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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 7TH INFANTRY (3RD INF. DIV.)
VOLTURNO RIVER CROSSING, 7-15 OCTOBER 1943
(NAPLES-FOGGIA CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: Regiment in a River Crossing

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index.....	1
Bibliography.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Geographical Features.....	7
The Enemy.....	9
The Preparations for The River Crossing.....	12
The River Crossing.....	19
Analysis.....	30
Lessons.....	34
Map - General Map of Fifth Army Area	
Map - Volturno River Defense	

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Note (Statements not authenticated by other source
material are taken from personal knowledge)

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 7TH INFANTRY (3RD INFANTRY DIVISION)
THE CROSSING OF THE VOLTURNO RIVER
7-15 OCTOBER 1943

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 7th Infantry, 3rd U. S. Infantry Division for the period 7-15 October 1943 in the Naples-Foggia Campaign in Italy. It includes the preparations for the crossing of the Volturno River 7-12 October 1943, the river crossing and the reorganization of the regiment to continue the advance to the north 13-15 October 1943.

This crossing of the Volturno River was to open the second phase of the Allied campaign in Italy. Five weeks earlier the American Fifth Army had landed on the beaches of the Gulf of Salerno. After a bitterly contested landing the German forces, under pressure from the Fifth Army, had begun an orderly withdrawal up the peninsula. Advancing up from the toe of the Italian peninsula the British 8th Army had joined the Fifth Army east of Salerno to make a solid front across the width of the peninsula. The enemy withdrawal continued until, by 7 October 1943, German forces reached the Volturno River valley on the Tyrrhenian side and the mouth of the Biferno River on the Adriatic side of the peninsula. (1) Along this line the Germans clearly intended to make a stubborn stand and to delay, if not stop, the northward advance of the Allied forces. (2)

The Fifth Army at this time was composed of the British 10th Corps and the U. S. VI Corps. After the Salerno beach-head had been secured the British 10th Corps had operated along the coastal plains of the Tyrrhenian Sea while the U. S.

(1) A-2, p. 1; (2) A-2, p. 2.

VI Corps had operated inland along the fringes of the central mountain range. On 7 October 1943 Fifth Army had reached and was holding the south bank of the Volturno River from its junction with the Calore River to the Sea. The British 10th Corps held the river line from the mouth of the river on the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Triflisco Gap. The U. S. VI Corps held the river line north from Triflisco Gap to the junction of the Volturno and Calore Rivers.

On 7 October 1943 VI Corps was ordered to force a crossing of the Volturno River on the night of 9-10 October in the vicinity of Triflisco, and to continue the attack along the high ground northwest of Triflisco toward the town of Teano. (3) For the task of carrying out this mission VI Corps had three battle tested divisions; the 3rd Infantry Division commanded by Major General Lucian K. Truscott Jr., the 34th Infantry Division and the 45th Infantry Division.

On 8 October 1943 VI Corps issued orders to the 3rd Division to force a crossing at Triflisco Gap and attack north toward Teano. (4) On this date the 3rd Division composed of the 7th, 15th and 30th Infantry R.C.Ts was holding the south bank of the river from Triflisco Gap to the Calore River junction, a total of fifteen miles in length. The 15th Infantry held the left half of the sector from Triflisco to and including Mount Castellone. The 30th Infantry held the right half of the line to the river's junction. The 7th Infantry was in a concealed bivouac two miles north of Caserta.

At the same time that the 3rd Division received orders to cross the Volturno, VI Corps also issued orders to the 34th Division to force a crossing on the right flank of the 3rd

(3) A-1, p. 12; (4) A-1, p. 16.

Division. (5) The 34th Division was further directed to relieve the 30th Infantry in its sector at once and to take over the area from the Calore-Velturno River junction south to the slopes of Mount Castellone. The 45th Division on the right flank of the Corps was ordered to continue its advance to the north, to protect the right flank of the Corps and to maintain contact with the British 8th Army on the right. (6)

When the 30th Infantry received word that it was to be relieved, it was early in the afternoon of the 8th of October. Any shifting of troops until after dark was impractical because German artillery fired on any movement in the valley. A series of rainstorms had badly flooded the lower reaches of the valley, and turned the only road running out of the area into an almost impassable mass of mud. In addition to the mud, blown bridges further complicated the task of getting the 30th out and the 34th Division in. At 0720 on the morning of the 9th of October, the 1st Battalion 30th Infantry reported that, with the exception of a few jeeps, all of its transportation was bogged down. (7) This battalion had suffered heavy casualties from artillery fire during the preceding days and the wounded had to be moved out on hand carried litters.

The same troubles of mud, blown bridges and enemy artillery which had so delayed the 30th Infantry in getting out of the position also delayed the 34th Division in its forward movement. During the day of the 9th of October it became increasingly apparent that more time was needed than original plans called for.

(5) A-1, p. 16; (6) A-1, p. 16; (7) A-2, p. 12.

Since 10th Corps on the left was also having trouble in getting into position, Fifty Army postponed the crossing to the night of 12-13 October. (8) This gave the 34th Division time to prepare and launch its attack in coordination with the 3rd Division on its left.

The plan of the 3rd Division for the crossing of the river was to make the main effort in the center with the 7th Infantry. A demonstration on the left flank of the Division was to be made by the 1st Battalion 15th Infantry supported by all of the heavy weapons of the 30th Infantry. On the right flank of the Division a secondary attack was to be made with the remaining two battalions of the 15th Infantry. The demonstration on the left flank was to begin at midnight and continue for the remainder of the night. If the enemy showed any signs of withdrawing in that sector the 2nd Battalion 30th Infantry was to force a crossing. The 7th Infantry in the center was to cross in force and seize the high ground two miles north of the river. On the right the two remaining battalions of the 15th Infantry were to attack north from Mount Castellene and secure Mount Monticello and Mount Mesarino. They were to then continue the advance to the north. (9)

An hour after the demonstration on the left flank had begun, the Division Artillery was to fire preparatory fires on known and suspected enemy positions on the north bank of the river. This fire was to continue until 0155 hours at which time the far side of the river was to be smoked for five minutes. At 0200 hours 13 October 1943 infantry elements of the Division were to begin the crossing. (10)

(8) A-1, p. 16; (9) A-1, p. 17-18; (10) A-2, p. 15.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The Volturno River, rising high in the mountains northwest of Isernia, drains more than 1500 square miles of fertile farm land and steep mountain slopes. Its intensely cultivated farm valley is from two to seven miles wide with the exception of Triflisco Gap, just above the city of Capua. (11) Triflisco Gap is so narrow that 15th Infantry troops on the sides of Mount Tifata exchanged rifle fire with Germans hidden in the olive groves on the north side of the river.

From its junction with the Calore River to the sea the Volturno is from 150 to 200 feet wide in a well defined and winding channel. The depth of the river along this section varies from 4 to 8 feet in depth. At this time of the year, October, it was the rainy season and the river was close to its flood peak with a heavy, swift current.

The hills on the south side of the river, between Capua and the Calore-Volturno Junction, start with Mount Tifata (604 meters) at the western end and extend north and east in a high series of ridges. The first of these ridges is Mount Leucio, running in a general northwesterly direction. The second ridge is slightly smaller and is of similar appearance. The last of these ridges is Mount Castellone (405 meters) which gradually flattens out beyond the town of Limatola. Mount Tifata and Mount Castellone come down quite close to the river bank, but in between these two mountains the two center ridges draw back from the river to form a small valley about a mile square.

Directly across from Mount Tifata a high ridge rises abruptly and extends in a northwesterly direction. The area

(11) A-1, p. 3.

between these two ridges is Triflisco Gap. Directly north of Mount Tifata and across the river a flat cultivated valley from two to three miles wide runs in a northwesterly direction for approximately five miles at which point it terminates in a steep hill mass known as Mount Fallano. Across the river from Mount Leucio and Mount Castellone an L shaped extension of this valley is broken by two sharp hills known as Mount Menticello and Mount Messarinelo. Some two miles beyond these two hill masses the valley is terminated by Mount Majalo (502 meters).

Through this valley the Volturno River winds between highly cultivated fields. In the center of this area the river makes a hairpin loop to the north. The loop is nearly a mile in length. The distance between the river channels at its neck is 300 yards. This distance widens out to approximately 500 yards near the tip of the loop. Three streams enter this loop in close proximity to each other, one on each side and one on the extreme tip. On the south side of the river, at the loop, two streams coming down from Mount Tifata and Mount Castellone enter the river; one just above, and the other several hundred yards below the neck of the loop.

The hills on both sides of the river offer some cover and concealment with the brush and scrub trees that cover them. With the exception of a few small dips in the ground and the stream beds, the valley offers no cover of any kind. Two hard surfaced highways run through the center of the valley from Triflisco toward the north. Highway #87, a main route, traverses the valley in a northeasterly direction to the town of Caiasso. A standard gauge railroad runs parallel to highway #87 across the valley from Triflisco to the northeast.

THE ENEMY

Up to the time of the Volturno Defense the Germans had invariably employed the rivers as an element in a defensive position or as a delaying feature. (12) Their tactics in the withdrawal had been to fight a delaying action by defending all key terrain features and natural obstacles. The German demolition plan consisted of destroying bridges, blowing trees across the roads and demolishing the towns and villages upon the highways where the rubble would be most effective in slowing the advance of our forces. To cover these natural and man made obstacles self propelled guns and tanks were used most effectively.

At most delaying points the enemy used small detachments of infantry supported by automatic weapons and one or more self propelled guns of some type. Extensive use was made of the 50mm mortar, and in a few instances the use of the multiple rocket launcher (nebel werfer) had been encountered. Booby traps of all types were used to a great extent. Although greatly feared and avoided by American troops, these booby traps did little to impede the advance of our forces. Blown trees and other road obstacles were generally mined, and in a few cases concrete obstacles had been erected.

The Volturno river line is roughly divided at the city of Capua into two sharply contrasting sectors. Westward toward the sea the terrain on both sides of the river is very flat and devoid of any cover. The area in the vicinity of

(12) A-3, p. 47.

the mouth of the river is cut up into a canal and drainage system to such an extent that it precludes the use of armored vehicles in this sector. To the north of Capua the river runs through a hilly area with considerable underbrush and scrub trees on the slopes of the ridges. (13)

In accordance with their strategic policy of making a slow withdrawal, the intention of the German Command at the Volturno River was to impose the maximum delay on the Allied forces. To accomplish this end the river defense was so organized to prevent an Allied crossing. (14) If, however, the river was crossed in great strength and its value as an obstacle ceased to exist, the enemy apparently did not intend to fight to regain it.

The key to the enemy defense lay in his main gun area in the section of hilly terrain that runs in a northwest direction from Capua. As long as this gun area was held a crossing in any strength was not possible in the flat country west of Capua. East of this key area the rough hilly terrain presented greater difficulties to the defense and was subject to infiltration through the covered approaches. (15)

After withdrawing behind the river the enemy destroyed all bridges which had not previously been bombed out by the Allied Air Force. All natural approaches to the river were mined and booby trapped. German patrols remained on the south side of the river in contact with the Allied forces but did not try to defend on the south side of the river. (16)

The Germans plan of holding the river line consisted of: mining all probable crossing sites; covering these approaches

(13) A-3, p. 48; (14) A-3, p. 48; (15) A-3, p. 49; (16) A-3, p. 50.

by artillery, automatic weapon and mortar fires and setting up mixed counterattack forces. Self propelled guns and tanks were to be used extensively on roving missions in the flat areas of the defense zone. Machine gun positions with supporting infantry were organized along the river bank. Battle positions were organized in depth in order to counter and seal off any penetration in the event crossings were effected. (17)

To prevent the crossing of the Fifth Army the German commander, Marshal Kesselring, had four divisions at his disposal. These divisions were the 26th Panzer Division, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, the Herman Goering Division and the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division. The Herman Goering Division, which directly opposed the crossing of the U. S. 3rd Infantry Division, was an elite Panzer Division. This German division had first fought in the Tunisian campaign. After part of its personnel had been evacuated from North Africa, it had been reconstituted and opposed the Allied troops in Sicily. After the operation in Sicily the division had again been brought up to strength and entered combat during the latter stages of the Salerno Beachhead battle.

The Herman Goering Division was composed of two battle groups. The eastern battle group, known as the Maake group, was defending the Volturno River from Triflisco Gap to a point near the town of Caiazzo. (18)

(17) A-3, p. 52; (18) A-1, p. 8.

THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE RIVER CROSSING

When the orders for crossing the river were received by the 7th Infantry, the regiment was in a concealed bivouac in and around the little town of Centurano. The regiment had just completed a motor movement from Montesarchio some 30 miles to the southeast of Centurano. The bivouac area was two miles north of Caserta on the main highway. This regiment with other units of the 3rd Infantry Division had landed in Italy during the last stages of the Salerno beachhead operation.

Casualties from enemy action in Italy had, up to this time, been light. The rainy days and cold nights, however, had caused many non-battle casualties from sickness. The combat efficiency of the regiment at this time was approximately 75%. With the exception of a few officer replacements and hospital returnees, only a very small number of men had been received as replacements. (19).

The decision to delay the attack until the night of 12/13 October gave the regiment sufficient time to make plans in detail. In fact this was one of the few times that all of the units may be said to have had ample time to make a reconnaissance in detail and to formulate plans. The maps and air photos of the area were in general quite accurate and fairly adequate for the needs of the various units. The only sure method of finding the depth of the river and selecting suitable crossing sites was to send out patrols for that purpose. Accordingly every unit of the combat team sent out patrols with the mission of testing the river for crossings and locating enemy strongpoints.

(19) Personal knowledge, self.

On the night of 10/11 October the battalion commanders of the regiment, with selected personnel from their battalions and attached units, set out on patrols to locate and establish the final crossing points for their units. In addition they were to locate suitable places for the forward assembly areas. With the enemy guarding the north bank and sending his own patrols across the river, this task was a difficult one. Several of the patrols were forced to engage in fire fights before they could extricate themselves.

The 2nd battalion commander had the most difficulty on his patrol. This patrol was made up of a rifle platoon, the battalion company commanders, the battalion staff and the commanders of the attached units.

After assembling on the forward slopes of Mount Castellone, the battalion commander split the group into sections with various missions of reconnaissance. While in this position the patrol was fired on by an enemy patrol which was some distance above. The battalion commander sent a rifle squad to take care of this fire and proceeded with his organization. He then took a small group and started on his reconnaissance. While moving along the lower right slopes of Mount Castellone, his group was attacked by a larger patrol and only managed to extricate itself after it had suffered several casualties. On the other side of the hill one of the other patrol groups had also been attacked and suffered casualties. During this patrol the battalion lost the F company commander, the attached engineer platoon leader and one other officer, in addition to several riflemen.

In spite of these difficulties the 2nd battalion commander returned with the desired information for the crossing. (20)

This was the first attempt by the regiment to make a river crossing. (21) Considerable thought and planning was given to the means of getting the men and equipment across the river. The use of engineer assault boats was ruled out. First because none were available in the theater in sufficient quantity and, secondly, the swiftness of the river current would have prevented their use for more than one trip across the river. It was finally decided to get the troops across the river by using guide ropes stretched from one bank to the other. (22)

The crossing sites that had been selected were shallow enough to allow men to cross by wading if they had some support such as a guide rope to assist them. A few rubber pontoons were obtained from the engineers and several life rafts were borrowed from the navy. Four DUKWs were allotted to the regiment but did not arrive in time to be of any use. It was the intention to use the pontoons and life rafts to ferry ammunition and weapons across with the assault troops. After the assault waves had crossed, the rafts were to be used for the resupply of ammunition and supplies until a bridge could be built. As there were not enough standard items to take care of the initial crossing, a major construction problem became the making of homemade rafts. These rafts were made from scrap lumber and the tarps from the 3/4 ton trucks in the regiment. A rough frame was made out of the lumber and the tarps were securely

(20) A-2, p. 18, Statement Lt. Col. E. W. Duvall C.O. 2nd Bn. 7th Inf. Feb. 1947. (21) Statement Col. Sherman C.O. 7th Inf. 8 Dec. 1943. (22) Statement Col. Sherman C.O. 7th Inf. 8 Dec. 43.

tied around it, making, in effect, a small canvas bottomed boat. During tests that were made, it was found that this makeshift raft would make a useable float which would support ten men around the sides with their equipment kept dry in the center of the raft. (23)

The radio equipment of the regiment was waterproofed and enough captured German quad cable was obtained to provide a wire link for each battalion for the width of the river.

In addition to the normal attached and supporting units from the division that normally made up a R.C.T., one company of tanks from the 751st Tank Battalion and one company of TDs from the 601st TD Battalion were attached for the crossing. These attached vehicles were all waterproofed for the operation. This waterproofing was considered necessary as the danger of an armored counterattack was thought to be almost certain, and it was not expected that a bridge of sufficient capacity could be constructed until some sixteen or eighteen hours after the initial crossings had been made. One crossing point that appeared suitable for the crossing of tanks had been found just to the south of the loop in the river. Tracks in the vicinity of this crossing indicated that the enemy had used this point as a ford. For our tanks to use it however, it would be necessary to break down the banks of the near side.

An initial firing area was found for the tanks, TDs and cannon company weapons on the eastern slopes of Mount Leucio.

(23) Statement, Col. Sherman C. O. 7th Inf. 8 Dec. 1943.

It was necessary for the Division engineers to improve the trail that led to the firing position. Although this engineer work required a good deal of time and secrecy, the trail was turned into a useable road with an exit to the river in ample time for the attack.

One additional unit was attached to the regiment at this time. This was company C of the 84th Chemical Battalion. This company with its 12 4.2 mortars was to be used to good advantage in subsequent actions. For this particular operation the chemical company used eight mortars with 20 rounds per mortar carried with the transportation. The organic transportation of this company consisted of 2½ ton trucks only. To enable this unit to cross the river at the earliest possible opportunity it was deemed necessary to provide it with vehicles which could cross on a small bridge. To do this, the regiment provided the company with eight ½ ton trucks which would be able to cross the smallest and probably the most quickly installed bridge that the engineers would construct. (24)

The AT Company of the regiment was to be utilized for a number of different missions. The towed weapons were to be left with the regimental trains. The company was to establish small ammunition dumps on the near bank of the river. These dumps were established so that ammunition could be ferried across the river with the minimum of delay, keeping in mind that bridges could not be constructed until several hours after the initial

(24) Statement, Capt. E. Davis, C.O. Co.C 85⁴ Chem Bn. Feb. 1947.

crossings. Along with the establishment of these dumps, the company was to furnish guides at critical points and put up white engineer tape to guide the 3rd battalion to its crossing point. Details were to be furnished to install the guide ropes and furnish security parties at the crossing points. If any personnel were available at the time, they were to assist the battalions in carrying the rafts to the river. (25)

The 10th Field Artillery Battalion which normally supported the 7th Infantry had one battery of the 27th Field Artillery attached to it for this operation. This battery was from an armored artillery battalion and consisted of six self propelled 105mm howitzers in comparison to the four towed guns in each battery of the 10th Field Artillery Battalion.

The commander of the 10th Field placed his batteries in position along the eastern slopes of Mount Tifata and the western slopes of Mount Leucio. One battery and the attached battery of the 27th Field went into position to the left of highway #87 and the remaining two batteries were placed above the highway on the slopes of Mount Leucio.

For this operation the 10th Field set up battery OPs and sent liaison officers to each of the battalions of the 7th Infantry. It was not mandatory to furnish forward observers to the rifle companies (forward observers were not included in the T. O. at this time) and the shortage of personnel did not allow the manning of OPs and furnishing forward observers at the same time. (26)

(25) Personal knowledge, self. (26) Statement, Col. Davis, C.O. 10th Field Artillery Bn. Feb. 1947.

The plan of the 7th Infantry for the river crossing was made with a view toward forestalling enemy armor. From the terrain study it was believed that the two lateral streams, running into the Volturno at the loop in the river, would be an effective tank obstacle for several hundred yards. The battalions therefore were sent across on both sides of the loop, keeping the streams to the left sides of the attacking units. The crossings were of necessity to be made on a narrow front due to the character of the river and the narrow width of the fords that were suitable for the use of the assault troops. (27)

The mission of the 1st Battalion was to force a crossing of the river just below the river loop, clear the valley to the right of the Formicola highway and secure the high ground at the north end of the valley.

The mission of the 2nd Battalion was to force a crossing of the river just above the loop, clear the flat ground to the right of the 1st Battalion, maintain contact with the 15th Infantry to the right and secure the eastern half of Mount Majulo.

The 3rd Battalion in regimental reserve was to follow the 2nd Battalion across the river as soon as possible, then occupy positions to the left of the 2nd Battalion on the slopes of Mount Majulo.

The attached tanks and TDs were to fire initially from the selected positions on the forward slopes of Mount Leucio. As soon as the 1st battalion had cleared its crossing point the tanks and TDs were to follow across and support the attack of the regiment from the far bank.

(27) Statement, Col. Sherman, C.O. 7th Inf. 8 Dec. 1943.

THE RIVER CROSSING

At 2400 hours 12 October 1943 the 1st battalion 15th Infantry with the heavy weapons of the 30th Infantry began their demonstration on the left flank of the division. At 0100 hours the division artillery reinforced by one battalion of 155mm howitzers and one battalion of 155mm guns (long toms) opened the preparatory fires on known enemy positions on the north bank of the river and throughout the valley. The preparatory fires lasted for 55 minutes. At 0155 smoke shells were mixed with H.E. to screen the crossing areas.

A few minutes after midnight the assault battalions began to move from their forward assembly positions. The men, carrying and dragging the rubber rafts, improvised equipment and their own weapons, had rough going across the muddy plowed fields. Before the artillery fire lifted, both the 1st and 2nd Battalions had set up a machine gun section to cover the crossing at each point. In the 2nd Battalion area the ropes were installed without too much difficulty under cover of the fire from the machine gun section. As soon as the ropes were in position, the first rifle platoon started wading across the swollen river. (28)

In the 1st Battalion area considerable difficulty was at once experienced in getting the guide ropes secured. The banks on the far side were quite soft from the recent rains and the trees, which were used to anchor the ropes, pulled out before the first men were across. One rope was finally put

(29) Statement, Lt. Col. Duvall C. O. 2nd Bn.

into place that held, and the first rifle platoon started across. (29)

The formation of both the 1st and 2nd Battalions was column of companies. The formation of the companies was column of platoons with the leading platoon followed by the weapons platoon. This company formation of all of the battalions was prescribed by the regimental commander. The formation of the rifle companies was designed to insure the early arrival of the automatic weapons on the far side to protect the crossing of the elements to follow. (30)

The actual crossing of the 2nd Battalion was completed as planned. A lot of credit for the smooth crossing of the 2nd Battalion must go to the machine gunners of the H Company section. This machine gun section, which had set up on the near bank of the river just before the artillery preparation lifted, emplaced their guns in the open a few yards back of the bank and directly opposing the enemy guns in the emplacements across the river. By almost continuous firing this gun section was able to cover the crossing of the assault elements and hold down the fire of the enemy guns. (31)

Directly across the river a company assembly area had been designated. The plan of the battalion commander had been for each company to complete its reorganization in this assembly area and then complete its mission. After reorganization F company, the lead company in the crossing, was to advance to the left along the loop of the river, then cross the flat country and take the left half of the objective. G company which

(29) A-2, p. 28; (30) Statement, Capt. Petruzel, C.O. K Company Feb. 1947; (31) Statement, Lt. Col. Duvall, C.O. 2nd Bn. Feb. 1947.

crossed behind F company was to reorganize, then advance on the right of F company and secure the right half of the objective. E company was to cross behind the two assault companies and advance in the center of, and behind, the two lead companies.

↘ Battalion headquarters and H Company, less the machine gun section attached to F and G companies, were to follow in column. (32)

When the Battalion Commander arrived in the company assembly area, he found that F company was having difficulty on the left flank. He ordered one platoon of F company to clear out the draw in that sector and the remainder of the company to bypass any resistance and get on to the objective. G company was then moving fairly rapidly across the flat ground to the north. To protect the right flank, the Battalion Commander ordered one platoon of E company to move to the right and protect the right flank of the movement. Keeping the mission of gaining the high ground in mind, the battalion commander pushed on with the three rifle companies toward Mount Majulo and by 0600 hours the major part of the rifle companies and the battalion commander's O. P. group was on the objective. (33)

A few hundred yards short of the highway, however, the battalion executive officer with HQ company, parts of H company and the artillery liaison officer's group had failed to maintain contact with the rear elements of E company. Enemy strongpoints which had been bypassed by the leading elements of the battalion opened fire on this group ^{causing} forcing it

(32) Statement, Lt. Col. Duvall, C. O. 2nd Bn. Feb. 1947;
(33) Statement, Lt. Col. Duvall, C. O. 2nd Bn. Feb. 1947.

to become disorganized. A large part of this group was pinned down in place until leading elements of the 3rd Battalion were able to destroy the strongpoints by assault. (34) Aggressive leadership and thorough briefing of small unit leaders and individuals paid off at this point. All of the small units that were delayed or disorganized, finally either destroyed or bypassed the enemy strongpoints and reached the objective by early afternoon.

The last unit of the 2nd Battalion to cross the river and make its way to the objective was the 81mm mortar platoon. (35)

As a matter of interest this platoon, as were all of the other 81mm mortar platoons in the regiment, was operating with only two of its six mortars. The platoon carried 30 rounds of ammunition per mortar. It was common practice, at this time, for the mortar platoons to take only two of their mortars while going by hand. Two mortars could easily handle all of the ammunition that the remaining personnel of the platoon could carry. It was believed that two mortars with ammunition were far better than six mortars without.

The 1st Battalion in the meantime was having heavy going. It had also crossed in column of companies with the companies in column of platoons. This actually amounted to crossing in column of ones, pushing across in the face of heavy automatic fire. The machine gun section which had set up at this crossing point had been unable to hold down the amount of fire that came from numerous positions along the far bank and houses on the

(34) Statement, Major Elterich, Ex. O. 2nd Bn. 8 Dec. 1943.

(35) Statement, Lt. Levy, Ex. O. H Co., 8 Dec. 1943.

north side of the river. The only feature that allowed the battalion to cross at this point was the fact that the far bank was considerably higher than the near one. Enemy machine guns away from the north bank could not be depressed enough to hit the troops along the waters edge. (36)

This battalion was the only one that brought its rafts and pontoons down to the river. The other two battalions, having a much longer distance to march from the forward assembly areas to the crossing points, had abandoned them when it became apparent that the troops were becoming exhausted with the heavy loads long before the distance had been traversed.

When the enemy weapons resisted all efforts to destroy them, the assault companies began to jam up on the far shore and a great deal of confusion and congestion resulted. In addition, about half of the rafts and pontoons were capsized or swamped in the swift current. Every company in the battalion lost part of its automatic weapons in the river when this happened. Finding it impossible to go up over the far bank, the battalion moved under cover of the far bank up into the loop of the river. At the entrance of the stream coming into the Volturno small units were able to get up into the flats and deploy out into the fields.

By reorganizing and clearing out the area next to the river bank the battalion was able to secure a bridgehead and a portion of the highway. On this portion of the highway a roadblock was set up.

(36) Statement, Lt. Wyeth, C. O. C Co., 3 Dec. 1943.

At daybreak the battalion was still crossing and it was at this time that a major portion of the units casualties occurred, due to the improved enemy observation for artillery and mortars. (37)

After setting up the roadblock and securing the crossing point, the battalion began its reorganization and began to strengthen its position. Before the reorganization was completed at approximately 1200 hours two enemy tanks pulled up behind two houses on the left of the battalion sector and began to fire into the area. Before they could do much damage, the two tanks were fired on by artillery and the TDs from across the river.

As soon as the 1st Battalion had cleared its forward assembly area, the 3rd Battalion started for the river. This battalion, which had the longest distance to march, also experienced considerable difficulty in crossing the open ground, because of the softness of the fields and the heavy loads that the men were carrying. About the time that forward elements of the battalion reached the stream which comes down from the eastern slopes of Mount Leucio, the troops came under machine gun and mortar fire from the far side of the river. This fire coupled with the heavy going in the soft ground caused the abandonment of the rubber boats and rafts that the battalion was carrying. Guides from the AT company and the white engineer tape were encountered at this point. Proceeding down to the

(37) Statement, Lt. Wyeth C. O. C Co. 3 Dec., 1943.

river under fire, the battalion arrived just as the last elements of the 2nd Battalion less one section of machine guns and the 81mm mortar platoon, were completing the crossing. (38)

Only one guide rope was in place when the 3rd Battalion began its crossing. Many enemy strong points had been bypassed by the 2nd Battalion and these positions caused several casualties and delayed the orderly crossing. By dawn the last elements of the battalion had crossed and the unit prepared to push on to the objective. A battalion assembly area had been designated around the same area that had been used by the 2nd Battalion for its company assembly areas. While reorganizing in this assembly area, daylight brought increased accuracy of enemy machine gun and mortar fire on the unit. (39)

The original plan of the battalion was to advance from this assembly area with I and K companies abreast, L, M and HQ in column to the rear. Due to the intense fire coming from the bypassed German positions it was apparent that the battalion would have to attack if it was to follow the 2nd Battalion. This would have resulted in the fires being directed toward the rear of the 2nd Battalion. Also, as the 3rd Battalion was the reserve battalion, becoming committed without authority could have caused serious results in the attack plan of the regiment. At this point the battalion commander ordered the battalion to swing left and advance in column of companies, clearing the river bank until the stream at the end of the loop had been reached. Then it was to turn north and continue toward the objective under all terrain

(38) Statement, Capt. Petruzel, C. O. K Co., Feb. 1947.

(39) A-2, p. 31.

cover possible. If any enemy strongpoints were encountered they were to be destroyed, while the main body of the battalion continued to advance. Two enemy positions were knocked out within fifty yards of the assembly area. The battalion continued up the bank of the river to the end of the loop where they encountered the F company platoon which had been left by the 2nd Battalion to clear up that sector. K company, which was the lead company of the 3rd Battalion, assisted this F company platoon in clearing out the area and then proceeded north toward the highway. Several German positions were destroyed and others, realizing their helpless position, surrendered. (40)

By the time the battalion reached the highway it had encountered the portion of the 2nd Battalion which had been delayed. This group was assisted in extricating itself from the enemy opposition, at which time an enemy truck was destroyed and several prisoners taken. (41)

From the highway to the north the results of the preparatory fires could be seen. Damage was considerable and numerous enemy wounded were found in and around positions which they had manned. Leaving a few aid men to take care of these wounded Germans, the battalion moved toward its objective. By the time the forward elements of the 3rd Battalion had reached the forward ^{side} of the mountain, they were in contact with F company which was the left company of the 2nd Battalion.

At about 1100 hours six tanks, without infantry support, approached from the direction of the Formicola road and opened

(40) Statement, Capt. Petruzel, C.O. K Co., Feb. 1947.

(41) Statement, Lt. Nofal, Plat. Leader, F. Co.

fire on the positions of K and F companies. The 2nd Battalion command group, several hundred yards away, could observe these tanks but did not have communication by either radio or wire to the rear. (42) The artillery liaison group was still with the delayed portion of the battalion.

F company had lost all of its rocket launchers and K company had only one launcher available. Three of the tanks moved up to within 50 yards of the positions and poured machine gun and direct cannon fire into the areas. The lead tank was knocked out by the K company bazooka team before the team itself was destroyed, but the remaining tanks continued to fire into the two companies. Before artillery fire could be brought down onto the tanks by the 3rd Battalion artillery liaison officer, the two companies had suffered heavy casualties, K company in particular. (43) As soon as artillery fire was brought to bear on the tanks they withdrew to the northwest. After the tank attack had ceased, the 3rd Battalion resumed its advance and by 1400 hours had begun to organize its position on the left slopes of Mount Majulo.

The tanks and TDs were ready to cross at daylight over the ford which had been located in the 1st Battalion area. To enable them to cross it was necessary that the banks on the near side be broken down. A bulldozer, A company 10th Engineer Battalion, was assigned to this job, but was unable to accomplish it because intense machine gun and mortar fire drove it away from the river. The bank was finally broken down by hand about 1000 hours by men using picks and shovels. By 1300 hours, most of the TDs and all

(42) Statement, Lt. Col. Duvall, Feb., 1947.

(43) Statement, Capt. Petruzel, C. O. K Co., Feb. 1947.

of the tanks were across the river and operating. (44)

About 1500 hours the regimental command post of the 7th Infantry started displacing across the river into the 1st Battalion area. Before dark the command post again displaced to the lower slopes of Mount Majulo near the 2nd Battalion.

While the 2nd and 3rd Battalions had been making their way across the valley, the 15th Infantry on the right had taken the two small hills on the valley floor. On the left flank the 30th Infantry had made two attempts to cross the river, but had been unsuccessful. Soon after dark on the evening of October 13th, the 30th Infantry crossed over the river in the sector of the 7th Infantry and took their assigned objective on the left flank of the division. (45)

Early the next morning (14 October), the 1st Battalion moved on to its original objective. By 0900 hours on the 14th of October all of the elements of the 7th Infantry, with the exception of the field train and the AT company, were across the Volturno and occupying the assigned objectives. Reorganization was completed in all units during the night and by the morning of the 15th of October, the regiment was ready to advance toward Teano. (46)

During the afternoon of the 13th, the attached company of the 10th Engineer Battalion had constructed a light bridge capable of carrying jeep traffic. This bridge constructed of scrap material gathered up around Caserta served the purpose very

(44) Statement, Col. Sherman, C. O. 7th Inf. 8 Dec., 1943.
(45) A-2, p. 33-35; (46) Personal knowledge, self.

well and allowed a major part of the necessary light vehicles to cross the river late in the afternoon. On the first day of the crossing the remainder of the 10th Engineer Battalion also began construction on the division bridge at the old bridge site north of the loop. In spite of many difficulties, including accurate enemy fire, the bridge was ready before midnight.

The 10th Field Artillery Battalion began to displace forward soon after dark on the 13th of October. By dawn of the 14th it had its guns across the river and was going into position along the south slopes of Mount Majulo.

ANALYSIS

From a regimental standpoint, this operation was considered a success. Colonel Harry B. Sherman (now Brigadier General) was personally congratulated by General Clark, commanding Fifth Army, on the crossing of the Volturno river by the 7th Infantry.

From the battalion's viewpoint, several things can be brought out which would have made the crossing more successful.

One of the outstanding factors in this operation that should be mentioned is the fact that physical control of the near bank was not obtained before the crossing. Control of the near bank would have been possible, but the plan of the 3rd Division placed the need for secrecy in this operation above the advantages to be gained by having physical control of the near bank.

The decision to maintain secrecy instead of gaining control of the near side of the river may be questionable in this operation, as far as the regiment is concerned, but the final result is that the division was successful in the crossing.

Many of the difficulties experienced by the battalions are directly traceable to the necessity for maintaining secrecy. The greatest drawback was the necessity of locating the forward assembly areas for the battalions on the forward slopes of Mount Tifata and Mount Leucio. The distance from assembly area to crossing point was approximately two miles for both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. The pontoons and rafts carried by both of these battalions were abandoned in the open

fields. If this equipment had not been abandoned, the men would have been so exhausted by the time they reached the river bank that their effectiveness would have been badly reduced.

The crossing on such a narrow front can be justified by the need for preserving secrecy, and in this case the difficulty of making detailed reconnaissance of the river for a large number of crossing points is apparent.

The value of the river channel as a barrier was over rated. The depth of the river was not such as to require the use of assault boats and rafts for the assault troops. The unnecessary burdening down of the assault troops with rafts and pontoons resulted in undue fatigue to the men who had to do the fighting.

The effect of mines at the crossing sites was not as serious as it might have been. In the 1st Battalion area a large number of mines were detonated by the men. Only about half of those that exploded actually caused casualties. This non-casualty effect was caused by the exploding mines being buried in the sand and mud in such a manner that the explosion took place in the ground.

The 2nd Battalion Commander, on the right of the regimental sector, pushed his battalion across the valley flat lands with all possible speed to gain the high ground at the far end of the valley. In spite of the difficulties that the 3rd Battalion experienced with the bypassed enemy positions left by the 2nd Battalion, the action of the 2nd Battalion resulted in a minimum of casualties in that unit and caused the early withdrawal of the German forces from the flat ground.

The 1st Battalion on the left, due to its difficulties in getting across the river before daylight, was handicapped in any efforts it might make to gain the high ground of its portion of the objective. This unit was forced to reorganize in a small area on the far side of the river. It took the united efforts of the whole battalion to clear out the valley land in the immediate vicinity of the crossing.

Local tactical surprise was gained as evidenced by several instances during the crossing. Positions on the right side of the sector had been in the act of distributing clothing, shoes and minor supplies when they were caught in the preparatory fires. Several prisoners stated that they did not expect any attack in that sector for several days.

Very little if any of the preparatory fire by the division artillery fell in the area between the river and Highway #87. The effects of the preparation were not evident south of the highway, whereas the ground north of the highway was thoroughly covered by the fire. A large number of enemy casualties and considerable damaged material was found between the highway and Mount Majulo. If the preparation had covered the area close to the far side of the river, and had been as effective as it was further to the rear, a part of the 7th Infantry's casualties might have been avoided.

The intelligence reports analyzing the enemy intentions in regard to holding the river line were born out in the light of the action of the German forces both during and after the crossing. The river itself was quite strongly defended, but

the defense did not extend in depth to a sufficient extent to seal off a penetration of more than company strength.

The expected counterattack in strength did not materialize. The abortive counterattack by the enemy tanks, was not supported by infantry and could not hope to drive out the troops put across the river by the 7th Infantry. It appeared that this tank attack was intended more to cover the withdrawal of an enemy battery of artillery in the valley than it was to drive the 2nd and 3rd Battalions back to the river.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. Control of the near bank of the river is desirable before a crossing is attempted.
2. In a night attack thorough briefing of all personnel down to the individual is necessary if the attacking unit is to gain its objective in major strength.
3. Aggressive leadership of small units determine the outcome of an operation, once the attack is launched.
4. Forward assembly areas to be used for a river crossing should be close enough to the crossing points to allow the assaulting troops to arrive at their positions in good physical condition.
5. Assault boats or rafts are of little or questionable value on a river with a fast current.
6. Unit commanders must not lose sight of their primary mission.
7. Reconnaissance is a vital part of ^{to} every river crossing.
8. All efforts possible should be bent to maintain communication during a river crossing. The period immediately after the crossing is extremely vital when the means to bring supporting fires depend on electrical means of communication.
9. Forward observers for the artillery are a vital part of the Infantry-Artillery team coordination.
10. River crossings should be made on a broad front.
11. Secrecy and deception as to time and place of the crossing is essential.