNISIA during June 1943. (18) During the first week in July the force loaded equipment, troops, and supplies.

The force plan provided for four landings in the vicinity of LICATA. (See Map B) Beaches were labeled RED, GREEN, YELLOW and BLUE for reference.

(14) A-1, part II, p. C-15

(15) Statement of Captain Tian A. Maletti, then stationed in Sicily with the Italian Army, in January 1950.

(16) Personal knowledge

(17) Personal knowledge

(18) A-5, p. 7

The 7th Infantry Regiment of the 3d Division would land on BEACH RED about five miles west of LICATA, move inland approximately three miles and secure the northwest portion of the beachhead from the SALSO RIVER west and south to the sea.

The 3d Ranger Battalion, followed by the 2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment of the 3d Division, would land on BEACH GREEN about three miles west of LICATA, move eastward through the MOUNT SOLE hill mass and attack LICATA from the west.

The 15th Infantry, minus the 2d Battalion, would land on BEACH YELLOW about two miles east of LICATA, move inland and attack LICATA from the east and north.

The 30th Infantry Regiment of the 3d Division would land on BEACH BLUE about five miles east of LICATA, move inland three to five miles and secure the northeast portion of the beachhead from the SALSO RIVER east and south to the sea.

THE BATTALION SITUATION

The 3d Ranger Battalion, when advised of its part in the coming operation, was in bivouac in the olive groves five miles south of FERRYVILLE, TUNISIA. In the early days of planning the company officers and battalion staff spent many hours in the evening, after the day's training, studying photographs of the beach area.

GREEN BEACH was divided into two small beaches each approximately ninety degrees to the other. (See Map C) It was flanked on the left by MOUNT POLISCIA rising to 365 feet within 300 yards of the water's edge and on the right by cliffs rising to over 100 feet. In the center was a rocky mass, known as ROCCA MOLLARELLA, rising 82 feet out of the sea. This rocky mass was connected to the mainland by a low sandy isthmus thus forming

the two smaller beaches. (19)

The terrain immediately in rear of the beach formed a natural basin, about 1200 yards in diameter, with an opening about 300 yards wide to the northwest. A small stream flowed through this opening, southeast across the basin and into the sea on the extreme right of the beach. The center of this area was comparatively level with very little vegetation. (20)

Upon analysis of the natural defenses of the beach a common sense plan for fortification of the area was developed. Only a limited number of the expected gun positions could be detected on the aerial photographs. Using the tactical wire, which was very much in evidence, as a guide, this hypothetical plan was developed and later proved to be accurate within a few feet of the actual locations of the weapons.

ROCCA MOLLARELLA was the key to the defense of GREEN BEACH. Tactical wire was so laid out as to isolate the rock from any land approach. Concertina and double apron barbed wire fences paralleled the water's edge at about 20 yards distance. Automatic weapons and small caliber cannon could easily be placed on the reverse slope of the prominence firing along the wire and across the narrow channels approaching the beaches. Weapons so placed would be comparatively safe from naval bombardment. (21)

This analysis brought about renewed emphasis of training in the technique of reducing fortified positions. The weapons employed were only those that would be available during the first few moments on the beach. These assault techniques were built

(19) A-1, part II, p. C-27

(20) A-1, part II, p. C-27

(21) Personal knowledge

around the 2.36 inch rocket launcher and the automatic rifle. They later proved sound. (22)

On 4 July 1943 the battalion boarded their ships, the British Landing Ships Infantry (LSIs) Princess Astrid and Princess Charlotte, in FERRYVILLE LAKE, TUNISIA. The British LSI is a sleek, fast ship in a class all its own. It mounts seven Landing Craft Assault (LCAs), with a capacity of thirty-five troops, and one Landing Craft Support (LCS) mounting twin .5 inch machine guns in a turret. Both craft are armored, have a low silhouette, and are capable of high speeds. (23)

Coordinated planning, initiated earlier with the crews of the LCAs, left no doubt in the minds of all concerned of their job and its execution. Upon boarding ship, one had the feeling that the team was now complete for the amphibious assault. It was as if the crew members wore the Ranger patch.

THE BATTALION PLAN (24)
(See Map C)
(See Annex 1)

H Hour was set at 0300 on 10 July 1943.

The battalion would land with six companies abreast in order, left to right, A through F. Three companies, A, B, and C, under the battalion commander, would land to the left of ROCCA MOLLARELLA and three companies, D, E, and F, under the battalion executive officer, would land to the right. The command craft of each assault group would carry, in addition to command and staff personnel, a demolitions section from Headquarters Company. Two sections of fused bangalore torpedo would

- (22) Personal knowledge
- (23) Personal knowledge
- (24) Personal knowledge

be lashed to the gunwales of every other craft. The demolitions section would breach the wire in the center of the beach and put up lighted beach markers.

A Company would assault MOUNT POLISCIA to the left of the beach, clear the enemy from this commanding ground, and take up positions on the northwest slope defending the beach on the left.

B Company would breach the wire and move around the east slope of MOUNT POLISCIA, clear the enemy from the western portion of the basin and occupy positions facing northwest 1200 yards inland.

C Company, minus the 2d Platoon and mortar section, would reduce the gun positions on ROCCA MOLLERELLA.

The 2d Platoon and mortar section of C Company would breach the wire, move 400 yards into the basin, deploy and await orders to aid in the reduction of ROCCA MOLLERELLA. The mortars would be placed in position and laid on ROCCA MOLLERELLA with range settings of 500 yards, to fire on call.

D Company would breach the wire, clear the enemy from the center of the basin, and take up positions to the right of B Company on the first high ground to the north.

E and F Companies would assault the high ground to the east of the basin, gain the two ridges running east, and clear the enemy from the MOUNT SOLE hill mass.

The beach area thus secured, the 2d Battalion, 15th Infantry would land at H plus 20 minutes, move into the basin, swing east down the ridge lines passing through E and F Companies and capture LICATA. (25)

(25) A-5, p. 9

D-1 AT SEA, FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE LANDING (26)

On the morning of 9 July the usually calm MEDITERRANEAN was lashed into a frenzy by high winds. A great number of personnel became seasick.

Nevertheless, final preparations were accomplished. Unit commanders made last minute checks of plans. Equipment was loaded into the LCAs and machine guns lashed to the gunwales.

At about 2000 the wind suddenly died. The sea settled into long swells. At about 0100 the Astrid and Charlotte dropped anchor off BEACH GREEN. The LCAs were promptly loaded and lowered away. Some difficulty was encountered in clearing the ship in the long swells. At about 0215 the LCAs rendezvoused and began to circle. Searchlights, mounted on the cliffs over the beach, began sweeping the sea but expected shellfire did not fall. At 0230 the craft began moving slowly toward the beach. At 0245 the marker destroyer was passed and the craft swung into line. It was necessary to proceed slowly due to the narrow channel which approached the two beaches at about 45 degrees to the general shore line. Presently the dark silhouette of ROCCA MOLLERELLA appeared.

NARRATION

THE LANDING ON GREEN BEACH (See Map C)

At 0255 on 10 July 1943 the assault craft carrying the 3d Ranger Battalion struck the beach. (27) The surf, encouraged

(26) Personal knowledge

(27) A-4, p. 1

by the long swell, lifted the LCAs and sent them crashing into one another. Before the ramps were lowered a machine gun in position on ROCCA MOLLERELLA opened fire. It was high. A machine gun on an LCA returned the fire. The enemy gun was momentarily silenced.

Troops moved rapidly from the LCAs and crossed the beach. A Company breeched the wire at the base of MOUNT POLISCIA and moved directly up the steep slopes. Meanwhile, two machine guns and a 47 mm cannon opened fire from the slopes of ROCCA MOLLERELLA. They concentrated their fire on the landing craft grounded on the left beach. The British seamen sustained numerous casualties. At that moment the LCS from the Princess Charlotte opened fire on the machine guns. One of the guns was silenced. (28)

This action enabled B Company and the platoon and weapons section of C Company to breach the wire and clear the beach.

D, E, and F Companies landed and quickly cleared the beach while the enemy concentrated his efforts on the left.

C Company, minus, cleared the LCA and swung back into the surf approaching ROCCA MOLLERELLA under cover of the fire from the LCS. Even though one machine gun was still firing, it was in position so high on the slope that its fire was plunging into the center of the beach over the heads of troops assaulting the positions. With one section firing from behind rocks out in the surf, the other section climbed the barbed wire entanglements on the rocky walls, gaining access into the position of a 47 mm gun

(28) Personal knowledge

which was in the process of being occupied by the enemy. Once on the rock all positions were systematically reduced. (29)

A and B Companies accomplished their mission against only slight, isolated resistance. D Company moved through the basin and cleared enemy mortar positions from behind the high ground to the north. (30)

E and F Companies, advancing to the east, encountered two enemy machine guns on the high ground 1500 yards east of the beach. E Company quickly attacked along the ridge and reduced these positions, sustaining one casualty, wounded, who subsequently died. Two men from Headquarters Company sustained slight wounds from concussion grenades in this action. (31)

At about 1000 the battalion moved eastward behind the 2d Battalion, 15th Infantry to the high ground overlooking LICATA. The Battalion Commander, with one company, entered LICATA at about 1130. The remainder of the battalion followed three hours later.

IN DIVISION RESERVE AT LICATA AND SAN OLIVA (See Map B)

At 1500 the battalion was relieved from attachment to the 15th Infantry and reverted to division reserve with the mission of guarding the port and other important installations in LICATA. (32) The purpose of this mission was to allow the troops to rest, resupply and prepare for future commitment. Ironically, however, the battalion sustained three times the casualties

(29) Personal knowledge

(30) Personal knowledge

(31) A-4, p. 1

(32) A-5, p. 11

sustained in the landings during this fifteen hour mission.

(33)

An enemy fighter bomber inflicted one wounded casualty as it strafed and bombed the harbor area. Eight additional wounded casualties were sustained by D Company when an anti-aircraft shell from a US ship outside the harbor landed in the doorway of a building which they occupied. With this the battalion was more than anxious for a combat mission. (34)

Early on the morning of 11 July the battalion was relieved in LICATA and marched to a bivouac area south of SAN OLIVA where they remained until the morning of 14 July. (35)

At 0600 on 14 July orders were received to move by foot to CAMPOBELLO, then by truck to NARO, and again by foot to occupy the high ground in the vicinity of hill 313, 1000 yards east of FAVARA. (36)

THE MARCH TO FAVARA (See Map B)

At about 0800 the battalion moved out on Highway 123, arriving in CAMPOBELLO at about 2000. Entrucking shortly thereafter the move was continued to NARO, arriving at 2330. (37) No route having been designated, the battalion commander selected the railroad between NARO and FAVARA as the route of march. The battalion signal section was to move by road to FAVARA the next morning.

At about 2400 the battalion moved out in column of companies, order of march; A through F. The advance guard was to be rotated through the companies in the order of march as the need arose.

(33) A-4, p. 1

(34) A-4, p. 1

(35) A-5, p. 12

(36) A-4, p. 2

(37) Personal knowledge

About a mile and a half from the objective, the battalion came upon a tunnel. Realizing that in all probability, the tunnel was mined, the battalion moved over the hill mass through which it passed. In moving over this hill mass the battalion lost about thirty minutes in the march schedule. If forced to fight for Hill 313 the battalion commander desired to attack during darkness just before dawn.

The battalion arrived on the objective at 0530 on 15 July without contacting the enemy. At first light the town of FAVARA could be seen across the valley. All was quiet. At 1000 the battalion commander, with one company, entered FAVARA. It was found that a radio patrol from the battalion signal section had entered FAVARA at about 0530. Patrols moving to the south contacted the 7th Infantry at 1230. The remainder of the battalion moved into an assembly area on the eastern edge of the town at 1300. (38)

THE CAPTURE OF MONTAPERTO (See Map D)

The Commanding General, 3d Division, was informed that a major effort was not desirable in the AGRIGENTO area. However, a reconnaissance in force, not involving a major commitment, would meet with no objection. (39)

At 1730 the battalion was notified of its attachment to the 7th Infantry. The 7th Infantry was given the mission of a reconnaissance in force in the AGRIGENTO area. The Rangers were ordered to move down HIGHWAY 122 toward AGRIGENTO, bypass AGRIGENTO and capture MONTAPERTO, swing south, and capture PORTO EMPEDOCLE. (See Map D)

(38) A-4, p. 2

(39) A-1, part II, p. D-6

At 1900 on 15 July the battalion assembled west of FAVARA and moved out in column of companies, order of march; A, D, C, B, E, F. About three miles west of FAVARA the battalion came under poorly directed hostile artillery fire. No casualties were sustained. Movement was slow allowing the scouts the opportunity to reconnoiter the areas adjacent to the road. Upon crossing a deep ravine about four and one-half miles west of FAVARA, where a bridge was blown, it became apparent that no armored support would be available from that point on.

At 0030 the scouts encountered a road block north of AGRIGENTO and east of the junction of HIGHWAYS 122 and 118 running north from AGRIGENTO. (See Map D) This road block was defended by a small caliber cannon and a machine gun only thirty yards from the road block and on each side of the road. Entrenched riflemen opened fire from high ground to the right of the road. (40) (See Map D)

A Company deployed astride the road and advanced on the gun positions reducing them with grenades and small arms fire. D Company deployed along the road and attacked the high ground, moving swiftly across an open area to the right of the road toward the positions marked by rifle flashes. Holding their fire until directly in front of the enemy, a tremendous volume of automatic rifle and rifle fire quickly reduced the position. C Company deployed behind D Company and moving up and through D Company occupied the top of the hill in positions facing the junction of HIGHWAYS 122 and 118.

(40) A-4, p. 2

All resistance was overcome by 0130 and the battalion took up positions on the high ground to the north of the road junction. The 165 Italian prisoners, captured in this action, were dispatched under guard to FAVARA and turned over to the 7th Infantry. (41)

The battalion occupied these positions until 0600 when it moved down the west slope of the hill toward MONTAPERTO and the high ground 1800 yards to the west.

About 200 yards down the slope the column was brought under artillery time fire. The bursts, though directly over the column, were too high for effectiveness. (42) No casualties were sustained.

As the head of the column, passing through a culvert under HIGHWAY 118, reached a point about 200 yards west of the road, an enemy motor column consisting of ten motorcycles (tricycle type) and two trucks loaded with troops appeared around a bend in the road 500 yards to the south. The vehicles were in close column with no security to the front. The majority of the battalion was still on the slope overlooking the road. The men quickly took cover among the rocks. The column was allowed to reach a point directly in front of the slope before it was fired upon. About four companies opened fire simultaneously. The vehicles went out of control and careened off the road. A great number of the enemy personnel were killed. The remainder, about forty in number, were captured. (43)

(41) A-4, p. 2

(42) A-4, p. 2

(43) A-4, p. 2

The column continued its march and entered MONTAPERTO, a small community perched on a high hill overlooking a broad valley to the south. As the companies marched into the small town square they were quickly ordered into positions along the southern edge of the town overlooking the valley. Upon arrival at their positions no further orders were necessary.

In the valley below were four batteries of enemy medium artillery. The mortar sections of all companies quickly took the enemy under fire. Automatic rifles and rifles engaged the gun crews at their positions. Within ten minutes it was all over. Ammunition burned around the position and a great number of the remaining enemy came up the steep slopes with their hands up. Some escaped to the south. (44)

C COMPANY IN THE ATTACK ON MASS a GRAMAGLIA (45)
(See Map D)

South of MONTAPERTO across the broad valley was MASS a GRAMAGLIA a long, high hill, surmounted by sheer cliffs averaging 100 feet in height. This hill fell sharply off to the west forming another valley running generally south. Atop the highest point on this hill a number of buildings, some tents and what appeared to be a permanent radio antenna, could be seen. This installation was believed to be a coastal defense control station.

The battalion commander ordered C Company to capture the control station, move over the south slope into the valley beyond and contact the remainder of the battalion. The battalion, minus, would move around the west slope of the hill into the valley approaching PORTO EMPEDOCLE. It was decided to leave no troops in MONTAPERTO.

(44) A-4, p. 2

(45) Personal knowledge

At 1000 C Company moved down the slope toward MASS a GRAMAGLIA. The battalion, minus, moved off to the right at about 1015. F Company was providing the advance guard. (46)

The only access to the top of the cliffs from the north was determined to be somewhere in the vicinity of a point where three paths converged at the base of the cliffs. C Company mortars were placed in position in the broad valley with orders to lay on the built up area and fire on call.

In moving up the slope, which was covered only by a two to four inch wheat stubble, the company was deployed with two platoons abreast, each platoon with both sections abreast, ten yards between men.

As C Company reached a point about 300 yards from the foot of the cliffs a soldier could be seen standing on the edge of the cliff waving his arms and shouting. An Italian-American member of the company informed the company commander that the man was saying, "Turn back or we fire." The battalion commander was advised of the threat and the march continued. The figure disappeared.

The area for 100 yards around the base of the cliff was covered with large boulders four to six feet in diameter. Upon reaching this area the company halted and took cover. At the point where the three paths converged an opening could be seen in the face of the cliffs. All was quiet.

The company commander with one section moved into the opening. Inside was a tunnel with a stairway hewn in the rock leading to

(46) Personal knowledge

the top of the cliff. The houses and tents, when viewed from the exit of the tunnel, appeared deserted. There was a low wall about fifteen yards from the exit which when gained would offer sufficient cover from the front. The section in the tunnel fixed bayonets. A runner was dispatched to the base of the cliffs with orders for the remainder of the company to fix bayonets and move quickly into the tunnel.

The Rangers rushed out of the tunnel and ran for the low wall screaming at the top of their voices. Before the first section was completely out of the tunnel the enemy came tumbling out of windows and foxholes with their hands up. As the area was being cleared a sniper fired at one of the automatic riflemen and was promptly killed.

Approximately twenty officers and sixteen enlisted men were captured in this installation. Upon questioning the senior officer, a colonel, among the prisoners it was found that this installation was the command group for the area defense zone of AGRIGENTO. (47) It was also ascertained that three men with a machine gun had escaped down the southern slope of the hill. An attempt was made to contact the remainder of the battalion. Before this could be accomplished they were fired upon.

A platoon of F Company deployed and attacked the machine gun. When about 400 yards from the position the platoon leader was killed. When the platoon came within assault distance of the position the crew surrendered. (48)

C Company joined the battalion on the south slope of MASS a GRAMAGLIA about 2000 yards north of PORTO EMPEDOCLE at about 1400. Preparation began for the attack on the town.

(47) A-4, p. 2

(48) A-4, p. 2

THE ATTACK ON PORTO EMPEDOCLE (See Map D)

The town of PORTO EMPEDOCLE was situated on a series of high cliffs and hills overlooking the sea. The town was divided, topographically, by a deep ravine perpendicular to the beach.

The battalion plan was to attack with six companies abreast (49) with both platoons of each company abreast. A, B, and C Companies, under the battalion commander, would attack in the area east of the ravine with D, E, and F Companies under the battalion executive officer west of the ravine. The mortar sections of each group were to take up positions in battery 600 yards north of the town. The prisoners of war were to follow the battalion by 500 yards and remain in the vicinity of the mortar positions.

At 1420 the battalion moved out in two columns astride the ravine. (50) Both columns deployed about 600 yards north of the town and attacked.

Group one, under the battalion commander, encountered only slight resistance as it moved through the edge of the town. (51) A machine gun opened fire on A Company, inflicting no casualties. It was promptly reduced. C Company captured a machine gun crew in the process of placing their weapon in action.

On reaching the main street which ran along the high cliffs overlooking the beach C Company found numerous unoccupied anti-aircraft positions and a pillbox placed to fire on the beach below. The pillbox was reduced by shooting off the door which was below the ground and made of wood. Its' three occupants were captured.

(49) A-4, p. 2
(50) A-4, p. 2
(51) A-4, p. 2

D, E, and F Companies, under the battalion executive officer, encountered more determined resistance. Approaching the northwest edge of the town they were brought under fire by small arms and anti-aircraft weapons in and around a walled cemetery. Attacking immediately E Company trapped most of the enemy in the cemetery and captured them. A few escaped to buildings in the town. About forty minutes were spent clearing the buildings with grenades and small arms fire.

At 1600 all resistance ceased in PORTO EMPEDOCLE. B, C, D, and E Companies formed a perimeter defense on the edge of town consisting mainly of enemy machine guns found in the area. A Company constructed a makeshift Prisoner of War enclosure for the 766 prisoners, 675 Italians and 91 Germans, taken during the day. (52)

At about 1800 an American seaplane was sighted. The plane approached from the sea and began circling the town. The natural assumption was that the plane would spot the battalion and report our location, having been out of contact with higher headquarters for about twenty-four hours. This assumption, however, was eliminated shortly by a salvo of naval shell fire which landed about 50 yards from C Company's position. Fortunately the shells landed in a draw and there were no casualties.

A determined effort was then made to establish identity with the plane. Another salvo landed about 400 yards further inland before the plane turned and flew out to sea. Shortly thereafter it returned accompanied by another plane and flying a sheet from the wing strut. Landing just outside the harbor it moved cautiously around the jetty and into the harbor. The battalion commander met the pilot on the jetty.

Arrangements were made to transport the battalion commander to the cruiser Philadelphia, lying off shore, and communicate the capture of PORTO EMPEDOCLE to the commanding general 3d Division. (53)

The only radio in the battalion capable of communication with higher headquarters was with the radio patrol from the battalion signal section. In the company of elements of the 3d Reconnaissance Troop, 3d Infantry Division the patrol was overtaken at a blown bridge two miles south of AGRIGENTO by four Italian light tanks. The communication sergeant thrust a grenade through a port of the lead tank and it plunged down an embankment. Two other tank crews were captured at daylight. (54)

The battalion occupied PORTO EMPEDOCLE until 1900 hours 17 July when ordered by the 7th Infantry into bivouac in the vicinity of MONTAPERTO. (55)

In summarizing the action of the battalion in relation to the operations of the 3d Division, the following was accomplished: The 2d Battalion 15th Infantry following the battalion in the landings was completely unopposed enabling them to move quickly to LICATA and secure the harbor facilities vital to combat as well as logistical support. The march to FAVARA, though unopposed, aided considerably in determining the extent of enemy defenses in the AGRIGENTO section. This city was an important communication center and it was suspected of being strongly fortified. When attached to the 7th Infantry and assigned their part in the reconnaissance in force of the AGRIGENTO area the

- (53) A-4, p. 3
- (54) A-4, p. 3
- (55) A-4, p. 3

Rangers came into their own. This was the type mission for which they were designed. Moving through terrain not conducive to vehicle operation, attacking isolated installations with surprise as their principal weapon the outer defenses of the AGRIGENTO fortress were destroyed and its supporting artillery considerably reduced. These operations aided greatly in the capture of AGRIGENTO and 6000 prisoners by the 7th Infantry.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. COORDINATION IN PLANNING WITH THE NAVY

If coordination of combined operations was difficult in the Sicilian campaign it was not felt on the assault craft landing troops level in the 3d Ranger Battalion. American troops and British seamen combined their efforts to land the battalion on the prescribed beach at the prescribed time. Good seamanship played the all important part once the troops were loaded into the craft. Too often, however, all advantage is not taken of the abilities of either service. As soon as possible after the tentative battalion plan was conceived the assault craft groups of the LSIs were contacted for further planning. With each side fully aware of the plans of the other, adjustments were made to assure success.

In rough seas on a moonless night in narrow approaches to the beach the battalion was landed on the proper beach within five minutes of H Hour. The effect of all elements landing simultaneously with almost complete surprise was apparent.

2. ENEMY WEAPONS WERE NOT PLACED TO TAKE MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE OF THEIR CAPABILITIES

The machine guns on ROCCA MOLLARELLA were mounted too high on the slopes of the rock. So mounted they were unable to lay

grazing fire along the well constructed tactical wire on the beach.

Elements of C Company attacking ROCCA MOLLARELLA were able to move under the fire to the base of the rock and then to systematically reduce the positions.

The heavy weapons defending the road block north of AGRIGENTO were too close to the road block. During poor visibility and darkness the troops encountering the road block were within hand grenade range of these defending weapons. Riflemen defending the block were in such a position as to be unable to protect the heavy weapons. Had the road block been secured at night with listening posts near the block and the defending weapons positioned 200 to 400 yards from the block and protected by riflemen the position could not have been so easily reduced.

3. IMPROPER DISPOSITION OF TROOPS IN LICATA

Shortly after entering LICATA approximately eighty per cent of the battalion was assembled in the harbor area. The harbor had been under air attack periodically since the first U.S. ship docked earlier in the day. For this reason no civilians were in the harbor area and only a few men would have been required to guard the installations therein.

One casualty was sustained by strafing enemy aircraft and eight by an antiaircraft shell from a friendly ship. Had the battalion been dispersed and only the required number of personnel used in the area this may have been averted.

4. THE ENEMY DISREGARDED THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SECURITY

The enemy convoy which was ambushed on HIGHWAY 118 was in route column. No security was provided to the front and flanks. The situation was fluid. There were no solid lines of contact

with opposing forces. As happened, troops could easily slip through the scattered defenses and ambush the column.

Had the enemy provided himself with only the minimum of security by observing the area adjacent to the road and spacing vehicles at greater distances the ambush could not have been so effective. The result of his disregard for security measures was his complete destruction.

5. C COMPANY'S "BOLD" ATTACK ON MASS a GRAMAGLIA

Had a determined enemy been in position on the cliffs atop MASS a GRAMAGLIA C Company would in all probability been wiped out. The slope of the hill from its base in the valley to within 100 yards of the cliffs was open wheat fields covered by only a two to four inch stubble. Though deployed in an open skirmish line riflemen in position on the cliffs could have delivered extremely effective fire on the company.

Had the company commander made even a superficial map reconnaissance he would have noticed that there were no cliffs on the eastern edge of the plateau. An attack from this direction would have enabled the company to take advantage of concealment in scattered woods and orchards to within 400 yards of the positions. Had C Company failed to accomplish its mission the remainder of the battalion could have been brought under extremely effective fire from the heights of MASS a GRAMAGLIA.

6. INADEQUATE COMMUNICATION TO HIGHER HEADQUARTERS

From 1900 on 15 July until 2000 16 July during the operations against MONTAPERTO and PORTO EMPEDOCLE the Rangers had no communications to higher headquarters. It is not known, due to the terrain, whether a portable radio would have solved this problem.

However, if the battalion had been in contact with the 7th Infantry operating east and north of AGRIGENTO it is felt that the fall of AGRIGENTO would have been hastened.

Whether the absence of communications was due to inadequate planning or the inability to procure the proper radio sets is not known. The fact that they would have aided the operations if operative is obvious.

7. THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECT OF THIS OPERATION ON THE COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BATTALION

During this operation the absence of determined resistance on the part of the enemy, gave the majority of the battalion an erroneous concept of combat. This concept could have been largely eliminated during the short pause following this operation through proper orientation on the part of the leaders and the experienced cadre.

This attitude had no ill effect on this operation unless it was instrumental in causing the company commander of C Company to act without a proper estimate. Later, however, when determined resistance was encountered there was a reaction of surprise that such could happen. Though not having a marked ill effect on the battalion there was an unnecessary period of readjustment.

LESSONS

1. In combined operation both services must coordinate on the small unit level in preparing a combined estimate and plan to the extent that no single detail is left for assumption.

2. In the defense, weapons must be so located as to take advantage of all natural and artificial obstacles and be capable of firing along fixed lanes at times of darkness or poor visibility to destroy the enemy while he is momentarily delayed.

3. When enemy aircraft are active or are expected to be active the passive measure of dispersal of troops must be effected.

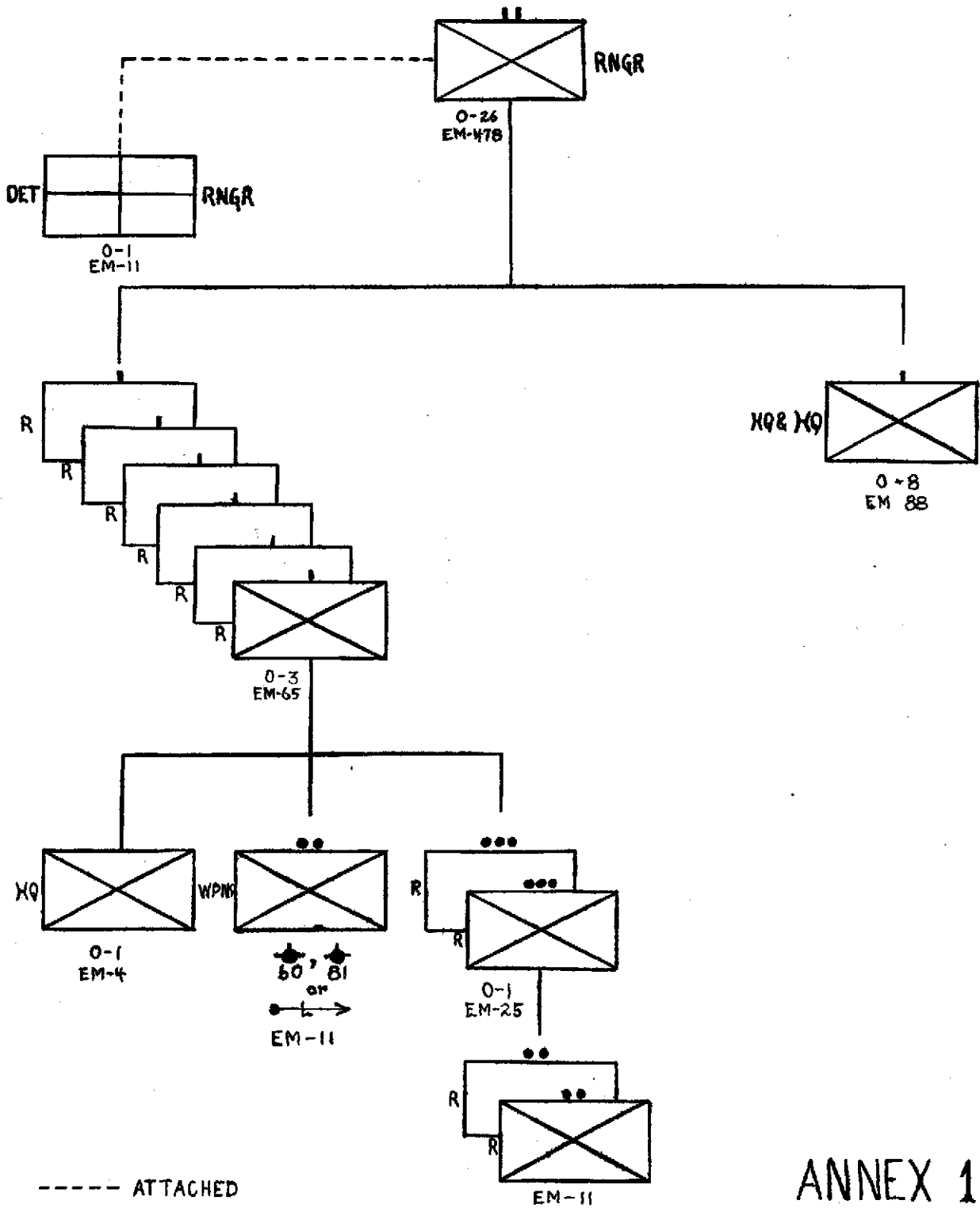
4. Adequate security measures are the only defense against the disastrous effect of surprise.

5. Regardless of the situation, a commander should make as thorough an estimate of the situation as time allows in arriving at a plan.

6. Adequate communication is especially essential to a force infiltrating through the lines and operating in conjunction with another force in the attack.

7. The individual soldier must be trained to expect the enemy to fight with all the means available and that ingenuity must be combined with an aggressive spirit to defeat him.

ORGANIZATION RANGER INFANTRY BATTALION



ANNEX 1