

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "A", 350TH INFANTRY
(88TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT MONTERUMICI,
NORTHWEST OF ANCONELLA, ITALY, 17 APRIL 1945
(PO VALLEY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY COMPANY,
ATTACKING VILLAGE IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	3
General Situation	3
Regimental Situation	5
Attack of 3rd Battalion	6
Company "A" Plan of Attack	10
The Attack	14
Capture of Di Sotta	17
Analysis and Criticism	21
Lessons	25
Map "A" - Positions in North Appennines	
Map "B" - Regimental Plan of Attack	
Map "C" - Movements of Company "K"	
Map "D" - Movement of Company "A"	
Map "E" - Company "A"'s Assault on Di Sotta	

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INTRODUCTION

When the spring sun melted the last snows from the North Appennines at the end of March 1945, the German armies occupied, with but minor exceptions, the same line that they had so stubbornly defended throughout the winter. (See Map "A") For more than six months, Fifth Army artillery observers, watching from the high peaks held by our forces, had on clear days been able to see the smoke rising from factory chimneys in Bologna.

To the U. S. infantry soldier in the North Appennines, Bologna, standing astride Highway 65 at the gateway to the Po Valley, was synonymous with "Promised Land" and victory. To the Germans, loss of this gateway meant loss of the entire Po Valley and of the lush agricultural and heavy industrial production that was keeping the Nazi armies in Italy supplied and equipped.

Winter action in the North Appennines had been confined to patrol activities and limited attacks to improve positions and straighten lines. This comparative quiet, plus news of Allied successes in Northern Europe, gave the impression that the campaign in Italy had settled down to a war of attrition -- a fact that was later reflected in the attitude of the individual soldier when the time came for the jump-off.

GENERAL SITUATION

During the first days in April, divisions of General-

Mark W. Clark's 15th Army Group were shuffled in the lines in preparation for, as the troops were certain, the final big push. (1) On the right, with a front extending from the Adriatic Sea to Bologna, was the British Eighth Army, under Lt. General Sir Richard L. McCreery. The American Fifth Army, commanded by Lt. General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., had the left zone, extending from Bologna inclusive to the Ligurian Sea. (See Map "A") (2)

In the Fifth Army zone, II Corps, composed of three American divisions, the 34th, 91st and 88th, the 6th South African Armored Division, and the Italian Legnano Group, was to make the main effort, through the mountains into Bologna and the Po Valley. (See Map "A") (3)

On 11 April, 1945, the 88th Division, still blacked out for security reasons, relieved units of the 91st Division, which moved over to the right before the Mt. Adone mass. The 88th took up position under and around the ridge running north and south from Mt. Adone to Monterumici. (4) The 1st Armored Division, a IV Corps unit, held the ground on the 88th's left. All plans concentrated on breaking through the enemy defenses and forcing a way through into the rich Po Valley. (5)

Importance of this position to the Germans was emphasized by Major General Schricker, commander of the enemy 8th Mountain Division, when he told his troops, "Monterumici at this time is the most vital sector of the entire division. I have no doubt that the enemy will make every effort to take possession of the Monterumici feature in order to obtain a basis for a large scale attack". (6)

(1) a-3, p. 7; (2) A-3, p. 11; (3) A-3, p. 9,11; (4) A-2, p. 3; (5) A-2, p. 2; (6) A-1, p. 191.

REGIMENTAL SITUATION

On arrival in the line, the 350th Infantry Regiment's headquarters and rear command post were set up at Anconella. 1st Battalion and regimental forward command posts were placed at La Valle. The 1st Battalion went into the line, where they were to hold positions until the jump-off and then go into Regimental reserve. The 2nd Battalion closed in rear assembly area near Anconella, where Cannon Company also took up positions. (See Map "B") (7)

Although no fires were permitted in order to preserve security, artillery, mortar and air observation posts were set up at La Valle.

In this position, with the 91st Division on the right at Mt. Adone, and the 349th Regiment of the 88th Division on the left, all units of the 350th waited for D day and H hour, which had been set for 2300 hours, 15 April. (8) Supporting the 350th were the 338th Field Artillery Battalion, Company "B" of the 313th Engineers, Company "C", less one platoon, of the 752nd Tank Battalion, one platoon of Company "C" of the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and one reinforced platoon of Company "A", 10th Chemical Battalion (4.2 mortars). (9)

On the enemy side, the 15th Mountain Division, comprised of the 296th and 297th Mountain Regiments, held the position. Directly facing the 350th was the 3rd Battalion, 297th Mountain Regiment, occupying well-prepared positions based on the towns of Di Sopra and Di Sotta. (See Map "B") (10) Although these villages were completely leveled and pounded to rubble, the stone structure of Italian houses, with deep, strong cellars (7) A-2, p. 3; (8) A-2, p. 5; (9) A-2, p. 4; (10) A-2, p. 4.

gave the enemy what amounted to strong fortified positions. All usable slopes leading to the villages were liberally sprinkled with schu and other antipersonnel mines. (11)

In addition to the rubble and cellars of the villages, the enemy had done an excellent job of organizing Monterumici with an elaborate system of interlocking caves, dug-outs and cleverly concealed gun positions. Narrow, tortuous trails, impassable by armor, were the only means of advance on the position, thus confining movement to areas which the enemy could blanket with fire.

The regimental plan called for the 1st Battalion to move from its front-line position into La Tombe, La Valle and La Piana as a diversion, and remain there in regimental reserve, while the 3rd Battalion was to proceed from its rear assembly area near Anconella to La Valle and clear the Monterumici peak, and the 2nd Battalion, also in assembly near Anconella, was to attack up Fazzano Ridge. (See Map "B") (12) In the event that the 3rd Battalion had difficulty in taking Monterumici, the 1st was set to come to their assistance. (13) At the same time, the 91st Division on the right was to attack and capture Mt. Adone, from which high point the enemy could observe and direct fire on all of Monterumici and its approaches.

ATTACK OF 3RD BATTALION

Early on 15 April, friendly planes began an intensive bombing of all front line enemy positions. (14) The actual offensive began at 2230 hours, when the full power of all supporting weapons available -- artillery, tanks, tank destroyers, mortars, machine guns, and AA guns -- was directed (11) A-2, p. 5; Personal knowledge; (12) A-2, p. 5; (13) A-2, p. 5; (14) A-2, p. 6.

on Monterumici in a series of concentrations and preparatory fires that lasted one full hour. (15)

At 2300 hours, the 3rd and 2nd Battalions moved out, and arrived at the line of departure at La Piana without incident. But when they attempted to move up the slopes of Monterumici, they were met by intense and accurate automatic weapons and mortar fire from enemy positions that neither the aerial bombardment nor the preparatory fires had disturbed in the least. (16)

Stopped cold by this intense fire, "K" Company, leading the 3rd Battalion assault, moved around to the left and drove towards La Torre, hoping to take that position and then advance on Di Sotta, in the center of the Monterumici line. (See Map "C")

By 0100 hours of 15 April, after suffering considerable casualties from schu mines, "K" Company was occupying positions about 400 yards below La Torre, where they were held up by accurate enemy machine gun fire directed at them from hitherto unsuspected enemy positions. (17)

In the meantime, "L" Company, which had struck to the right of Monterumici, had been able to advance against very light resistance until a point just short of the road west of Fazzano.

"K" Company then attempted to outflank the enemy by sending one platoon to the left of La Torre while another attacked Di Sotta. (See Map "C") The two assault platoons made their way up the steep bluffs leading to their objectives, but upon reaching the crest, were driven back by point-blank automatic weapons fire delivered at them from cellar positions in the ruined houses. (18)

(15) A-2, p. 6; (16) A-2, p. 6; (17) Statement of Capt. Ray Stroup; (18) Personal knowledge, Statement of Capt. Ray Stroup.

cemetery in the saddle between that village and directly above Di Sotta.

As soon as they reached the exposed slope between Di Sotta and Di Sopra, a hail of fire from machine guns, machine pistols, rifle and hand grenades hit them. The fire hit from hidden positions that the night's fighting had not previously revealed, and came at them from Di Sotta beneath them, Di Sopra to their left, and the cemetery directly above them and to their front. (See Map "C") (23)

When excellently directed mortar fire began dropping in on them, the men, completely disorganized, tried to take cover in fox holes in the vineyards on the slope to the right and left of the trail -- only to discover that the fields were mined and the fox holes booby-trapped. A short, furious attack from the cemetery completely disrupted the company and resulted in the death, wounding or capture of most of the men, and the capture of all their radios, thus to all practical purposes taking them out of the fight. (24)

"I" Company, in reserve for the 3rd Battalion, was then called to support "K", and moved on Di Sopra under cover of fire from the supporting tanks. (25) "L" Company had, meanwhile, again been driven back by heavy mortar and machine gun fire. The 2nd Battalion had fared but little better than the 3rd, and after failing to advance in their sector, returned to Fazzano. (26)

By 1800 hours, 16 April, the 3rd Battalion's position was desperate. "K" Company was completely ineffective, and the regimental commander decided to commit the 1st Battalion, his reserve.

(23) Statement of Capt. Ray Stroup; A-2, P. 9; (24) Statement of Capt. Ray Stroup; A-2, P. 9; (25) A-2, P. 9; (26) A-2, P. 10

"L" Company, meanwhile, had after a short and fierce fire fight succeeded in taking their first objective, the enemy outpost at Fazzanello, located well down on the eastward slope of Monterumici ridge. However, when they attempted to proceed further, machine gun and small arms fire from Santa Cecilia halted them abruptly.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the 91st Division, which had moved out at 0300 hours with Mt. Adone as their objective, had encountered fierce resistance, that, combined with the difficult terrain, had prevented them, by 0600 hours, from moving farther than Brento. This left the 350th subject to direct observed artillery and mortar fire from that sector. (19)

To remedy this situation, fighter bombers were called for to work over the enemy positions on Adone, and in anticipation of their arrival at 0715 hours, the 338th Field Artillery Battalion placed a heavy smoke screen on the peak and southeastern slopes of the mountain. (20)

After the nights fighting, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions reorganized, secured replacements, and, with increased heavy mortar and machine gun support, continued the attack. (21)

Strangely enough, with the coming of daylight (16 April), enemy automatic weapons fire ceased completely, and "K" Company was able to move three platoons into the village of Di Sotta and La Torre without any resistance other than an occasional sniper shot. (See Map "C") (22)

Elated by their apparent success, the company moved directly through the two villages, without stopping to check the ruins for enemy soldiers, to assault the two remaining enemy positions on the Monterumici crest -- Di Sopra and the

(19) A-2, p. 8; (20) A-2, p. 8; (21) A-2, p. 9; (22) Statement of Capt. Ray Stroup.

The 1st Battalion, profiting by the experience of the 3rd, planned to have "A" Company attack Di Sotta from La Piana, "C" Company move out from La Valle and take Di Sopra and the cemetery, and "B" Company remain in La Tombe as battalion reserve. (27)

Immediately after darkness, "C" Company moved out, scaling the Monterumici bluff from the left, and at dawn on 17 April, moved through "I" Company and assaulted Di Sopra.

COMPANY "A" PLAN OF ATTACK

When informed of the objective assigned him in the battalion plan of action, "A" Company commander conferred with his platoon leaders and drew up tentative plans. From their reserve position at La Piana, the officers of "A" Company had had a grandstand seat for the entire fighting of 16 April, and had been able to watch, through field glasses, every detail of the action taking place on the slope above them. Consequently, they knew fairly accurately the enemy machine gun positions to be avoided.

In addition, their knowledge of the trail leading to the assault position on the slope before Di Sotta, and of the area around Di Sotta itself had been considerably enhanced by information obtained from wounded brought down during the nights of 15 and 16 April.

The combination of this information, plus that revealed by detailed study of air photos, convinced "A" Company commander that the best assault position was from the slope directly east of Di Sotta. Information obtained from the wounded regarding mine fields led to the decision to make the assault at dawn. (28)

(27) A-2, p. 10; (28) Personal knowledge.

With battalion approval of this tentative plan, "A" Company moved out from La Piana at 2345 hours, 16 April, so as to reach a position below the east slope leading to Di Sotta and allow sufficient time for reconnaissance before making the actual attack at dawn. The trail from La Piana to La Torre followed a cliff, with a deep ravine just below it. The spring rains and washes had so narrowed the trail that it could only be negotiated in single file. (See Map "D")

Though no contact en route was contemplated, it was felt that it would be best to have the company arrive at the assault position in the order it expected to fight. Accordingly, order of movement up the trail was 2nd Platoon, 3rd Platoon, 4th Platoon, Company Headquarters, and Weapons Platoon. (29)

By 0300 hours, 17 April, the company had reached a point about 500 yards east of La Torre. Here the company commander took advantage of the special abilities of some of his men, and sent them south to reconnoitre an off-the-trail route to Di Sotta. Three men were sent out, while the remainder of the company took cover just off the trail.

The three men sent on reconnaissance were of Mexican-Indian decent, and had long previously proven their amazing ability to move swiftly and silently over difficult terrain at night, and to bring back intelligent and accurate reports. Within half an hour, the three were back with word that they had discovered a difficult but passable route along the face of the bluff that would lead to Di Sotta.

With one of the men from the reconnaissance party taking the lead, the company moved out along the bluff. Here the going was extremely slow and difficult, and on many occasions (29) Personal knowledge.

the column had to halt to allow negotiation of a troublesome spot, where each man, in turn would have to hand his weapon and equipment to the man in back of him, cross the gap by jumping or clawing his way, and then have his weapon and equipment thrown to him. For the entire company to cross the area, a total distance of less than 500 yards, require a full hour and a half ! (See Map "D")

By 0500, the company was in position on the bluff directly below Di Sotta, when a radio message was received from battalion that Mt. Adone was still in enemy hands, and that direct observed fire could be expected from that source. (30) Orders were passed up and down the line for all men to dig in, while the company commander and two platoon leaders made their way to the top of the bluff to reconnoitre the assault position. (See Map "E")

As they came to the top of the bluff, mortar fire began to drop near the area where the company was dispersed. This information was radioed to battalion, with a request for smoke on Mt. Adone. Within three minutes, smoke shell bursts could be seen on Adone. The enemy mortar fire continued, but failed to come closer to the company's dispersal area.

At the top of the bluff, the company commander and platoon leaders found that they were separated from Di Sotta by a vineyard slope, about 250 yards long, and at an upward incline of about 30 degrees. To assault Di Sotta from this position would require that the assault force cross this vineyard, every foot of which the enemy could cover with grazing machine gun fire from his positions. Since a frontal assault under these conditions was considered out of the question except in case of direst necessity, it was decided to seek an-

(30) Personal knowledge.

other assault position. (See Map "E")

From their position, the company commander and platoon leaders could see that the vineyard slope to the left of Di Sotta, though equally as steep as the slope facing them, was a great deal shorter, extending for only about 50 yards -- but with the drawback that the bluff dropped off vertically from the end of this slope, and as far as could be seen, the rock face of the bluff offered no means of approach. (See Map "E")

Nevertheless, a reconnaissance party consisting of the 3rd platoon leader and two men was sent out to determine if there were not some possibility of working around the rock face of the bluff to the left slope. Shortly after the reconnaissance party left, Colonel James C. Fry, assistant division commander of the 88th Division, arrived at the observation post. Colonel Fry was considerably worried at the delay in taking the Monterumici feature, which was at this point the last obstacle between the division and its objective at the entrance to the Po Valley, Sasso Bolognese. (31)

A short explanation of the situation by the company commander and a quick look at the slope in front of Di Sotta convinced Colonel Fry of the wisdom of seeking another assault position, although he stressed the fact that Di Sotta must be taken without delay, and that if no other possibility presented itself, a frontal assault would have to be made, despite the inevitable high losses. (32)

At this time, the reconnaissance party returned with word that a very small rock ledge, about long enough to accommodate 30 men and about one foot wide, existed on the (31) Personal knowledge; (32) Personal knowledge.

rock face of the bluff, well to the left of Di Sotta and approximately under the short slope leading to the south end of the village. (See Map "E")

The reconnaissance party also reported that, by ridding themselves of all equipment other than individual weapons, one platoon could make their way to this ledge, using the roots and bushes growing out of the face of the bluff to draw themselves along.

THE ATTACK

After a short consultation, a plan for using this ledge was worked out. Since the 3rd Platoon leader had already reconnoitered the bluff face, it was decided that the 3rd Platoon would work its way into position on the rock ledge and make the assault from there, while the remainder of the company would move up to the front of the slope and support the assault by fire. Additional fire support would be obtained from the heavy machine guns and 81 mm mortars of "D" Company, in firing position on the high ground across the valley, and from the tanks and tank destroyers down in the valley.

The company plan provided for the 3rd Platoon to notify the company command post by radio when they were in position on the ledge, at which time the preparatory fires, to last five minutes, would begin. "D" Company and tank fires would be coordinated by radio between "A" Company and battalion command posts.

After five minutes, heavy machine gun, mortar and tank fires would lift, and the 3rd Platoon would make the assault. It was decided that the light machine guns and individual weapons of "A" Company would continue firing during the

assault, shifting to the right end of the village, and would lift their fires entirely when the 3rd Platoon was observed actually in the left end of the village. (See Map "E") (33)

At the moment the 3rd Platoon entered the left end of the village, the 1st and 2nd Platoons were to come up the front slope into the village and prepare to repel the counter-attack that, all officers felt, was sure to come from the direction of La Torre. If the counterattack did not materialize, the company would, after clearing Di Sotta and reorganizing, move north on the ridge and take La Torre.

With these arrangements made, the 3rd Platoon started working their way around the rock face of the bluff to the ledge -- a process that took about one hour. During this time, sufficient harrassing fire from mortars, machine guns and individual weapons was placed on Di Sotta to keep the enemy there occupied and divert their attention from the 3rd Platoon's move.

Before the 3rd Platoon started to the ledge, it had been ascertained that one enemy machine gun was located at the left end of the village. To take care of this gun when it was definitely spotted, each squad leader in the platoon was equipped with two 60 mm mortar shells wired to rifle grenade adapters so that the mortar shells could be fired as rifle grenades. It was felt that the additional punch of the 60 mm mortar shell would well offset the loss in accuracy.

The first man to reach the ledge was the platoon sergeant, who immediately took up position to observe all he could of the southern end of Di Sotta. By the time the platoon leader arrived on the ledge, he had located the po-
(33) Personal knowledge.

sition of what was later found to be the single enemy machine gun guarding that slope, and pointed it out to the platoon leader. The gun was in the corner of a building, and the masonry ruins provided perfect overhead cover for it, rendering it impregnable to high-angle fire. The platoon leader decided that this gun could be knocked out only by a direct hit of the 60 mm mortar shell rifle grenades.

The three squad leaders were summoned and the target pointed out to them. They were instructed to fire their grenades on the gun position during the preparatory fires, and to attempt to place their grenades directly on the gun. The platoon leader also briefed the squad leaders on their mission, stressing that during the actual assault, all men were to fire continually as they moved forward.

Each squad was also assigned an area of responsibility -- the 1st squad was to take the buildings on the left, directly in front of the assault position, the 2nd squad, the buildings in the center of the village, and the 3rd squad was to skirt the village and take the buildings on the right. All were warned that, until the arrival of the remainder of the company, the men were not to enter cellars or caves but instead to toss in hand grenades and cover the entrance.

Next the company command post was contacted by radio and the company commander informed that all was ready. Less than thirty seconds later, the preparatory fires from the company and the supporting weapons began. The first three 60 mm mortar shell rifle grenades were fired on the machine gun position facing the platoon -- and all went wide of the mark. Of the second three fired, one scored what appeared to be a direct hit, but by this time dust and smoke from tank

and mortar fires so obscured the ruins of the village that it was impossible to determine whether or not the gun had been put out of action.

As the tanks and mortars ceased fire, the men of the platoon pulled themselves over the crest and started up the 50 yard slope in the assault. Steepness of the slope slowed the assault down to a walk, but as no fire was directed on the platoon, it was evident that the mortar shell grenade had hit the enemy machine gun position and had put it out of action.

During the assault, all men of the platoon showed a tendency towards either unwillingness or forgetfulness to fire their weapons as they moved forward, and it was necessary for the platoon leader and platoon sergeant to call men by name and order them to fire. Even with this spur, it is doubtful if more than twenty-five percent of the individual weapons of the platoon were fired at any one time during the assault -- a fact that could have been very costly if the enemy had been expecting the assault to come from the south.

(34)

CAPTURE OF DI SOTTA

However, upon reaching the first ruined building, the men lost all signs of the tendency to refrain from firing. The squad leader of the first squad waved three men into the building, and they fired practically a full clip each into the windows and door before they went in. The attack moved on, two or three men peeling off and going into each door, as it was reached and the 2nd and 3rd squads moving north through the ruins of the village to the areas assigned to them.

(34) Personal knowledge.

Supporting fires of the company had already lifted, and in what seemed to be a matter of seconds, the whole platoon was disposed in the ruins of the village, and grenades could be heard going off -- a sign that cellars were being cleared.

The grenades proved to be extremely persuasive, and enemy soldiers streamed out, hands high above their heads and shouting "Kamerad". As they came out, squad leaders and the platoon guide gave them explicit directions with kicks and rifle butts and moved them down the slope to meet the rest of "A" Company, already on the way up to join the 3rd Platoon in the village.

Just as the rest of the company moved into the village and went into position in the ruins, mortar fire, apparently coming from Mt. Adone, hit Di Sotta. This was taken to be a sign of an impending counterattack, and the 1st and 2nd Platoons, occupying the right end of the village were warned. After about two minutes, the mortar fire moved south in the village, and the enemy counterattack force, numbering approximately sixty men, could be seen moving down the trail from La Torre to Di Sotta.

Light machine guns of the weapons platoon were brought into position, and all men warned to hold fire until the enemy were within twenty yards of the northern buildings of Di Sotta. The enemy approached cautiously, and when met by bursts of automatic weapons fire, dropped to the ground. Shouts of "Kamerad" and "surrender" could be heard so all men were ordered to hold fire.

A German-speaking soldier ^{shouted} hollered to the enemy soldiers, ordering them to stand up, hands high above their heads, without their weapons. "A" Company men could distinctly hear this order, in German, being passed back among the enemy, so it was no surprise when the entire counterattack force, except for a few dead and wounded, stood up, and on order, moved into the village and gave themselves up.

A hurried questioning of the prisoners brought out the information that this counterattack force had come from La Torre, and that less than a platoon of men, mostly wounded, were all the enemy force left there. Acting on this information, the 1st Platoon was sent to La Torre to take that village.

The platoon moved out up the ridge, using the same trail that the counterattack force had taken towards Di Sotta. The platoon was accompanied by the section of light machine guns, and by a German-speaking soldier.

Approximately seventy yards from La Torre, the platoon leader dispersed his platoon into firing positions, and had the machine guns emplaced to fire on the buildings. When all men were in position, he ordered the machine guns and automatic rifles to fire three long bursts, each. Then the German-speaking soldier called to the enemy in La Torre, telling them that they had sixty seconds to come out of the buildings with their hands up, or they would all be killed. The Germans came out in less than thirty seconds.

As soon as the 1st Platoon occupied La Torre, clearing parties were sent into the network of tunnels that existed between the two villages, connecting them and Di Sopra. These tunnels were found to be a forgotten part of the Mt. Adone

galeria system, an ancient tunnel system going completely through Mt. Adone and Monterumici. Many of the tunnels were well-fitted out with living accommodations, including wooden two-decker bunks -- a good many of which were occupied by enemy and "K" Company wounded. Large quantities of small arms ammunition, grenades, rifle grenades, and panzer-fäuste were found stored in the tunnels.

"K" Company's debacle was found to have been effected by these tunnels. As learned from prisoners and liberated members of "K" Company, the enemy manning positions in La Torre and Di Sotta had, at daylight on 16 April, left those positions and moved into the tunnels. From there, they allowed "K" Company to come through the two villages unopposed, but with observers watching their progress closely. When "K" Company was in the most exposed portion of the area, the enemy moved back into their firing positions in Di Sotta and La Torre, thus closing the trap neatly. (35)

One casualty was suffered by "A" Company in the entire attack upon Di Sotta and La Torre -- the platoon runner of the 3rd Platoon was hit by a shell fragment from the enemy mortar concentration just prior to the enemy counterattack on Di Sotta.

Not in chronological order
T About a half-hour previous to the assault on Di Sotta, word had been received from battalion that "C" Company had, after a bitter fire fight and a hot hand-to-hand battle, succeeded in taking Di Sopra and the cemetery, located in the saddle between Di Sopra and Di Sotta -- but at a cost of ten men killed, including the company commander, and 31 wounded. (36)

(35) Personal knowledge, Statement of Capt. Ray Stroup;

(36) A-2, p. 11.

Thus with the capture of Di Sotta and La Torre, enemy resistance on Monterumici was eliminated. 166 prisoners, including wounded, were taken by "A" Company in the two villages and in the network of tunnels underneath. Consequently, by 1830 hours, 17 April, the regiment had secured the entire Monterumici ridge and was ready to continue the attack into the valley to the west and north.

Officers of "A" Company were surprised to note that not one commissioned officer was among the more than 160 prisoners taken in Di Sotta and La Torre. (37) Questioning of the prisoners revealed the startling information that every German commissioned officer had, upon orders from higher headquarters, withdrawn to the rear during the night of 16 April, after leaving orders with their troops to "fight until the last round of ammunition, then surrender." Non-commissioned officers had commanded the enemy units in Di Sotta, Di Sopra and La Torre. (38)

ANALYSIS & CRITICISM

Careful scrutiny of the Monterumici operation brings out one glaring fact -- sad lack of aggressiveness upon the part of the individual infantry soldier. It is certain that, had the 3rd Battalion displayed the aggressiveness that is normally expected of the Infantry, it would not have been necessary for the regimental commander to commit his reserve in order to take his objective.

Officers of "A" Company, in reserve at La Fiana throughout the day of 16 April, were able to see plainly the action that took place on the slopes, and observed many squad-sized groups of "K" and "L" Companies huddled in defilade and in (37) Personal knowledge; (38) Statement of prisoners.

shell holes, where they remained for hours at a time, even though no enemy fire was being placed upon them. In every case, such groups failed to move from cover until an officer approached and took them under his control.

The explanation for this lack of aggressiveness undoubtedly lies in the fact that both officers and men were convinced that the war was practically over, and accordingly had a very understandable desire to preserve their personal safety. It is felt, however, that had junior leaders been more forceful, this tendency could have been overcome.

Under the regimental plan, the 1st Battalion, which had occupied a front-line position directly beneath Di Sotta, Di Sopra and La Torre prior to the attack, was moved from this position to La Tombe, La Piana and La Valle as a diversion, while the 3rd Battalion, previously in reserve, was brought up to make the initial attack on Monterumici.

This plan was without doubt sound, but the advantages gained from this deception were wiped out by the fact that the 3rd Battalion failed to reconnoitre the area they were to attack over.

If each of the forward companies of the 3rd Battalion had sent out a reconnaissance patrol to reconnoitre the route to their assault positions, valuable time would have been saved, and fewer mine casualties experienced. This point is borne out by the fact that "A" Company, in moving over the same ground, also at night, suffered no casualties from mines, due to information obtained from "K" and "L" Company wounded.

Too, if combat patrols had been sent to feel out the enemy defenses on the ridge prior to the attack, "K" Company

would probably have known of many of the enemy machine gun positions that came as such surprises to them during the actual attack. It is realized that patrol activity was suspended prior to the attack as a security measure. However, patrols had been active on the whole front, and particularly at Monterumici during the entire winter. In itself, the suspension of patrol activity served as a warning to the enemy that a special action was being planned.

Another fact that stands out in this operation is the apparent lack of coordination between companies in attacking their company objectives. For example, on the morning of 16 April, "K" and "L" companies started their attacks at approximately the same time. But while "K" Company was moving away from La Torre to escape enemy machine gun fire, "L" Company attempted to attack Fazzano. While "K" Company tried to attack Di Sotta, "L" Company was inactive. Then when "L" Company moved again "K" Company was retreating from Di Sotta.

This lack of coordination was also shown on 17 April, when "A" Company attacked Di Sotta and "C" Company attacked Di Sopra at different times. Had the attacks been coordinated, it is felt that "C" Company would have suffered fewer casualties. As it was, in all of these piecemeal attacks, the Germans were able to devote their total attention to the attack of one company -- and when that was repelled, to that of the next.

Reason for this lack of coordination was due to the fact that, once a battalion was committed, the battalion commander had very little control over his unit. Battalion command posts were located in the valley below the ridge, and the only communication battalion commanders had with

their attacking companies was radio -- which proved ineffective at most times during the attack.

"K" Company's failure to take proper precautions in La Torre and Di Sotta before moving on to Di Sopra on 16 April, was utterly inexcusable. Had La Torre and Di Sotta been properly cleared of enemy personnel when the company moved through, the action would have been over twenty-four hours earlier and many American lives spared.

"A" Company's attack on Di Sotta on 17 April, with one platoon assaulting under covering fires of the remainder of the company and of supporting weapons, provided an excellent example of the efficacy of the basic infantry tactic of fire and manoeuver. During the actual assault, Colonel James C. Fry was moved to remark to "A" Company commander, "This is just like an attack demonstration at Fort Benning".

The reluctance of infantry soldiers to fire their weapons while moving forward in the assault is an old problem to small unit leaders, and is probably based upon the mistaken belief that a soldier who fires is more apt to draw enemy fire than one who does not.

Withdrawal of the German officers from the defense position, and their leaving further conduct of the defense in the hands of non-commissioned officers is highly significant. At the time the officers withdrew, it was obvious to all of the German soldiers on Monterumici that the only future awaiting them was either death or capture. Yet they continued fighting until their positions were overrun. — why?

As was shown by "K" Company's several attempts to find a weak link in the chain of defense through La Torre and Di Sopra, the Germans were experts in organizing their

weapons to the terrain, and religiously observed all of the seven principles of defensive combat. The only approach to Di Sotta that was not covered by fire of at least two automatic weapons was that used by the 3rd Platoon of "A" Company. Questioning of prisoners taken on Di Sotta brought out the fact that the Germans had considered this approach impassable to all but specially equipped mountain troops, and had accordingly failed to defend it in strength.

LESSONS

- ✓ 1. Forceful and aggressive leadership on the part of junior officers will save time and lives.
- ✓ 2. Attacks of the rifle companies should be subject to the coordination and control of the battalion commander at all times.
- ✓ 3. Control can never be any better than communications.
- ✓ 4. Thorough and complete reconnaissance is essential to the success of an attack.
- ✓ 5. A determined defender cannot be driven from a well-organized position by air and artillery bombardment alone.
- ✓ 6. Proper use of supporting weapons will save lives of riflemen.
- ✓ 7. In the defense, no point should be overlooked as a possible route of enemy approach.
- ✓ 8. In the attack, supposedly "impassable" obstacles often offer the best assault route.
- ✓ 9. Development of a large, accurate, high-explosive, point-detonating fragmentation rifle grenade would be of benefit to the infantry soldier.

✓ 10. The basic infantry tactic of fire and manoeuver will, if properly applied, enable the reduction of the best-organized defensive positions.

✓ 11. Thorough knowledge on the part of the small unit leader of the individual capabilities of his men is an aid to success in battle.

✓ 12. Coordination is essential to fire and manoeuver tactics.

✓ 13. Proper use of smoke on enemy-held terrain features observing the battle area will reduce the effectiveness of enemy indirect fire weapons.

✓ 14. Failure to take proper clearance measures in buildings and cellars of a village is suicidal.

✓ 15. Committment of the reserve at the proper moment is the most momentous decision that faces the commander.

✓ 16. Training of the individual soldier in assault fire technique must be stressed until the firing of his piece becomes as automatic as walking.

✓ 17. In the attack or defense, to cover ground by fire is better than to cover it with men.

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