

PHASE VI 135TH INFANTRY DEBARKATION HISTORY

And so, on the cloudy, drizzling day of the 15th of September the forementioned convoy was on its way then to an unknown destination. In spite of the first dismal day, everything soon brightened up considerably making the weather fairly warm, clear and pleasant most of the trip. The Pvt's, Romeo Vellucci of Prov. R.I. and Tony Martino of Brooklyn, New York, both of these men from "K" Company, were largely responsible for the continuous good moral<sup>e</sup> present on-board the "HMS DUBLIN CASTLE", housing the 135th Infantry with some attached troops. They sang songs, were continually jovial and made jokes; they went by the name of the "THE 609'ers". Pvt Martino was later wounded on the beachhead at ANZIO. There were no incidents of importance en route, although at the finish of the journey, it was common knowledge that the WILLIAM P. HENNING, that was in the freighter convoy, which went by way of MALTA and the STRAITS OF MESSINA, was torpedoed and sunk.

On the 20th of September the convoy passed the coast of SICILY, came in sight of the Southwest coast of Italy and dropped anchor in the Gulf of Salerno, Northwest of FAJSPUR on the next day. At the time that the convoy left MALTA, higher command had set NAPLES as the objective, but at once it became clear that the great port would not be taken in time to be used by their convoy. It was still not even certain that the beachhead in the Gulf would be held when the convoy arrived on 29<sup>th</sup> plus 12<sup>th</sup>, 21st of September. Being that the troops had been ordered to load for a port landing in "NAPLES", they found it a slow business to transfer themselves, their baggage, their weapons, vehicles, and stores to landing craft and "ducks" for the choppy passage to the beach. The landing was made across the beach in LC1's and LC8's from the transports. The Battalion landed at various points along a 200 yards of beach in the vicinity South of the GULF River. 1/sgt John Mellen, of Northington, Minnesota, 1/sgt Mike Leonard of Towle, Pennsylvania, both Corporals at this time in "A" Company, were among the many, who learned not to be with those who crowd the "ducks" enroute to shore, for theirs' sank about 1500 yards from shore as a result of the large number of personnel on-board.

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Files VI 135th Infantry Regiment (Cont'd)

Another "duck" was sent from a VC immediately to give them relief from the chest deep water. On the whole, however, everything went along fairly smooth.

The troops assembled on the beach in their unit areas, and after a couple hours, were on their way on a muddy road march inland to an assembly area, it being near ~~XXXXX~~, a mile from the beach, and about 10 miles south of CALPANHA where the next four days were consumed in unloading, assembling of vehicles and equipment, and road marches. The vehicles arrived a day later (the 22nd of September) and the unloading of them commenced, the 23rd. Transportation was furnished to this regiment from the 133rd Regiment and VI Corps during the unloading process. The second Battalion had the second Platoon Anti-tank Company attached. The 135th Infantry Regiment was part of the 5th Army's reserve.

On the 27th of September, the Regiment was alerted for immediate movement to the front. It rained that night quite suddenly and heavily, causing many tents to collapse. P/S Schlenker of Cincinnati, Ohio, P/S J. M. Koode, Farmerville, Texas, and P/S Thompson of Browns Valley, Minnesota, all of "I" Company were among the men who slept in a hay-barn the remainder of the night, listening to the booms of thunder and flashes of lightning raid the unit area. Much equipment was wet.

On the following morning at about 0530, the second Battalion with second platoon of Anti-tank Company attached, 12th Field Artillery Battalion and "B" Battery 105MM AAA Automatic weapons Battalion crossed the I.P. at a road junction near the small village of ~~XXXXX~~ (about 3 miles North of ~~XXXXX~~) and cleared that road junction in about 2 1/2 hours. The 3rd Battalion furnished breakfast and policed the area, while the first Battalion took care of barracks bags. Due to the heavy rains during this period, the roads were almost impassable at some points causing the newly formed Regimental Combat team some difficulty in moving efficiently, however this group continued to advance along route 7 to ~~XXXXX~~ then North through ~~XXXXX~~. On the 29th the remainder of the Regimental Combat team was alerted and Colonel ~~XXXXX~~, Regimental Commander sent the Liaison of ~~XXXXX~~ along the proposed route to check its condition for his movement.

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Chapter VI 13 - MONTFALCONE (Cont'd)

At 0730 hours, on the 30th, the leading elements of the remainder of the Regimental Combat Team, with the exception of the first Battalion and Cannon Company passed the selected I.F. in the vicinity of ~~XXXXXX~~ lead by Lieutenant Colonel James S. Hall, Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion. Attached to this convoy for the movement were the following units: 34th Division Signal Company, 34th Division Ordnance Company, 34th Division Artillery Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 34th Division Reconnaissance Troops, 2 gun Companies of the Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the 2634 Quartermaster Company. Air guards were stressed and alert on the vehicles with all the .50 caliber machine guns manned at all times. The interval between the vehicles was also of prime importance. The motor convoy was enroute North via route 18 to MATTIPAGLIA, East on route 19 to ~~XXXXXX~~, North on route 91 to OLIVETO, North to CALABRITA, Northwest it left route 91, several miles farther, and rode on route 7 to LIONI, and continued on route 7 until the assembly area, 10 kilometers East of MONTFALCONE, was reached at about 1700 hours that evening. The first Battalion was still South near PASTUM with Cannon Company, awaiting Divisional orders to join the Combat Team with Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Miller, Commanding Officer of the First Battalion, in <sup>h</sup>charge of the troops.

Also on that same evening of the 30th of September, the second Battalion was ordered to move by motor to an assembly area at a road junction Southwest of MONTFALCONE where, when they arrived, were told to fuel up, and be prepared to move again. On the following day, the first of October, they were on their way to an assembly area a mile Northwest of MONTFALCONE where they arrived about noon. Every unit was on the move continuously and this Regiment was no exception. Lieutenant Colonel Charles J. Verest, Regimental Executive Officer acting as a coordinator aided the second Battalion in arriving at a new locality approximately 1 1/2 miles North of MONTFALCONE in the early evening of the same day.

It seems the second Battalion was never at rest, for no sooner had they arrived in the vicinity of MONTFALCONE when they were instructed to be prepared to move from their

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D R A F T

PHASE VI 135TH INFANTRY REGIMENT MI TOLO (Cont'd)

present area through the first Battalion, 133rd Infantry (near PLOZZA) on Division order. Meanwhile Lieutenant Colonel Miller arrived from PASTENA with his first Battalion and led it to a new bivouac area at MONTELLA near PLOZZA at 2200 hours.

On the second of October at 0700 hours, the 3rd Battalion along with Anti-tank Company moved to a new assigned area in the vicinity of BRUCCANO and then on to a new area in MONTESANO. This left the first Battalion in the PRATOLA area about 1000 yards from the SABATO river.

Meanwhile on the evening of the 1st of the month, a detachment from Regimental Headquarters, moved forward to take command, of the PRATOLA sector, when the second Battalion would pass there through the first Battalion, 133rd Infantry. However, this was fruitless, because in the late afternoon of that day, the Corps Commander indicated to the 34th Divisional Commander, General Ryder, that it was his intention to assemble the entire Division as Corps Reserve. They were to await the concentration of the balance of the Division which was being delayed because the high seas were making the unloading of motor transport difficult off the shores of SALERNO. Consequently, at 1830 hours, General Ryder issued orders to Col. Robert T. Ward, Regimental Commander of the 135th Infantry, not to pass the 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry through the 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry. The Regiment was ordered, however, to concentrate West of the CALORE river. The CALORE river makes a big arc as it flows Westward past BENEVENTO then North to PONTE, West again to the vicinity of TELESE and South where it flows into the VOLTURNO river. It was in this area that the Regiment was ordered to assemble, and it was given the mission of patrolling to the Northwest. This left the second Battalion behind, holding its positions in the PRATOLA sector, and continuing to send security patrols east of the SABATO river, which starts near TUFO and flows almost due North to its intersection with the CALORE river, a mile west of BENEVENTO making a "T" intersection. The second Battalion contacted the 3rd Division on their left and reported some shelling and small arms fire in their sector.

The second Battalion moved on and secured a crossing of the SABATO River on the

D R A F T

D R A F T

PHASE VI 135TH INFANTRY REGIMENT HISTORY (Cont'd)

3rd of October after receiving a slight artillery and small arms fire, The attalion took no casualties from the shelling, although there were a number of civilians killed, the wounded being cared for by the 2nd Battalion medics. Contact was made again by the second Battalion, with the 3rd Division on the left, at 1700 hours, and then, the Battalion moved on Northwest to TUFO here it was relieved by elements of the 3rd Division. During this day, the 135th Infantry assembled in the PRATOLA, MONTAGLIARITO, MONTAPUGGIO area. It was in these areas that German documents were picked up, ofly enough, indication that the enemy 135th Flak Regiment had occupied the area shortly before the 135th Infantry's arrival. Documents recorded paric in 2 enemy units, lists of losses in SICILY and ITALY, Hitler's instructions for handling of ITALIAN exsoldiers, records of the number of American planes destroyed in SICILY and ITALY and the naming of our A 36's "JABS". There were also lists of subunits in the 135th Flak Infantry Regiment with a complete list of all their officers and non-coms. One document mentioned a man called "Stehel" as Company Officer of JABS and announced the Vatican having a double guard--all this long-range information was collected and given to J-2.

The first Battalion moved to the vicinity of ST. GIOVANNI (which lies South East of RENNEVENTO about 12 miles), followed by the 3rd Battalion whose foot elements marched via MONTAGLIARITO-LA SERENA to an assembly area in the vicinity of MONTAPUGGIO. The second Battalion remained in position near TUFO with outpost missions, still continuing to be relieved by elements of the 3rd Division. Additional J-2 information was picked up in documents found in the Regimental area which included information on Adolph Hitler's notorious "Heiber Standard" SS engineers. Many of the men in this unit will remember their short stay in this vicinity, for during lulls in training, men would be faced with a long steep climb in order to enter MONTAPUGGIO on the top of the hill, however, the town was very friendly to the men, giving them an opportunity to relax in the evenings with dances, etc. It might be added, that here, ever since the Regiment first landed in the hills of MONTAPUGGIO near MONTAPUGGIO, training was interrupted only by the moving to the many assembly areas, as they followed the advance of the troops that were engaged with

PHASE VI 135TH INFANTRY REGIMENT HISTORY (Cont'd)

the enemy. The training included the study of new weapons and thorough tactical development with particular emphasis on anti-tank rockets and anti-tank grenades.

On the 4th Of October plans were being made for the assembly and movement of the 135th to the ALTAVILLA area, 12 miles approximately South of BENEVENTO and while these plans were being drawn up, the second Battalion continued to patrol its ground between TUFO and South PAULINA.

At 1030 hours the Division Commander had a conference with the Regimental Commanders, Regiment Executives, Battalion Commanding Officers and their executive officers giving them his plan for movement of the 135th and the rest of the Division to the North-West. Also there was a discussion of tactics employed by the Germans in this delaying action and possible counter measures that could be taken. On the 5th of October the second Battalion moved forward again this time to the vicinity of ALTAVILLA, while the 1st Battalion moved to the vicinity of TUFO.

Preparatory to moving the Regiment in South of MONTESARCHIO. Two days later, the second Battalion had closed in on the MONTESARCHIO area with the transportation of the Regiment on the West side of the blown bridge North of ALTAVILLA. The bridge at the sulphur mine about 1 1/2 miles Northwest of TUFO was being rebuilt and the Regiment marched from the vicinity of MONTAFUNCO via ALTAVILLA where it was shuttled to a bivouac area South of MONTESARCHIO. The day's movements were handicapped by rain, which made the by-passes almost impossible and 109th Engineers of the 135th Combat Team worked on the roads throughout the day and night.

By 0620 hours of the 4th of October, the 135th had completed its movement and at 1020 hours orders were on their way down for the Regiment to be prepared to move out of the MONTESARCHIO area. Colonel Ward, Lieutenant Colonel Miller, Major McCulloch, and Lieutenant Colonel Hall reported to the Division Headquarters and received plans for the relief of the 30th Infantry by the 135th Infantry. They went forward on a reconnaissance to MONTE DELLA CORTE and contacted Colonel Rogers of the 30th Infantry. After orientation by Colonel Rogers, the 3-3's were ordered to bring the Battalions forward in the order

PHASE VI 135TH INFANTRY REGIMENT HISTORY (Cont'd)

of second Battalion, first Battalion, third Battalion and the relief was to be effected by the similarly numbered Battalions of the 135th Infantry. Relieving the 30th Infantry Major McCulloch sent forward to contact the second Battalion in the vicinity, Northwest  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles and reconnoitered the area in the vicinity west of that town. Lt. Col. Miller went to the first Battalion area in the vicinity East of MELIZZANO about 2 miles and Lt. Col. Hall to the vicinity of FRASSO. The coordination of the relief was left to the two Regiments concerned. A 3rd Division order was received for the withdrawal of all but one Company of each Battalion of the 30th Infantry, which further complicated the night relief by the 135th Infantry.

The second and first Battalions, in that order, were detrucked, after dark, at a crossroad due south about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from DICENTA, (about 4 miles West on the road leading away from SAINT ANITA). The relief of the second Battalion was effected without difficulty, in spite of some mortar and artillery fire around 0200 hours. Because of the difficulty of shuttling with organic transportation, the first Battalion did not arrive at the detrucking point until 0215. Distance, darkness, and mud kept Lt. Col. Miller from returning to meet his company commanders until 0200. He oriented the company commanders in his Command Post with first Lieutenant John F. Lyong of "A" Company, Captain Kimble F. Midkiff of "B" Company, Captain Leslie F. Bailey of "C" Company and Captain Arnold F. Brandt of "D" Company all being there, and moved out at 2300. By 0600 hours, daylight had broken, and neither Lt. Col. Miller nor his troops had arrived at the Command Post of the first Battalion of the 30th Infantry. Bad roads, rains, and a black night made it extremely heavy going. The 9th of October, the 1st Battalion moved over trails and roads (if they can be called "roads" in their condition) very deep with mud. The march was eight miles during intermittent rains. All this together with an extremely black night made the difficulties indescribable and slow going. The 1st Battalion did not arrive in the rear of their area until 0745 hours, but by 0830 hours, the relief had been effected. The daylight, fortunately, was obscured by a heavy fog which did not

D R A F T

PHASE VI 135TH INFANTRY REGIMENT HISTORY (Cont'd)

lift until later in the morning. The positions occupied could not, however, be adjusted until the dark hours in the coming night.

On the next day (the 9th of October), the second Battalion reconnoitered positions in the vicinity of LIMATOLA preparatory to sending one Company to relieve elements of the 15th Infantry. They were directed to hold the LIMATOLA area until passed by elements of the 168th Infantry. The second and first Battalions were given the mission of reconnoitering the VOLTURNO River between and the junction of the VOLTURNO and CALORE Rivers (which was due south of AMOROSI about 3 miles) for possible crossings.

On the morning of the 9th, the bridges at S. AGATA had not been repaired. The 3rd Battalion was forced to detruck there, for the 10 mile march to the vicinity of FRASSO. They detrucked at SAINT AGATA at 0915 hours and moved out.

Captain Roy J. Erickson, Executive Officer of second Battalion made a reconnaissance of the LIMATOLA area, but the order to send one Company to that area was rescinded. The 3rd Battalion completed their relief at 1600 hours.

Three days were spent in night patrolling of both sides of the river and denying the Germans observation from SOROPACA. Fire communication during the period was difficult to maintain, and intermittent shelling of the DUMENTA-AMOROSI Road and the positions the Battalion occupied, limited the supply of the Battalions by vehicles to 3 or 4 jeeps each night. The rear Command Post of the first Battalion, at a spot near a road leading from FRASSO about 2 miles southwest of that town, was shelled on the afternoon of the 10th. A direct hit on Executive Officer Major Robert V. Shinn's jeep killed two (first Sgt. Stanley H. Woodmont and 1/c. Wilfred J. Lane, both of Headquarters Company, first Battalion) and injured three others. Most of the fire, apparently, came from tanks and self-propelled guns in the vicinity of ANCONISI. After our artillery got into positions, the enemy shelling was less intense.

On the 11th of October, Corporal Harvey W. Hornberger was in charge of mess detail feeding "F" Company's outpost in the vicinity of SQUILLE at 2000 hours. As the detail



D R A F T

D R A F T

PHASE VI 135TH INFANTRY REGIMENT HISTORY (Cont'd)

(5 men) was returning, they were fired on by a platoon from "D" Company at a road block about 1½ miles north of BUISANTA. The Corporal ordered his men to lie down while he went forward to stop the fire. He disappeared and was not seen again. The area was searched on the morning of the 10th but no trace of him was found. An enemy patrol was operating south of the river about 2000 yards and he may have been captured.

The second Battalion had several night encounters with enemy patrols. Our patrols were successful in selecting 3 points as suitable river crossings, one of which was a former ferry crossing, and another an old dam that might take a few vehicles.

Captain Thomas W. Chagin, then a first Lt., hailing from Pennsylvania, assigned to "I" Company as commanding officer, received information that 4 Italians were in the PIAO area, near his command post, giving vital data to the enemy. The Captain took Pfc. Claudiella of Danfield, New Jersey, Pfc. Leonid of Brooklyn, New York and 2 others, all from "I" Company in a jeep and went to the house where the 4 Italians were staying. It was about ½ mile from "I" Company's assembly area. Although it was a deep misty evening, everything went smoothly and the 4 Italians were picked up at 2000 hours and given to the second Battalion -2 for action.

A civilian curfew was in effect between the hours of 1800 and 0530 hours during the night and no civilians were allowed on any highway. All commanders and Military Police were authorized and directed to enforce this regulation. A.C. posted necessary notices in all towns. This helped a good deal because many civilians were the source of more than a little trouble, with a few here and there being picked up as spies, enemy in civilian clothes, and were as a whole, nuisances everywhere.

Lieutenant Bifore picked up a civilian cutting wire and the civilian claimed a 3rd Division Officer told him he could have wire. Evacuated under guard, the Division released the Italian after questioning him and put the SIC on the job.

220 replacements and 39 hospital returnees arrived at 1550 hours on the 10th and the plan was to assign them to the various Weapons Companies, to fill them up where needed.

D R A F T

D R A F T

CHAPTER VI 135TH INFANTRY REGIMENT HISTORY (Cont'd)

Service Company delivered the men as far as the vehicles could go, then guides from the organizations, led them the rest of the way. The Service Company massed the men before they left for their assignments.

The second battalion sent a platoon to report to Commanding General, Division Artillery, at a position about 2 miles southwest of DUGENTA to do outpost duty for the Artillery Command Post. The platoon was relieved shortly by the 168th Infantry.

October the 11th at 2000 hours, Lieutenants Henley, Hauser, and Woodring were at the regimental Command Post, having just returned from school. Also on this day the 135th finally relieved all of the 30th Infantry of the 3rd Division and at 1900 hours the next day, moved forward to assigned areas immediately south of the VOLTURNO River.

This ended the regiment's first phase in ITALY.

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