



The
34TH
INFANTRY
DIVISION



LT. COL. R.T. JACOBSON



The **STORY**
of the
34th INFANTRY
DIVISION

Louisiana ... to Pisa



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The material in this story has been passed by the
United States censor and may be mailed home.

This item donated to the Minnesota National Guard
by the family of WWII Red Bull Lt Col Robert Jacobson.

Right: Major General Charles W. Ryder,
former Commanding General of the 34th Division.

Below: Major General Charles L. Bolte,
present Commanding General of the 34th Division.



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FOREWORD

This is the story of an Infantry Division.

The tale is worth telling because it relates how a group of Americans was formed into a fighting team and how the team remains even though some of the men who compose it pass on. This is the record of the first American Division to be sent to the European Theater of War after Pearl Harbor. It is the account of more days in combat than any other American Division has had thus far in World War II.

It is the story of a long, hard trek.

CHAPTER I

IRELAND — Beginning

The entry of the United States into the war found the 34th Infantry Division already organized. Formed from the National Guard of Iowa, Minnesota, and North and South Dakota, the Division was inducted into Federal service on 10 February 1941 and, after basic training at Camp Claiborne, took part in the Louisiana maneuvers. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, certain units were dispatched to key places in the southern states for security purposes, but hardly had they settled down to their first war job when they were ordered to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for the War Department had selected the 34th to be the first American division to go to the European Theater of War in World War II. The destination was Northern Ireland.

The Commanding General, with a small staff group and some elements of the Division, left for overseas almost at once to prepare for the main body. During their absence, and on practically no notice, the Division rapidly streamlined itself from a square to a triangular Division, which meant, unfortunately, that several units had to leave the Division. There was little time for regrets, though, for in three waves between 15 January 1942 and 13 May 1942 the Division shipped out, so that by the end of May the whole formation had concentrated in Ulster. The Division at once began a training program for small units which, especially since it was being executed overseas, had rather more urgency than the Louisiana maneuvers.

The country of Northern Ireland is wild and wet. Jagged hills and bare moors are dotted with peat-bogs and cut by brown mountain torrents. The Division soon became accustomed to the difficulties of the cross-country movements which later were to form part of their daily existence in combat. Almost as soon as the Division had arrived in Ireland a call was made for volunteers to create the 1st Ranger Battalion, which may be said to have had its origin in the 34th Infantry Division. In order to create team spirit and cooperation with our British Allies, a number of exercises involving the service of both nations were held. Training for combat was intensified after Major General Charles W. Ryder assumed command of the Division on 12 June 1942, for the General was certain that more active duties than garrisoning a base lay ahead.

King George and Queen Elizabeth
visit 34th Division in Ireland.



CHAPTER II

ALGIERS — Pretending

In the early part of August confidential orders were received to move the 168th Regimental Combat Team from Ireland to Scotland in preparation for an undisclosed combat mission. While in Scotland the 168th RCT underwent rugged training for amphibious and mountain warfare. A small inkling of the type of operation which lay in the offing was obtained when volunteers were requested for No. 1 and No. 6 Commando, British units who specialize in amphibious raids and whose toughness is a byword in the Allied services. As training progressed, further orders were received from the High Command to constitute a planning group which was to move to London on an extremely secret mission. It was in London that it first became known that elements of the 34th Infantry Division had been selected to take a large part in the first big Allied offensive of the war — the landing in North Africa. The mission was to seize the port of Algiers and to insure that it was kept open for the supply of an Allied army which, moving rapidly eastward, was to occupy Tunisia, taking Rommel's Afrika Korps in the rear.

The Allied force which General Ryder was to command was given the name "Eastern Assault Force" and was to land near Algiers at precisely the same hour at which two other Allied task forces hit the beaches near Oran and Casablanca. It is not of great importance here to study the details of this gigantic operation; it is enough to say that the

Eastern Assault Force arrived off Algiers at the appointed time, 0100 hours on 8 November 1942. Due to certain errors, not all of the assault infantry waves were put ashore at the right places. In the case of the 168th Infantry a delay of several hours was caused by the landing of a battalion 17 miles away from its designated beach. Nevertheless, so thorough had been the briefing of all ranks on the situation and mission that the heights overlooking Algiers were under our control less than 12 hours after the first landing craft scraped upon the beach. The 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry had joined the expedition at almost the last minute, being given the task of landing from two destroyers after they had smashed the boom guarding the entrance to the harbor. Although a gallant attempt was made to put this plan into execution the boom proved a more difficult proposition than first was thought and before the leading destroyer could bring up alongside the mole, French searchlights and guns had been alerted and severe damage was inflicted upon the two small ships. The infantry who managed to get ashore were opposed by Senegalese troops and French tanks - more than a match for the Americans who had only small arms. When our troops had fired all their ammunition their commander surrendered to prevent further bloodshed.

Meanwhile, a second American Combat Team and a British Brigade seized important airfields south of Algiers while the 168th Infantry had patrols into the southwestern outskirts of the city. Throughout the whole of this skirmishing, negotiations were going on between General Ryder, as the Allied representative, and General Juin, French

commander.

On the morning of 9 November, a little over 24 hours after the assault waves touched down, a conference was held in the main fort of Algiers and an armistice arranged which came into final effect on 11 November.



Convoy nearing coast of Algiers.

CHAPTER III

FIRST DAYS IN TUNISIA — *Skirmishing*

Their mission in Algiers completed, elements of the Eastern Assault Force were moved to Tunisia with the 1st British Army. On 15 November the 175th Field Artillery Battalion was detached from the Division and left Algiers for Tunisia. The battalion was ordered to Medjez el Bab to support a French unit already fighting the German-Italian enemy, and went into action on 17 November, repelling an infantry-tank attack. Division troops attached to No. 1 and No. 6 Commando also went into action at the same time on another part of the Tunisian front. On 24 December the 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry was attached to the 12th Air Force in Tebessa while the Anti-tank Company, 168th Infantry was sent to Biskra, a French desert outpost. The 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry was ordered to Constantine on 11 January to guard lines of communication and on 29 January the remainder of the regiment was ordered to the Gafsa-Sbeitla area for operations under command of the 1st Armored Division. It will be seen that at this time the 168th RCT was scattered into a number of small units while the rest of the Division was in an entirely different area.

On 3 January 1943 those units of the 34th which had been left behind in the British Isles landed at Oran and after a short stay in an extremely muddy assembly area just south of the port, closed in at Tlemcen, an ancient city 90 miles southwest of Oran. The 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry moved

from Algiers to rejoin the Division at Tlemcen but to offset this the 2nd Battalion, 133rd Infantry was assigned to Allied Force Headquarters as guard troops. That portion of the Division in the Tlemcen area carried out a rigorous training program which culminated in the receipt of orders on 30 January to move to the area of Maktar, Tunisia, and to relieve elements of the 1st U.S. Infantry Division and French troops under command of the French XIX Corps. While the majority of the 34th Infantry Division was getting ready for combat the 168th Infantry and the 175th Field Artillery Battalion already were taking part in a kind of Indian warfare in Tunisia.

An over-all picture of the Division at this time is virtually impossible to draw, so scattered had the formation become. It may be mentioned, however, that the capture of Sened Station in southern Tunisia on 31 January was the first important action for elements of the 168th Infantry. The regiment did not regather all of its component units until the first week in February when, under command of the 1st Armored Division, the 168th took up positions in the vicinity of Sidi Bou Zid near Faid Pass. The regiment was still in these positions when the main portion of the 34th closed into Maktar and began the relief of French troops in the sector between Pichon and El Ala. The 133rd Infantry, last element of the Division to close into the Maktar area, had barely completed the relief of the French in the sector south from El Ala to the Fondouk highway, when the German breakthrough at Faid was reported. In the face of the enemy successes south of the Division we were ordered to withdraw

30 kilometers west to a new defense line.

In the meantime the 168th Infantry, engulfed in the rush of German infantry and armor, was surrounded and cut to pieces with very heavy losses. Some of the troops managed to infiltrate through the enemy ring and make their way to Allied lines once more, but when the stragglers were brought together only about half of the regiment remained; the others were killed or captured.

On 18 February the main part of the 34th Division, with the 18th Regimental Combat Team (1st Infantry Division) attached, was defending a gap in the mountains leading to the Sbiba - Rohia highway. The Germans moved against this line with powerful armored and infantry forces but, although German tanks succeeded in infiltrating into our positions, all enemy efforts to occupy ground were neutralized by the massed fire of our artillery, reinforced by a number of efficient French units. However, the German attack which had overrun the 168th Infantry had made such progress through Kasserine Pass that it threatened to envelop the southern flank of the defense line which the 34th was holding. Accordingly, on the night 22-23 February the Division was ordered to readjust its lines.

The enemy, to our surprise, did not exploit his advance and on the morning of 23 February our reconnaissance disclosed that the Germans had withdrawn.

Consequently, a mobile group consisting of a Battalion of the 135th Infantry, some French tanks and the Division reconnaissance troop, supported by Field Artillery, was ordered to make a reconnais-

sance south from Sbiba to Sbeitla while a portion of the force proceeded east to the Arab village of El Ala. Both these objectives were approximately 40 kilometers away from the starting point - which gives a good idea of the open nature of the fighting of those days.

Progress was slow. The 109th Engineer Battalion had risen magnificently to their first combat assignment when they made a 35-mile road in three days to assist our relief of the French. They now demonstrated their worth again in the large-scale mine-clearing operation necessary to permit our scouting forces to advance.

On about 25 February a considerable reorganization of Allied forces in Tunisia was completed and the 34th Infantry Division passed to command of the American II Corps. During the next few days the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 751st Tank Battalion were attached, followed after a few days by the return of the 175th Field Artillery Battalion and the 168th Infantry. The latter had had a brief period for rest and refitting after their experience at Faid Pass, and the 34th Infantry Division was exceedingly lucky to have been able to draw upon trained soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division for replacements to bring our battered regiment up to full fighting strength.

Men who had left the Division in Scotland to fight in No. 1 and No. 6 Commando, after making a brilliant reputation in operations near Bizerte and around the notorious Green Hill and Bald Hill, also rejoined the Division at this time.

The 34th Infantry Division was once again together to settle down to learn warfare from scratch

and to build themselves up to where they could count upon beating the Germans wherever they were found. Strong reconnaissance was continued to Sbeitla and eastwards through barren rocky country to the pass of Kef el Ahmar.

KEF EL AHMAR



CHAPTER IV

SBEITLA - HADJEB et AIOUN - Scouting

On 4 March reconnaissance had reached a state where it was possible to consider a resumption of aggressive action. The Division was ordered to make a demonstration in the direction of Pichon - El Ala (the place where the Division had first entered the line and 40 odd kilometers east of the front then held) in support of a large scale offensive which jumped off many miles to the south near Gafsa. The demonstration force consisted of the 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry with tanks, anti-aircraft artillery, field artillery, the reconnaissance troop and the ex-commando force; a portion of the 133rd Infantry guarded the route of approach and withdrawal by blocking to the southeast. The demonstration force, before it withdrew, penetrated to the outskirts of Pichon with armored reconnaissance vehicles confirming the fact that the enemy occupied this place in some strength.

Following the demonstration the main line of resistance of the Division was moved 10 kilometers to the east where it was sited to run due north and south since the re-occupation by Allied troops of the Kasserine Pass minimized any threat to our positions from the south.

By the middle of March the 34th Division line was based roughly on a north-south range of hills some 50 kilometers west of the German positions. The country in between was rocky and sandy, uninhabited except for small bands of Arabs and one or two families of European settlers who farm-

ed some of the land in the vicinity of water holes. The mountains for the most part were steep and had vegetation only on their lower slopes — toward the top they were completely barren. In the whole of the flat land between our own lines and the Germans', cross-country movement by armor was extremely easy since the only barriers were the dried up stream beds called "oueds" which criss-crossed the countryside but which were not formidable tank barriers. The only concealment came from scattered clumps of cactus or stunted olive trees which were interspersed over the ground.

Following the success of the American drive on Gafsa in the south the 34th Infantry Division undertook the job of clearing the plain between its line and the Germans' so that an attack could be launched to seize the key town of Kairouan many miles away. Reconnaissance was pushed to Kef el Ahmar and to Sbeitla. Being inexperienced in warfare our troops were sometimes out-witted by the enemy, notably at Kef el Ahmar where on one occasion one of our rifle companies was ambushed by the Germans at heavy cost to ourselves. When Sbeitla had been reached, the reconnoitering elements turned northeastward and made good progress along the road to Hadjeb el Aioun. Many minefields and demolitions were encountered enroute and bold counter-reconnaissance operations by the Germans made this phase of our activity very exciting. Motorized elements of the Division penetrated to El Ala and then turned south towards Djebel Trozza to come out on the highway near Hadjeb el Aioun where our elements linked up again.

This was truly open warfare. There were no

flanks, no front and practically no rear. One had to be prepared for enemy in every direction. Progress was registered in miles, not in yards. The German airforce was a constant threat and considerable movements of troops took place under the cover of darkness with total black-out.



Tunisian flatland.

CHAPTER V

FONDOUK - Beating

By 25 March our scouting operations had been completed and the Division received the order for its first major attack in World War II. The mission was to jump off from the river line five kilometers northeast of Hadjeb el Aioun and to advance astride a highway to capture and hold Fondouk Gap and the long ridge of mountains which ran in a semi-circle southward and then westward from the Pass. All intermediate objectives were rapidly taken. By late 27 March our troops, with the 135th Infantry on the left, the 168th Infantry on the right, and the 109th Engineer Battalion in a screening role further to the right, had reached the mountains.

The Germans held their line in strength. They had spent a considerable amount of time and effort to prepare positions in the solid rock, many of them reinforced with railroad ties and steel girders. The approaches were bare and flat, completely devoid of cover. Barbed wire and minefields on the bottom slopes of the hills greatly increased the dangers of our assault. Maneuvering was virtually impossible since the enemy could see everything that went on in the flat land. The operation was simply a head-on assault in the face of withering fire from an opponent having ample ammunition and virtual immunity from our counter-fire. With great bravery our troops stormed the enemy position again and again, each time being halted by a wall of fire before they could even carry the first ridge line. Casualties were heavy and grew daily heavier. In their first

large-scale action our troops were stunned to find themselves up against an almost impossible task.

On 1 April the Division was ordered to abandon its efforts and to withdraw to a temporary line until further plans could be made.

It must not be thought, however, that nothing had been achieved by this gallantry. The Allied High Command had desired that German troops be diverted to the center of the line, that is, the 34th Infantry Division sector. There, they would be unable to influence the large scale American attack in the south toward Maknassy — where there were great opportunities of cutting Rommel's line of retreat. For a week following our disengagement, the Division was exposed to harassing attacks by the German airforce and artillery while our units could do little to reconnoiter the enemy's position in the face of his commanding observation.

On 4 April the Division was attached to the British IX Corps for a further operation to seize Fondouk Gap. The plan was that a British infantry brigade would seize the hills to the north. Upon the opening of Fondouk Gap a British armored division would move along the highway to Kairouan and it was hoped to catch a large part of Rommel's forces as they continued their rapid flight northward in front of the Eighth Army. The 135th Infantry on the right and the 133rd Infantry on the left moved up under cover of darkness to a line of departure in the open ground at the foot of the mountain. Dawn had broken before the artillery preparation had lifted and our troops began the advance. Progress was very difficult and costly. The assault battalions were pinned down by machine gun and mortar fire from

enemy positions, so well camouflaged and so perfectly sited that it was virtually impossible to neutralize them even with artillery fire.

The British attack on the left had gone rather better and by evening the northern buttress of the Gap had been captured. On the following day a great effort was made by the 133rd Infantry which succeeded in clearing the first hill of the objective. That evening the armored division sent a company of tanks through the minefield protecting the Gap, and although the bulk of the tanks was lost, a path was cleared for the remaining units who followed in rapid succession. The Germans, threatened with the encirclement from the north, withdrew to Kairouan and the Division completed the occupation of the enemy position. A motorized infantry force immediately was sent in the wake of the armor to occupy Kairouan but this mission was soon taken over by British troops and the 34th Infantry Division moved to a training area in the vicinity of Maktar on 15 April.

Pillbox on North African coast.



CHAPTER VI

HILL 609 - Conquering

Without exaggeration it may be said that the Division was transformed during the next few days. After a very gruelling and somewhat discouraging introduction to heavy combat all units passed through a most rigorous week of training with special emphasis on night attacks and the cooperation between infantry and artillery in the assault behind a rolling barrage.

By 22 April the Tunisian front had shrunk to a relatively small area in the northeastern corner where the Germans were preparing a strong defense of their last link with the African continent, covering Bizerta and Tunis. II Corps was moved rapidly and secretly to take over the extreme left flank of the Allied front and, initially, the 34th Infantry Division was placed in Corps reserve.

By 24 April the American attack had progressed to a point where it was considered desirable to relieve a portion of the 1st Infantry Division. Accordingly, the 168th Infantry and later the remainder of the Division entered the line on the 1st Infantry Division's left. The sector of advance given to the 34th followed the railroad from Beja to Mateur along a river valley which also for part of its length carried a narrow, serpentine road.

The terrain of northern Tunisia was quite a change from that further south. The hills, while just as steep, had considerably more vegetation and the lower slopes were extensively cultivated. As before, though, the higher peaks were bare and jagged.



HILL 609

ed and often so steep that to climb them, even without weapons or opposition, was a considerable feat. In order to further the Corps plan of seizing the important communication center of Mateur, to the northeast of our sector, it was first necessary to secure the dominating terrain — Hill 609.

After stubborn fighting during which our troops showed that they had learned well how to follow an artillery barrage, the attack swung eastward into the hills which lay in the path of our advance to Hill 609. The 168th Infantry protected the left flank of the Division by seizing three high peaks on successive days while the 135th Infantry on the right proceeded to make progress at the rate of one hill a day, using the cover of night to deploy for its attack. The 133rd Infantry was used to support the 135th Infantry during this movement for the exhausting fighting necessitated periodic reliefs of the assault battalions.

By 29 April the Roman ruins lying about 1000 yards west of Hill 609 had been secured and on the following day there began the brilliant encirclement of the hill, during which one battalion of the 133rd Infantry began movement to the north and east while a battalion of the 135th Infantry seized Hill 531.

This feature had originally been included within the sector of the 1st Infantry Division who captured it but were later repulsed by a vicious German counterattack. For the protection of our own force it was necessary that we secure the hill whether it was included in our own sector or not. Accordingly, one battalion of the 135th Infantry stormed it and thereby enabled a further battalion to pass through its

Using a screen of artillery shells very skillfully the infantry closed to hand grenade and bayonet range. Darkness had fallen and fighting of the most bitter kind took place in conditions where only excellent control and leadership prevented friend from killing friend. Toward morning one platoon succeeded in forcing its way up the goat trail which the Germans had believed was not a feasible means of approaching their positions, and took the stubborn men of the "Barentin" regiment by surprise from the rear. Temporarily stunned, the enemy was quickly overcome and Hill 609 was ours. Immediately a battalion was placed in occupation of it and our artillery forward observers accompanying the foremost infantry elements soon were directing fire upon the rapidly retreating enemy causing great havoc.

During this action the 34th Division found itself. After knowing bewilderment, bitterness and hard experience, the 34th now had one of the most outstanding achievements of the Tunisian campaign to its own credit. In his official report to the War Department, General Omar Bradley, commanding II Corps, stated in regard to the fighting at Hill 609, "A strong enemy was repulsed. Fighting all day was intense and bloody. The enemy was engaged with bayonet and grenade, and there were many cases of outstanding bravery."

During 2 and 3 May the Germans withdrew rapidly to Mateur and II Corps changed its dispositions, 1st Infantry Division crossing over to the left so that the 34th now became the right flank division.

CHAPTER VII

EDDEKHILA — Exploiting

On 4 May the 34th assembled in low hills west of the highway leading to Chouigui Pass. The mission was to advance along the semi-circular hills which formed the south boundary of the Oued Tine Valley to seize a mountain pass which carried the road eastward to the important junction of Chouigui. The Division's objective was the Pass itself and our advance was to be paralleled by an attack of the 1st Infantry Division to take the hills to the north. The 34th Division's plan was to leave the 135th Infantry in occupation of Hill 609 and its eastern satellites until the success of our attack was assured. The assault was to be conducted by the 168th Infantry who, in order to avoid being caught under enemy observation in the flat ground (as had occurred at Fondouk), were ordered to advance across difficult but less dangerous territory in the hills at the southern edge of the valley, taking the little village of Eddekhila, about half way to the objective, and then turning northward to the Pass itself. Any attempt by the enemy to strike the advance of the 168th Infantry from the southern flank was to be blocked off by the 133rd Infantry who, upon order, were to peel off to the south and form a screen behind which the 168th Infantry could continue their advance. This plan worked very successfully. The German position had considerably deteriorated, since the entire Allied offensive was making excellent progress and the Germans must have realized that their days in Africa were number-

CHAPTER VIII

TRAINING FOR EUROPE — *Preparing*

The fighting in Tunisia came to an end on 13 May 1943. The German had suffered a major defeat. Many of the finest Allied troops had been required to beat them yet the war was so exacting that there was little time for self-congratulation. Almost at once, preparations were begun for the conquest of Sicily, and the 34th Division received the vital, if not very exciting, job of helping the invading troops to make a smooth departure from Africa.

The 34th were the "housekeepers" for Sicily. Several provisional truck companies were organized using vehicles, drivers and mechanics from the field artillery battalions of the Division who, day in and day out, hauled gasoline to the airfields in an effort to slake the thirst of the bombers paving the way for the landings. The Infantry Regiments set up staging camps for the assaulting troops, furnished the cooks and the KPs—yes, and dug the latrines. The task was not pleasant, but it was done.

Not all was work though. Our French Allies, whose small, poorly equipped Army had fought so magnificently at our side during the campaign, had decided upon a Victory March through the streets of Tunis. The U. S. troops who had taken part in the African fighting were represented on this occasion by the 135th Infantry Regiment who marched past in a solid mass under the palms of the Boulevard Gallieni, to the vigorous applause of the crowd. There was no complacency in the Division however. Wise soldiers learn from their experience.

The Commanding General called for a school to be held in which the lessons learned in Tunisia could be studied and broadcast throughout the 34th. All of the Staff and demonstration troops came from the Division itself, and they placed great emphasis on the training of small unit leaders and on the practical way to do things. After some delays and difficulties the school opened near Tebourba in what must have been the hottest olive grove in Africa. It was a very serious school—all concerned went there to get all they could out of it, for, as the General said in his opening address. "We shall fight in Europe, and we shall find there that, in comparison, the Tunisian Campaign was just a maneuver conducted with ball ammunition". In the meanwhile, the troops assembled into dumps much of the vast booty of war which the Germans, by their surrender, had let fall into the hands of the Allies. The 135th Infantry manned a huge prisoner of war camp near Bizerte, capable of handling 10,000 prisoners, which rapidly filled up as Allied victories in Sicily mounted. The 168th Infantry, not letting their pride stand in their way, did yeoman service in the Bizerte docks discharging ships.

After Sicily—the European mainland. A stiff job, in which only good troops with good training would survive. At the end of July 1943, the 34th Division handed its housekeeper's apron to other units and boarded its trucks and the decrepit French "40 & 8s" for the long, hot, dusty journey to Oran. Assigned to Fifth Army, the 34th went with a will through the tough, efficient program of the Invasion Training Center, with its realistic street fighting, its obstacle courses, its live artillery barrages, its "ball

ammunition". You get out of training only as much as you put into it—and General Alexander said that he had never seen troops "go at it" with such spirit. As so often happens, not all the troops were able to complete the course, for time was passing—D-Day loomed ever closer.

It was during this training program, too, that an important addition was made to the infantry strength of the Division. The 34th had been selected by the War Department to demonstrate to the world that U. S. citizens of Japanese descent could fight alongside other Americans in full confidence and efficiency. The 100th Infantry Battalion, composed almost exclusively of these American "Nisei" mainly from Hawaii, was assigned to fill the place of the 2nd Bn 133rd Infantry Regiment (which remained at Algiers as the guard for Allied Force Headquarters). As our story is told, we shall see how nobly this experiment succeeded, for the Hawaiians' reputation is now a legend, not only in the 133rd Infantry, but throughout the World.

CHAPTER IX

SALERNO-BENEVENTO — *Hurrying*

The 34th Division was in Army reserve for the Salerno operation. No one knew, when the operation was started, exactly how it would go—everyone was tensed, alert for anything, plans were as flexible as possible. To begin with, the 151st Field Artillery Battalion was detached from the Division, and landed under command of the 36th Infantry Division on the Salerno beaches on D-Day—9 September 1943. At once, the Battalion was in the thick of it. German tanks and infantry slashed savagely at the beachhead, trying to drive it back into the sea. The 105mm howitzers were dragged off their landing craft and rushed up the sandy slope to the very perimeter of the beach. Firing at maximum rate over open sights the 151st Field Artillery decisively smashed the enemy panzers who drew off but to come again and again. One battery was overrun by tanks. The gunners coolly withdrew, deployed as infantry with their '03 rifles, counterattacked and recaptured their guns. At a time when the entire Salerno enterprise was threatened with costly failure, the men of the 151st Field Artillery Battalion stuck it out and won. The Chief of Staff of the 36th Infantry Division said, "The beachhead would have been destroyed had it not been for the early arrival of the 151st Field Artillery Battalion thirty minutes before the first counterattack". For eight days, the Battalion shot it out with the Germans and fired more rounds than during the entire Tunisian campaign.

The news of this performance filtered back to the rest of the Division poised at the port of embarkation. So this was Europe!

The 135th and 168th Regimental Combat Teams set sail from Oran for Naples, 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 would be held. Word was flashed to the 133rd Regimental Combat Team, still at Oran, to load their ships—for combat. In less than forty-eight hours, working night and day, the 133rd RCT waterproofed all its vehicles, stored its equipment not needed for fighting, and loaded its ships, stripped for action—ready, if necessary, to make an assault landing to restore the beachhead.

Travelling fast, the 133rd's ships arrived off Salerno a few hours after the 135th and 168th Combat Teams. These latter troops, since they had been ordered to load for landing in a port, 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. On the other hand, the 133rd, loaded and equipped for the task, smoothly disembarked everything in twelve hours and formed upon land—ready to go. They did not have long to wait.

The situation on shore was roughly this: The German Command, realizing that its attempts to contain and then to smash the bridgehead had failed, had decided to relinquish its hold on the southern portion of the perimeter and to swing back to the north while retaining the high ground north of Salerno as a hinge. It would then be possible to form a single front from one side of Italy to the other.

It was necessary to prevent the Germans from organizing their defense at their leisure. Higher headquarters therefore directed the 34th Division to form a task force composed of the 133rd Infantry, 151st Field Artillery Battalion and attached anti-aircraft, engineer, medical and reconnaissance troops, together with the necessary staff, and to push on as swiftly as possible to block off the enemy route of reinforcement between Benevento, sixty miles to the north, and the battle area. Once the Highway leading south from this town was cut we could take the initiative and push on rapidly across the Calore River and carry the fight to the enemy.

Accordingly this task force passed through the 45th Infantry Division on 28 September at S. Angelo de Lombardi and, pressing up Highway 7, made their first contact with the enemy along the Calore River near the town of Montemarrano. The German troops consisted of armored infantry: self-propelled guns, and engineers in half-tracks from the 26th Panzer Division — a very efficient organization whose armored counterattacks against the beachhead had proved so nearly fatal.

It was not the Germans' intention at this time to fritter away resources by fighting pitched battles at frequent intervals. Instead, their engineers, covered by the infantry, demolished every bridge and prepared road blocks at awkward points so that our advance could not possibly have been as rapid as would have been desired. Furthermore, in order to discourage any undue boldness on our part, each U-curve and ledge in this serpentine highway was covered with fire from high velocity weapons and small arms, necessitating wide out-flanking move-

ments into the hills alongside the road. Great endurance was required of our troops since speed was absolutely essential.

By 29 September our troops had occupied the heights west of Chiusano and it was in taking this objective that the 100th Infantry Battalion first met the enemy. As the advance pressed on to the north-west, Montemiletto was captured and by the evening of 1 October advance elements of the 133rd Infantry reached the outskirts of Benevento. The next day the town itself was occupied and a bridgehead was secured across the Calore River without too much difficulty since, due to the speed of our advance, the German engineers had not had time to demolish the stone bridge very thoroughly. While there was a great gash in the masonry, the structure was still firm enough to enable our foot troops to cross and when German engineers with a truck-load of explosives came back that night they were surprised by our infantry and were forced to beat an undignified retreat before they could even start work.

It would be difficult to overestimate the endurance and the aggressiveness of troops who, in spite of continuous rain and in the face of the delays caused by stout enemy resistance, continued to press on and finally forced the enemy out of a vital road junction and river crossing, making an advance of 40 miles in rugged country in five days.

While the 133rd Infantry Task Force was scoring the first of the Division's great successes in Europe, the 135th and 168th RCTs devoted themselves to training in the use of close combat anti-tank weapons and in preparing themselves for the fierce fighting to come. At each successive assembly area

which was occupied in the wake of the rapid drive to Benevento, not a moment was lost, for in spite of the vigorous training in Europe, the ferocity of the combat in Italy had made a deep and startling impression on those who had tasted it. Those for whom the experience had yet to come wisely devoted all their energies to learning the lesson of other soldiers' experience.

With Benevento in our hands the barrier of the Calore River crossed, this sector was handed over to the 45th Infantry Division, while the 34th assembled 30 kilometers to the west, preparatory to relieving elements of the 3rd Infantry Division along the Volturno River.

**Serpentine roads and rugged country,
typical Italian terrain.**

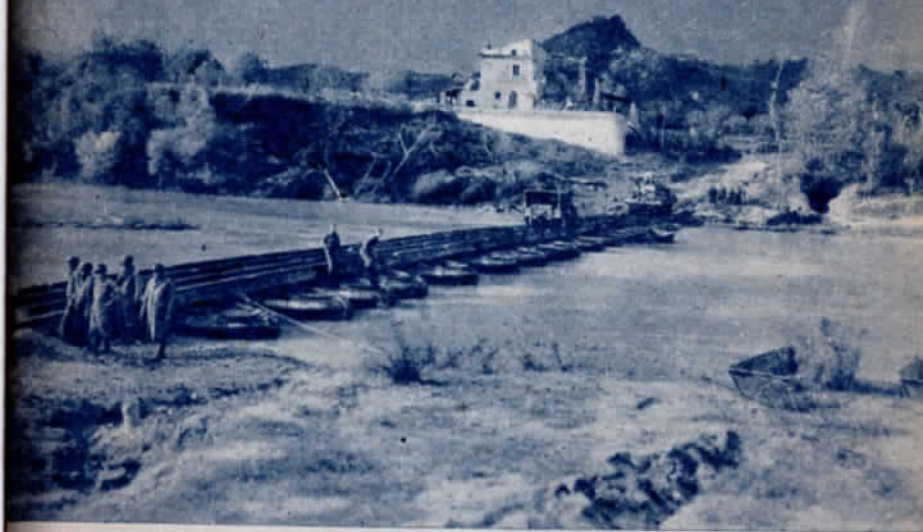


CHAPTER X

VOLTURNO - Spanning

The river formed the first large obstacle which the Germans had decided to defend since the breakout from the beachhead. In the 34th Division sector, which was nearly 15 kilometers wide, the stream was swift and in some places deep enough to cover a man's head, with steep banks overgrown with shrubbery. Immediately upon taking over the sector very active patrolling was begun in order to discover the best places to cross, the easiest bridge sites and the location of enemy defenses. Patrols of a few men crossed the stream repeatedly to feel out the German positions; careful study was made of aerial photographs, and intelligence officers, by noting the direction of German tracer fire, were able to draw a quite complete and accurate picture of the German fire plan. While this was going on supplies of bridging equipment, artillery ammunition and fuel were brought up in convoy after convoy. Surprise, if we could achieve it, would be decisive. Therefore all traffic near the river had to be squeezed into the hours of darkness and so large were the movements that only superb traffic control prevented jams which might well have given away our whole plan. The direction and density of the traffic was so well worked-out and so faultlessly coordinated by the Division MP's that the operation is, even today, constantly cited as a model of good practice. By evening 12 October, like a tightly coiled spring, the Division was ready to snap into action. As a result of the careful preparations the crossing was

Treadway bridge across the Volturno River.



made rapidly and achieved great surprise. Preceded by an accurate artillery preparation the initial objectives consisting of the high ground on the northern bank were reached and the work of getting across supporting heavy weapons and supplies began. The Germans used their artillery and mortars vigorously to try to prevent our engineers from constructing the bridges and ferries necessary to support the combat troops. Yet, in spite of intense shelling which repeatedly punctured the inflated rubber pontons, a treadway bridge was in operation on the day following the initial crossing. The infantry had advanced and had captured, in the face of heavy machine gun

fire, the series of hills less than 2000 yards north of the stream and as soon as the supply line across the river was in service the advance began resolutely to take the town of Caiazzo, thus cutting the lateral highway which the Germans had been using to bring reserves to the threatened sector. Pushing rapidly north, across country in which there were very few and difficult roads, where cover was hard to obtain and in the face of very strong opposition from infantry and armor, our troops reached Alvignano, eight miles north of the river, by 17 October.

The enemy during this phase consisted of the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, a unit which included in its ranks many seasoned soldiers from the Russian front. In those days the Germans had ample equipment of excellent quality including a number of Mark IV tanks; however, such had been the pressure which our troops had put upon them that prisoners confessed that their ranks were seriously depleted and their troops short of food and sleep due to the remorseless hammering of our artillery which continued by day and night. Alvignano was occupied without resistance and pushing on, the village of Dragoni was taken by assault on 19 October by the 168th Infantry.

By this time, our troops were again upon the Volturno River, for the stream was flowing here almost at right angles to the direction it had at the point where our first crossing was made. At the hamlet of Marguerita, northeast of Dragoni, the river was spanned by a bridge which the Germans had not yet blown. A spirited effort by the 133rd Infantry, which had relieved the 168th Infantry, to capture this bridge intact almost succeeded, but

in spite of this failure our advance continued without pause, capturing the crossroads of Alife. Here the Division was ordered to turn northwest and advance along the ridges north of the river valley to Capriati.

Still the Volturno lay ahead of our advance. Changing direction abruptly, it now challenged us for the third time.

The problem promised to be difficult. The river at this point ran in a wide shallow bed, with many small islands of shingle and sand. The valley in which the stream flowed was from four to six miles wide and perfectly flat, with steep mountains springing straight up from the edge of the valley floor both on our side and on the Germans'. The lowlands were planted with olive trees and vineyards, whose long rows of wire, used for training the vines, canalized movement considerably. On the farther side, the slopes of the mountains were terraced, each step being about six feet high and buttressed with a stone wall. Very few trails existed and it was easy to see how difficult it would be to transport heavy weapons and supplies by mule or, more likely, by men, up the steep face of the mountain. The only cover for such operations was from the scrubby olive trees that grew on the terraces (their value for concealment is not great) or from one or two draws which carried off the rainwater from the hills. All these difficulties could be seen—from maps, photographs or from OPs on the ground itself. But even greater dangers were unseen and would come from the Germans. Ever since the failure of their attempt to smash the Salerno landings, the enemy High Command had decided upon the defense of a Winter Line—so strong, so well-stocked, so cun-

ningly fitted out, that the Allies would remain stalled throughout the foul weather of a winter in the mountains. In various ways, the Allies had discovered not only that the Winter Line ran through Cassino, but that a very strong series of delaying lines began in the heights overlooking the west side of the upper Volturno valley and the town of Venafro. The knowledge that the third crossing of the Volturno would see the start of the attack on the main enemy position stimulated the Division to exert its best efforts and to neglect no precautions to make the coming operation a success.

During the last three days of October the enemy had virtually broken contact, leaving us in undisputed control of the eastern bank of the river. For the next three days the 34th Division carried out intensive reconnaissance for stream crossings and to seek out the enemy defenses. Certain captured documents removed from prisoners of war helped us to plot enemy minefields, but due to the width of the river and the expanse of flat terrain dominated by enemy observation it was very difficult for patrols to go far out or to obtain detailed locations. Consequently, when the assault across the river was launched at midnight on 3 November the troops who carried it out did so well realizing that a large number of unknown dangers lay ahead of them. The enemy did not contest very strongly the crossing of the river itself. However, on the western bank, extending through the vineyards and olive groves for a depth of as much as 1500 yards, the Germans had laid one of the biggest minefields that had been encountered in Italy up to this time. If our troops did not want to be caught in the flat land during daylight

it was vital to reach the foothills before dawn. There was, therefore, no time for reconnaissance or for mine clearing operations. The assault battalions formed up in single file and walked clean through the minefields, the lead man clearing the path for the column which followed him. As soon as one man was hit, the man behind him would take his place. At fearful cost the lead company cleared the field and reached the western foothills. It was one of the most outstanding examples of discipline under fire that American troops had ever given. Throughout the entire march the night was punctuated by the flash of S-mines exploding and, alerted by the noise, the Germans sent up many flares and fired blindly into the flat ground, making even worse the difficulties of the passage. By dawn, however, our troops had established themselves in the vicinity of Pozzilli and had begun the steep climb into the mountains. Many enemy groups had been by-passed during this drive but these were rounded up without great difficulty during the morning.

It was now possible to get more detailed information on the defenses which the Germans had built as the outpost line for their winter positions. For six weeks, the engineers of their reserve units and the Organization Todt, using conscripted Italian labor, had blasted out of solid rock shelter positions which the Germans call bunkers. Each of these positions was connected to a machine gun or mortar location so that the enemy obtained relative immunity from our artillery barrage and could nearly always man his weapons in time to take our advancing infantry under murderous fire. One hill in particular proved difficult to take. This was a craggy

promontory at the top of which the Italians, with a sure instinct for a safe place, had built the town of Roccaravindola. The sides of the hill contained beautifully camouflaged machine gun nests and individual firing positions cut into the side of the rock with overhead cover provided by railroad ties covered with earth and foliage. These positions halted the entire advance until a platoon skillfully worked its way unobserved through the town itself and came upon the German positions from the rear. Completely surprised, the Germans surrendered after a brief struggle. The way north up the highway was now open and a task force, consisting mainly of the 135th Infantry supported by tanks and tank destroyers, moved rapidly up the road to capture the town of Montaquilla, also sited on the top of a steep hill commanding the entire valley beneath.

The Germans were fully aware that this assault on their winter positions was a serious one. They did everything they could to stop it, not only by resisting our forward troops, but by desperate attempts to cut our supply line and starve out the assault. In addition, the enemy was helped by extremely bad weather. The autumn rains had begun and for days on end it poured constantly and the wind blew at gale force. Roads almost ceased to exist. The river which, when it was crossed, had been shallow, was now a raging torrent. The 109th Engineer Battalion, fully experienced in assault bridging worked fiercely to keep roads open and the river spanned. Time and again the floods forced them to remove their pontoons lest the entire structure be swept downstream. Yet nearly always within a matter of hours the bridge was built again and

Tanks bogged down in a sea of winter mud.



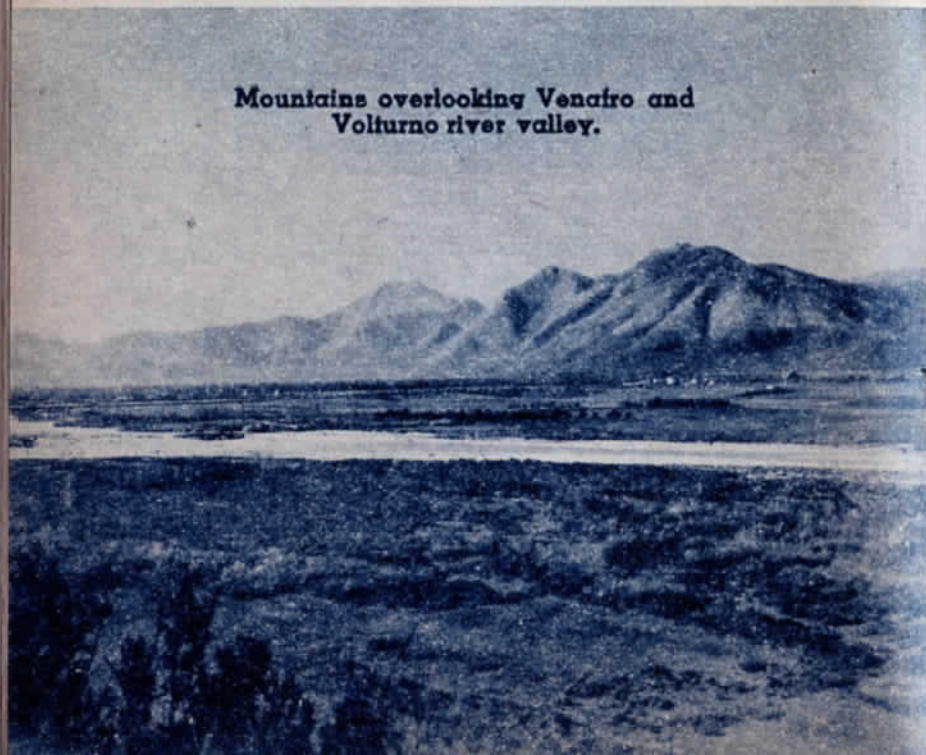
supplies and ammunition rolled across the valley and up the steep trails to the infantry.

During this time of critical road conditions, traffic discipline became more than a matter of convenience and safety—it was a military necessity. The Division MPs, who had learned their job at the first Volturno crossing, brilliantly maintained their high standard until, even at the critical time when for three days the Division was virtually cut off from the rest of the Army by the direct route, essential traffic was kept moving over round-about roads.

The German airforce, which in Africa had been so formidable as to require constant protection against it, but which since Salerno had remained very

quiet, reasserted itself and reinforced the enemy harassing attacks against our artillery positions, bridges and critical points along the roads. The German planes had very little success, however, except on one occasion when they were able to put out of action almost a complete battery of the 185th Field Artillery Battalion's medium howitzers.

**Mountains overlooking Venafro and
Volturno river valley.**



CHAPTER XI

M. PANTANO - Climbing

With the capture of Montaquilla and the clearing of the hill mass between that town and Filignano, a temporary halt was called to the advance. The immense exertions of the attack together with the weather had made it necessary for a certain amount of refitting to be done. During this phase the 133rd Infantry, while in Corps reserve, went through a training program while the other two regiments carried out day and night patrolling so that a continuous flow of information about the enemy was obtained. The German forces who opposed us at this time had been freshly committed for the defense of the outpost line. They consisted of the 305th Infantry Division who had relieved the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division when the pressure was being put on them. The 305th was commanded by a general with great experience of mountain warfare and his troops included a number of seasoned soldiers deriving all the advantages which defense in this terrain provides — yet our troops were able not merely to drive the enemy back, but also to inflict upon him very appreciable losses in men and material. Large quantities of ammunition and supplies had been captured in the bunker positions defending the hills and our artillery, not content with supporting the infantry, had carried out a harassing program on the enemy supply lines, which, according to the German prisoners themselves, had often meant that they enjoyed no food or sleep for as many as four days at a time.

To underline the achievement scored by the 34th

Division at this time it must be remembered that throughout the period of assault, in constant rain, mud, wind and cold, our troops had absolutely no specialized winter equipment. Every man in the Division lived in sodden clothing with no waterproof boots, his feet so cold and wet, that trench foot was a disease almost impossible to avoid. A great effort was made to insure the supply of dry socks to the forward troops but this was not always possible.

It was not until 29 November that the offensive was resumed. The 133rd Infantry, released from Corps reserve, had entered the right Division sector relieving parachute infantry in the region of Colli. Our line at this time ran roughly north and south and on the left flank of the 133rd Infantry came the 168th Infantry while still further to the south stood the 135th Infantry. The plan was to attack to the west with the 168th Infantry making the main effort to secure the dominating mountain of M. Pantano. This hill, over 3300 feet high, consisted of a large mass of bare rock surmounted by four small «pimples» in the shape of a square. Covered routes of approach were virtually absent, and since it was impossible to dig foxholes in the solid rock, the only feasible way in which the infantry could obtain any protection was to pile boulders in front of them or to take advantage of the very few rock walls which laced the slope. The weather continued to be appalling. Low clouds and fog reduced visibility to such a point that frequently enemy positions were by-passed without either side being aware of it.

The assault was launched on a two regiment front in the face of extremely heavy artillery and mortar fire. The enemy, in command of excellent observa-



tion, had taken advantage of the previous few days' respite to register his weapons accurately on all critical approaches. Heavy casualties to our troops were unavoidable and progress was slow and bitter. During this fighting the 100th Infantry Battalion demonstrated that the small physique of its men, was more than compensated for by their courage and tenacity. The attack on M. Pantano made progress and on the morning of 30 November the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry had secured the « pimple » at the southeast corner of the square. Throughout the entire day the enemy launched savage counterattacks upon this battalion, but our troops refused to budge. On the following morning dense fog delayed the resumption of the attack since units could not see each other and control was very difficult. Shortly after noon the fog lifted and as the battalions moved forward the men were hit by severe German fire from well-camouflaged dug-in positions. Our casualties were heavy — within an hour two battalion commanders were lost. The enemy hit back again and again throughout the night and still the position was held. On 1 December a concerted attack by the 133rd and 168th Infantry Regiments was arranged (the 135th Infantry, having been squeezed out by the progress of the 168th Infantry, was now the Division reserve). After a thirty minute artillery preparation the infantry jumped off, but the advance was extremely slow. For the next two days fierce fighting of this type continued. The Germans, alert to the vital importance of M. Pantano, were determined not to let it go. Again and again our troops closed with the enemy and the supply of hand grenades frequently gave out. On one occasion, the Germans,

having launched a series of counterattacks against the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry, almost succeeded in overrunning one company. Their grenades exhausted, our soldiers tore down the wall, behind which they were sheltering, rock by rock and threw them at the Germans. The enemy failed to drive us back.

Such fighting could not continue indefinitely. After the long and grueling advance from the first Volturno crossing, culminated now by the fiercest fighting they had known, our troops were nearly exhaust-



Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark awarding unit citation to the 1st Bn., 168th Inf. Regt.

ed. Furthermore, snow had begun to fall and our troops, still without winter clothing suffered agonies from the cold. A man who became wounded often had to lie for hours without attention until darkness enabled medical aidmen to evacuate him, a process which involved hours of difficult and dangerous climbing down the steep rock face of the hill.

The assault was broken off and the Division contented itself with active patrolling. We had succeeded in maintaining our foothold on the top of M Pantano and held one out of the four peaks. On the night of 8-9 December, the 2nd Moroccan Division began the relief of our worn out troops and on 12 December this was complete. After 76 successive days of contact with the enemy, the 34th Division withdrew for rest, training and replacements to the area of S. Angelo d'Alife, which it had captured on 23 October.

The entire Division had performed outstandingly well during this period. The War Department awarded a unit citation the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry, for its performance on M. Pantano.



Mt. Pantano

CHAPTER XII

SAN VITTORE-CERVARO - Clearing

By a stroke of luck the Division had been relieved in time to spend Christmas in an area where hot food, baths and clean clothes helped to restore the fighting efficiency of the troops. A considerable number of replacements was absorbed and training was conducted to bring back teamwork and cooperation to units in which casualties had been severe. On Christmas Eve the Division staff was notified that the 34th was to relieve the 36th Infantry Division in the S. Pietro sector within a few days. It seemed that Christmas dinner had scarcely been eaten before the first units of the Division moved to the line once more.

The situation was that the Germans were defending a chain of hills running approximately north and south astride Highway 6, which led to Cassino and the Gustav Line, the main position which the Germans had decided to defend throughout the winter. The hills facing the 34th Division's positions were to be used for delaying action to gain time for the finishing touches to be placed on the Gustav Line. The ground immediately to the front of our new front-line was noteworthy for two hill features, M. Porchia on the left and M. Chiaia on the right. At the foot of the latter huddled the village of S. Vittore to the north of which, in a series of wild and jagged peaks, rose the bulk of Mt. Sammucro. To the Germans' rear opened the wide plain through which the highway and railroad ran westward, the two diverging to pass

on either side of the solitary hump of M. Trocchio which commanded a view for miles around. To the north of the highway, rocky terraced hills studded with olive groves gave every indication of being tough country to fight over.

In the midst of a snow storm and blinding gales the 34th Division completed the relief of the 36th Division and began patrolling along the Division front to obtain all possible information about the enemy. The 133rd Infantry formed, with the 1st Special Service Force, a group under separate command in the mountains eight kilometers north of S. Pietro. Immediately to the south came the 168th Infantry and on their left, the 135th Infantry. On the night of 4 January the 34th Division launched an attack designed to storm and occupy the village of S. Vittore and to capture M. Chiaia. A very heavy artillery preparation preceded the assault and by the morning of 5 January the 135th Infantry had obtained a good footing in S. Vittore and an intense fight at close quarters was joined from house to house. The troops defending the enemy line were from the 44th Infantry Division, a predominantly Austrian formation of indifferent quality. Many prisoners of war were taken in the rush of our attack. On the right of the 135th Infantry, the 168th Infantry in a concerted drive was helping its left neighbor to storm M. Chiaia. The Germans had defended this feature with many machine gun positions on the forward slope while counter-attacking groups assembled on the rear slope in shelters dug out of the side of the mountain. Heavy mortar and artillery fire from positions behind the hill was laid down on our assaulting elements who made slow progress.

On 6 January, although S. Vittore was now completely occupied, the German troops on M. Chiaia continued stubbornly to resist for the hill feature was not finally taken until the following day. During this intense battle, the 168th Infantry occupied two other hills to the north of M. Chiaia and opened the way for an attack upon the village of Cervaro, a typical collection of stone-built houses set upon the slope of steep hills. Before an attack could be launched to clear this village a day was spent in cleaning up isolated pockets of resistance and adjusting our own dispositions preparatory to launching a coordinated assault. In the meantime, the 135th Infantry had moved out across the floor of the valley parallel with Highway 6 and were engaged in cleaning up the low rolling hills east of M. Trocchio. On 10 January the 168th Infantry resumed the attack and cleared a number of hills just west of Cervaro after vicious close quarter fighting using grenade and bayonet. The enemy was fighting desperately for time. During the night he withdrew his forces into the town itself and moved up many machine guns, mortars and several self-propelled guns into the ruins of the buildings where the fallen masonry gave admirable cover for his troops. For two days and nights hand to hand fighting of the fiercest kind raged from street to street and from house to house. The enemy launched repeated counter-attacks and for fear that his ragged units would be pierced by our thrust and the defenses of the Gustav Line assaulted before he was ready, he committed the 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment so that his weary Austrian soldiers could disengage and retire in some order. It was immediately noted that the quality of the

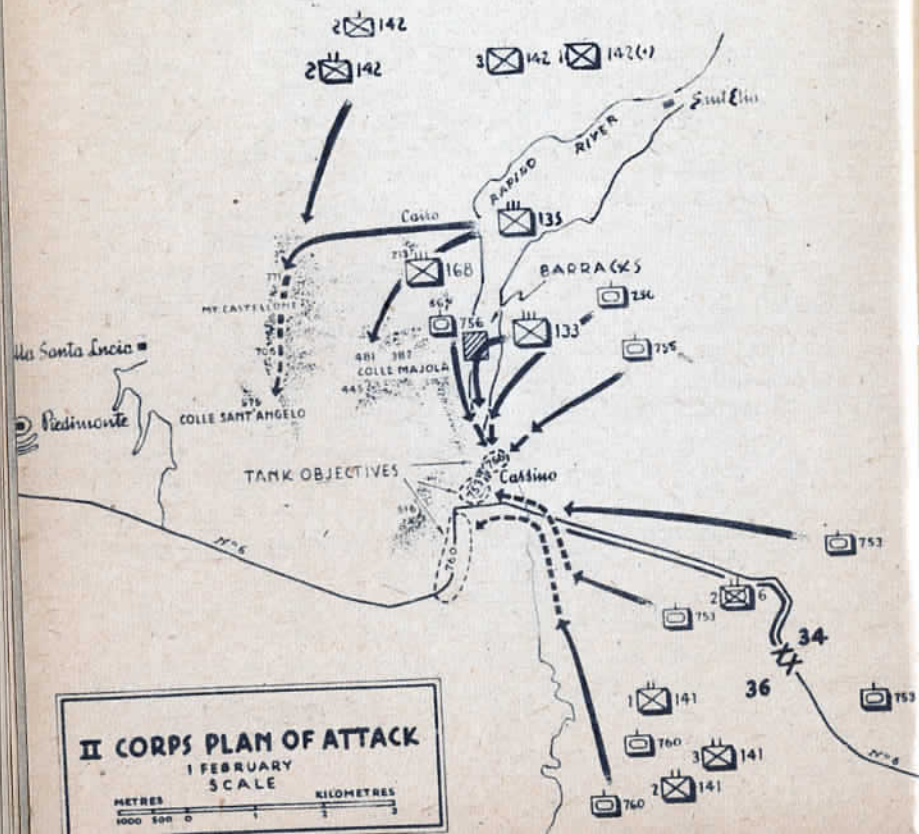
View showing M. Trocchio on left,
Cassino and Monastery hill on right.

enemy fighting improved with the arrival of these tough troops, yet, even they could not withstand the terrific punishment which the 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry gave them in the ruined shell of Cervaro. The town was in our hands and the high ground to the north cleared of the enemy by noon 12 January. For their action, the 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry received a unit citation from the War Department.

During these few days, the 135th Infantry continued its steady advance and assaulted a hill guarding M. Trocchio which the enemy tried unsuccessfully to hold with a battalion from the crack Herman Goering Division. After three days of fighting the hill was finally clear and nothing stood between us and the towering observatory of M. Trocchio. The 133rd Infantry, who on 13 January had once more come under the Division's control, had during the previous few days advanced against the most determined enemy resistance across peak after peak paralleling the advance of the other two regiments. At dawn on 15 January an attack was launched to take M. Trocchio, an operation which proved simple since the enemy, not wishing to be caught on an isolated height at a great distance from his main line, had withdrawn and our troops promptly set up their own OPs in positions where the Germans had been directing their fire against us only a few hours before.

The Division had conducted a steady grinding attack for fifteen days against stubborn German resistance and had finally driven the enemy back to the very ramparts of his main winter positions. Whether the Germans were ready or not they had now to

defend their Gustav Line. Little contact with enemy troops was had during the next few days since he had withdrawn behind the river barrier that formed a modern counter-part to the moat with which medieval soldiers used to surround their citadels.



CHAPTER XIII

CASSINO - Storming

It will be convenient here to sketch briefly the German position which shortly was to become world renowned. To the west of M. Trocchio there opened up the broad Liri Valley along which Highway 6 and the railroad led ultimately to Rome. Running from north to south in front of the mouth of this valley flowed the Rapido River which linked up with the Liri River nine kilometers south of Cassino. The town was built at the base of an imposing hill, covered with rocks and stunted shrubbery, through which twisted the narrow road leading to the famous Benedictine Abbey of Montecassino. The Rapido River had been turned in its course to flood the flatland on the east side of the town. Towering above Cassino there rose a series of craggy peaks — one in particular, Hill 593, dominating but not controlling the Abbey hill itself since a deep gorge separated the two heights. Further north the little villages of Cairo and Terelle huddled close to the hill-sides connected by a steep and winding trail. Surmounting the whole picture, rose the pinnacle of M. Cairo. An Italian army of ancient days had built a castle on a small sugar-loaf hill on the northwestern outskirts of Cassino from where fire could be placed on the entrances of the town. The modern Italian army had constructed barracks about five kilometers north of the castle along the Cassino-Atina road. The terrain was so suitable for prolonged resistance that the Italian War College had used it as an example of a well-chosen defense line.

Thick minefields and rows of barbed wire had been laid in the marshes and on the gently rising ground at the foot of the mountains to prevent the passage of tanks or foot troops. A chain of bunker positions, stronger than any encountered before, had been built, some reinforced with concrete, some with railroad ties from the ruined station of Cassino, but all of them dug and blasted out of the rock of the Cassino hills. Not content with natural fortifications the enemy had installed portable steel pillboxes, half-buried in the ground, each containing a machine gun. Every man and every weapon had shelter from artillery fire. In support of their infantry positions, emplacements were prepared for self-propelled guns which could mount the trails on the northwest side of a hill without being observed by us, fire a few rounds and disappear. A large concentration of gun positions had been constructed close to the hills behind Cassino and along Highway 6 where they had good protection from our counter-battery fire. Enemy artillery was further reinforced by a number of Nebelwerfers whose eerie noise earned them the name of «screaming meemies».

To attempt an assault upon such a series of fortifications was a most hazardous undertaking and originally it was decided to try to force the Rapido River and advance straight up the Liri Valley, bypassing Cassino and turning the Gustav Line. After a series of attempts by the 36th Infantry Division to cross the Rapido south of Cassino had been thrown back with much bloodshed, the 34th Division was ordered to cross the Rapido north of Cassino, to carry by storm the hills overlooking the town and break through to Highway 6, isolating the town and

the Abbey. Our attack began during the period of 24-25 January. Three days previously an Allied amphibious force had successfully established a beachhead at Anzio.

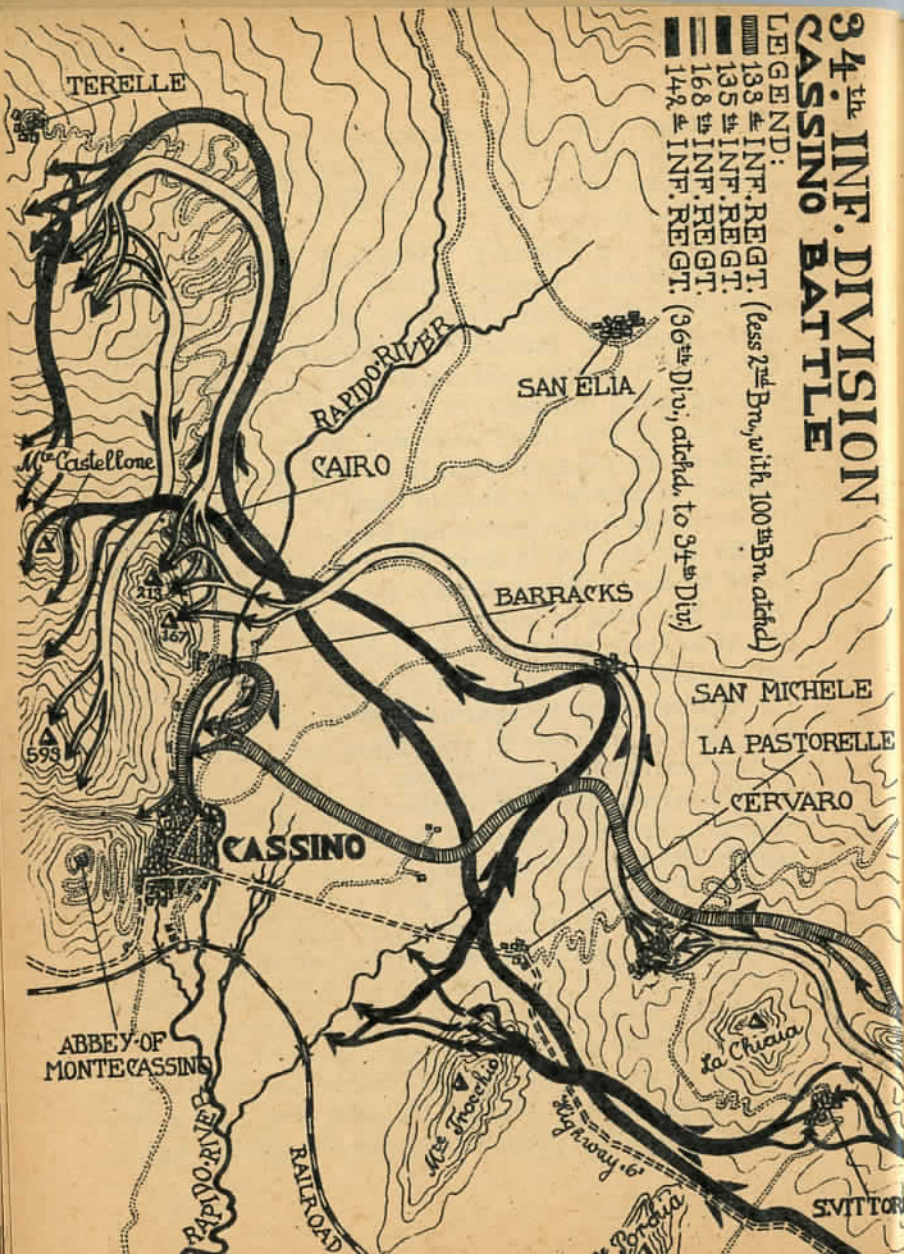
The 133rd Infantry, advancing with three battalions abreast, approached the river north of the barracks and immediately ran into extensive minefields covered by elaborate interlocking machine gun fire. The regiment continued the agonizing job of forcing paths through the minefields in the marshy land and several times succeeded in getting elements across to the western bank. Each time the tremendous volume of enemy fire obliged them to withdraw, but the enemy in his resistance had betrayed a weak point in his line. On 26 January the 133rd Infantry gave place to the 168th Infantry who, with the 756th Tank Battalion in support, prepared an attempt to storm to the farther side. In the face of mines, barbed wire and most intense fire the regiment succeeded in establishing a bridgehead and in pushing to the base of the hills one or two kilometers further on. It was impossible, so soft was the ground, for the tanks to cross, but four of them, bogged down, continued to fire in support of the infantry and greatly assisted them in their advance. Engineer troops worked like Trojans to prepare firm crossings but these were not in operation until the afternoon of 29 January when the bulk of the tank battalion crossed in support of the infantry attack. Before midnight, two small hills had been attacked and taken and the enemy dugouts and bunkers were mopped up.

The 133rd Infantry moved across in the left of the Division sector. During the next few days very successful infantry-tank operations cleared our right

34th INF. DIVISION CASSINO BATTLE

LEGEND:

- 133rd INF. REGT. (less 2nd Bn., with 100th Bn. attached)
- 135th INF. REGT.
- 168th INF. REGT.
- 148th INF. REGT. (36th Div., attached, to 34th Div.)



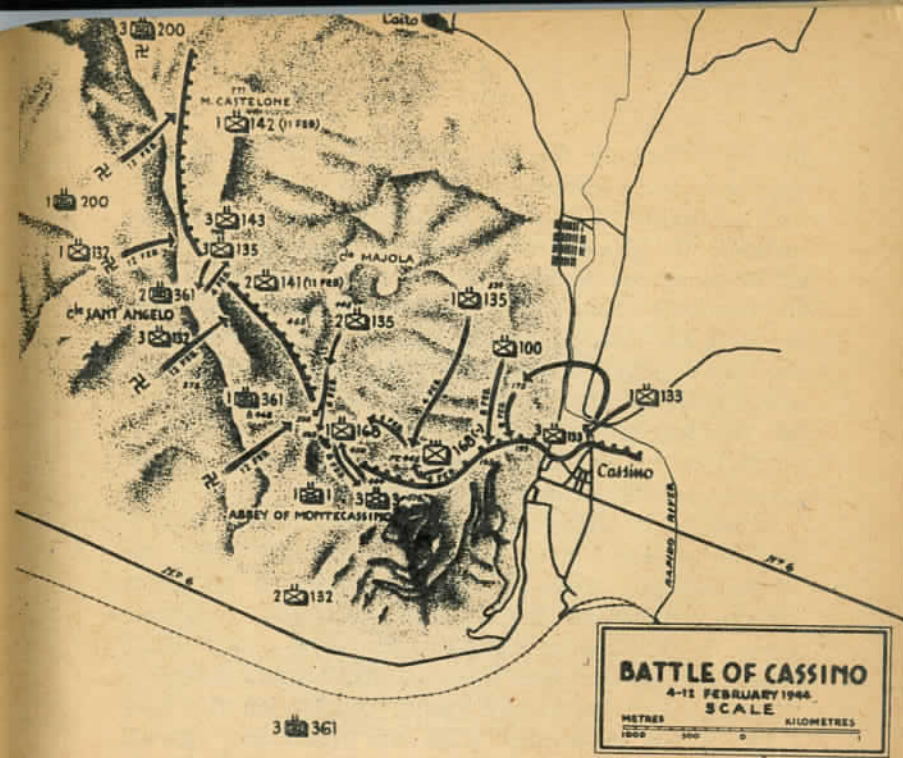
flank, occupied Cairo and captured over 250 prisoners including an entire battalion headquarters. By this time the 168th Infantry had formed a definite salient into the German line. The enemy command grew anxious and brought in heavy reinforcements from the Adriatic coast consisting of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division and the 1st Parachute Division. The 135th Infantry passed through the 168th Infantry and pushed on up the hill, trying to reach Highway 6 and isolate the Abbey. On 1 February the 133rd Infantry drove west from its positions toward Cassino clearing the barracks. The next morning the regiment with tank support began the attack from the north on the town of Cassino itself, meeting very fierce resistance. The enemy had installed anti-tank guns at critical intersections and had made of the stone-built houses strong-points for his machine guns and riflemen. A diversionary attack by elements of the 133rd Infantry from the east was turned back. The enemy refused to be stamped into a withdrawal.

Throughout this entire period, it must be borne in mind, every box of rations, every can of water, every round of ammunition which the infantry used had to be brought up across terrain which was under direct observation from hills still in enemy hands. The Germans, fully aware of this, laid down accurate and continuous fire upon all critical points and especially upon the river crossings. Traffic control by the Division Military Police reduced congestion but within a few days the stench of decaying mule carcasses, the litter of overturned vehicles, abandoned shell-cases and disabled tanks made a scene of modern war which will not be forgotten by any who

saw it. On the mountains the battle remained stubborn and progress was slow. Casualties to both sides were very heavy especially because the fanatical German paratroopers launched frenzied counter-attacks in an attempt to drive us back to the valley. Our ranks became thinner and the problems of evacuating casualties down the treacherous mountain trails and across the shell-swept approaches to the position were very serious. Volunteers came from the service and rear units of the Division to help out.

By the end of 12 February a platoon had succeeded in reaching the outer walls of the Abbey and capturing prisoners from a cave on Monastery hill. It was impossible for the platoon to remain, however, and they withdrew. The Germans throughout the operation took full advantage of the fact that the Allies had undertaken not to fire at the Abbey in view of its importance to the world as a religious institution. The relative immunity which the enemy obtained for his observation can hardly be overestimated.

On 13 February the 135th Infantry in the face of withering fire assaulted and captured Hill 593 which overlooked the Abbey but which was separated from it by a deep gorge. The enemy reacted viciously. Five furious counter-attacks were sent in against our positions in less than twenty-four hours. Once our troops were forced to withdraw but immediately they reformed and took the hill again. In conjunction with this operation other elements of the regiment and of the 168th Infantry managed to reach the northern slopes of Monastery hill itself, before they had to withdraw. Castle hill, far below Hill 593, remained a constant threat to our troops



and made movement in daylight very hazardous. Several times large concentrations of artillery fire were laid down upon it and attempts to storm it were made by the 133rd Infantry without success.

The latter regiment had, during the entire time, been carrying on what was almost a separate battle in the cellars, the dining rooms, the kitchens of Cassino. So close was the contact that when the mortars and the machine pistols momentarily stopped at night our troops in one room of a house could hear the Germans talking in another room. Nonetheless,

by 12 February the key strong-point which the Germans had created in the jail was taken and one-half of the town was in our hands. Infantry attacks on each city block were assisted by tanks who knocked holes in the walls of the houses through which the infantry could climb, or throw grenades. Enemy mortars and self-propelled guns a few streets away kept up a heavy counter-fire. Our field artillery and dive bombers attempted to smother them with massed fire but the piles of rubble only increased the protection for the Germans. The town and castle of Cassino crumbled into stinking ruins.

The 34th Division, when it had made its first assault on the Gustav Line was already tired and understrength from its brilliant series of advances which crushed-in the ring of delaying positions from S. Vittore to Cassino. By now, after three weeks of constant fire, repeated attacks and counter-attacks, often seemingly endless nights on the bare rock of the mountain with no protection against the furies of the rain, wind and snow, after intolerable hardships, our troops had reached the limit of human endurance. Their numbers were so reduced that every time a man was carried off the hill by aidmen a gap was left in our lines. In spite of the most devoted support which our artillery and tanks could give to the infantry very little useful help could reach the men in the foxholes whose chief weapons in this fighting were the hand grenade, the tommy gun and the bayonet.

The 34th Division had made a serious dent in the Gustav Line. It was now time for fresh troops to take up the fight at the point our troops had reached.

On 14 February elements of the British 4th In-

Maj. Gen. Ryder presenting awards
to men of the 34th Division.



dian Division took over positions held by the 135th and 168th Infantry Regiments on Hill 593 and on the other hills overlooking Cassino. Some of our men had stuck it out so long and had suffered so much that they had to be lifted bodily out of their holes. The sadly depleted regiments went to S. Angelo d'Alife for rest.

The 133rd Infantry remained in the town of Cassino for a few more days grimly registering its gains of a room here, half a house there, still opposed by the toughest enemy resistance. They had the unforgettable experience of seeing the Abbey blotted

out by hundreds of American bombers on the day after the 34th Division relinquished command of the sector.

The battle of Cassino was a failure. The Division had failed to take its objective. The German paratroopers had succeeded in blocking the best efforts of our troops to advance. Yet for those who were there and who knew the difficulties of the assault, the tremendous strength of the German fortifications — to those men, Cassino was the outstanding achievement in the Division's history.

It is too early even to attempt a final judgment on what the 34th did. But it is a matter of record that the troops who relieved us, in spite of the most rigorous air support, lost some of the ground which our troops gave to them. It is a matter of record that successive attacks by troops several times as numerous as we also failed to capture the fortress.

It is history that when the Allied attack finally achieved its goal no less than five divisions were required to finish the task which the 34th had so gallantly begun and so nearly completed.

CHAPTER XIV

ANZIO - Waiting

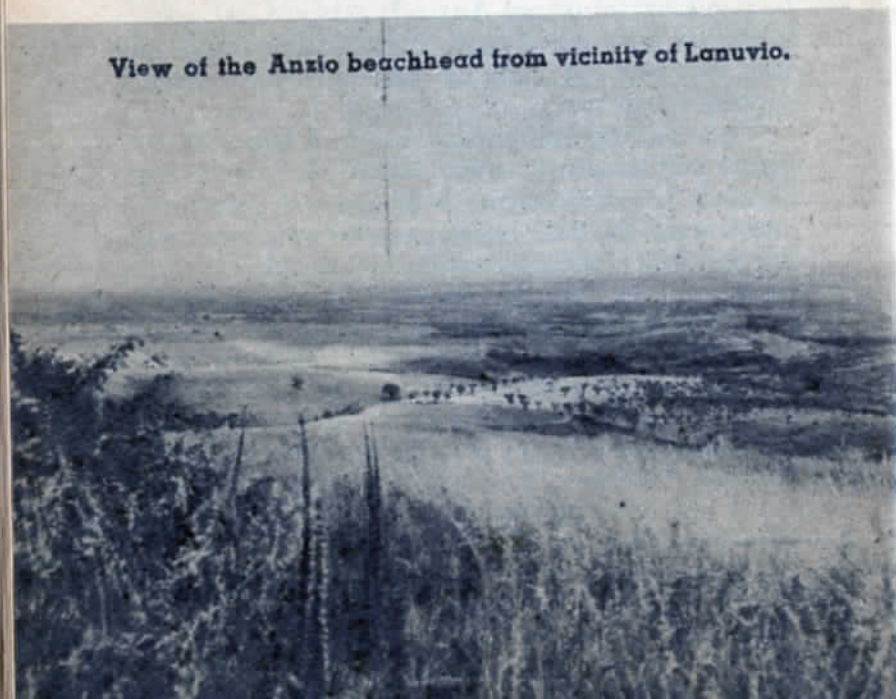
At S. Angelo d'Alife little could be done during the first few days out of the line except to rest and to recover the strength which had been expended so freely on the Cassino hills. Within a few days the Division was directed to move to a new rest area at S. Giorgio near Benevento, where the Division first went into action in Italy. At this place some progress was made to fill the decimated ranks of the infantry since the 2nd Battalion, 133rd Infantry, released from its guard duty at Allied Force Headquarters, rejoined the Division fresh and at full strength.

On 11 March the Division was ordered to prepare to move by sea to the Anzio Beachhead, by now a legendary place where hard-pressed Allied troops had just succeeded in holding off determined enemy counter-offensives.

The 34th was still understrength. A bare few days before embarkation, which began 17 March, large numbers of replacements were received, creating a problem for the three regiments who were faced with the possibility of heavy action before efficient teamwork could be built up. Between 17 and 25 March, two LSTs made the journey each night from Naples to the tiny harbor at Anzio. The 168th Infantry, marching straight off the transports, closed into an assembly area in the right sector of the beachhead and immediately began relief of elements of the 3rd Infantry Division. The 135th Infantry followed suit a few days later while the 133rd Infantry remained in Division reserve.

The beachhead at Anzio was a place unique in the experience of the 34th Division. A small piece of completely flat land measuring less than ten miles at its widest point and no more than eight miles deep, heavily cultivated and criss-crossed with canals and drainage ditches — these few square miles were so congested with troops and equipment that at times it seemed impossible to find a vacant place to dig a hole or pitch a pup tent. For this reason the bulk of the Division's transportation had been left behind at Naples where it was used to bring up supplies from the ports and dumps to the forward areas of the southern front in preparation for the gigantic Spring

View of the Anzio beachhead from vicinity of Lanuvio.



offensive which was even then in an advanced stage of planning.

At Anzio the 34th learned a new type of warfare. They learned that the enemy, from the hills overlooking the beachhead, could see everything that went on in our sector during the daylight. They learned to dig in to the sides of the ditches and stream beds and to remain under cover during the day, coming out at night to stretch their legs and to keep watch against the ever-present possibility of a German attack. The infantry learned the routine of manning defensive positions, posting guards, making patrols and being relieved. The artillery perfected the shattering technique of coordinated artillery fire in which the shells from hundreds of guns arrived on their target at the same instant. The signal company operated its scores of miles of telephone wire, learned to lay its lines away from the most likely objectives of German artillery fire, to dig in all their switchboards and to provide for alternative channels of communication. The engineers learned the difficulty of laying barbed wire entanglements and minefields at night under cover of infantry patrols. The entire Division shared the same life in damp and dismal holes, under a constant hammering from German artillery and aircraft.

When the Division arrived at the beachhead, the enemy had just failed in two concerted attempts to drive the Allies into the sea and no one could be sure that they would not try a third time. On the front of the 34th Division, the enemy units consisted of the 362nd Infantry Division, a recently formed organization who were not outstandingly good but

The engineers stringing barbed wire at night on the Anzio beachhead.



who maintained a very high standard of alertness in their defense. After a time it became clear that the Germans had abandoned the offensive and the 34th conducted a series of well-coordinated raids to secure information on enemy units, on their tactics and their defensive positions. Never before had the agencies used to collect information about the Germans worked so well together. Aerial photographs, interpreted at headquarters only a few hours after they had been taken, were used to pin-point enemy weapon positions. Prisoners taken by the infantry were carefully questioned for facts about enemy tactics, supply and other matters. The artillery staffs built up a complete picture of the opposing gun

lay-out and after almost two months of hard work our knowledge of the enemy opposite us was complete and accurate almost to the last detail. During this period, also, our own troops had been relieved by turns, and as each unit passed into reserve it went to a training school where veterans could pass on the benefit of their experience to the large numbers of fresh replacements. At no time did the Division delude itself with the idea that the current defensive phase was anything but temporary. No one, especially as the beachhead became more and more crowded with the steady influx of troops and supplies, had any desire to remain a sitting target for the Germans any longer than was necessary. All day and all night the German artillery shot harassing fires at our dumps, our forward positions and our supply lines. It was difficult for them to miss — so congested was the area. At night their artillery program was stepped-up to take advantage of the fact that traffic on the roads increased since we could only move supplies by night.

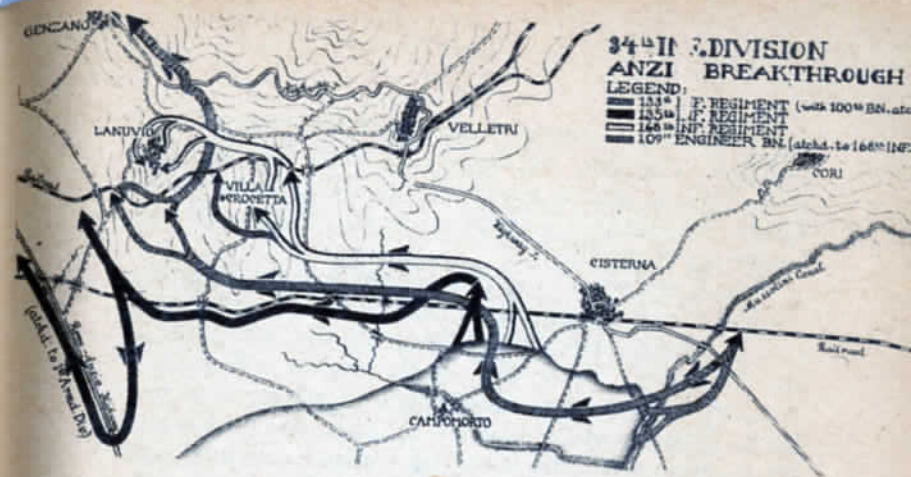
On 11 May, when the main attack on the southern front jumped off, everyone on the beachhead was tense. All in the Division knew that if this drive succeeded the time when the beachhead would have a land link with the remainder of the Army was not far distant. The planning staffs had worked hard to prepare for the breakout from the beachhead. The troops had trained and rehearsed their part in detail. No longer were we to be on the defensive. Instead, if all went well, the Allied beachhead force would play a crucial part in the encirclement of the right wing of the German troops as they fell back up the boot of Italy in the face of the drive from the south.

CHAPTER XV

THE BREAKOUT-ROME-CIVITAVECCHIA

Chasing

At 0630 hours on the morning of 23 May the great sortie from the beachhead smashed into action. The mission of the 34th Division was to hold the perimeter and to allow the assaulting elements of the 1st Armored Division on the left, the 3rd Infantry Division in the center and the 1st Special Service Force on the right to pass through them and to pierce the German defense line. However, the 135th Infantry Regiment was attached to the 1st Armored Division for this operation while the 133rd Infantry stood by to support the Special Service Force. Preceded by a fifteen minute artillery preparation, fiercer than anything seen before, the Americans hit the unfortunate 362nd Infantry Division such a blow that it reeled back in confusion. Within a few hours the enemy's forward positions were over-run and hundreds of prisoners of war were on their way to our PW cages. On the left, the 135th Infantry with the Armored Division had made excellent progress and had crossed the railway embankment which formed a major feature of the German defense line. On the right, the 133rd Infantry rushed to the sector of the Special Service Force, whose initial attack to cut Highway 7 had been thrown back, and restored the situation by an assault in the face of severe opposition from infantry and tanks to cut the highway and the railway southeast of the key road junction of Cisterna. While resistance in this town



continued for some time from the cellars and ruined buildings, the success of the breakout was evident. The 362nd Infantry Division within three days had been practically annihilated as an organized fighting force. The 34th Infantry Division reformed and prepared to exploit this triumph.

The 168th Infantry moved to the west, the 133rd Infantry, returning from its foray, moved to the left of the 168th and both regiments formed up for a concerted push to the northwest. On 25 May the 135th Infantry, relieved of attachment to the Armored Division after a magnificent performance, moved into 34th Division reserve. At dawn on 26 May our troops made rapid progress which continued until late on 27 May when stiff enemy resistance was met along a line approximately 1000 yards short of the railroad between Lanuvio and Velletri. It had long been known that the Germans had prepared a strong defense line in this area. Bunkers and mortar positions had been dug into the north face of the railway embankment while machine gun and rifle emplacements were hastily completed by

the retreating German troops as they occupied their defenses. Further, the village of Villa Crocetta had been turned into a fortress containing over a battalion of infantry reinforced with tanks and self-propelled guns.

The Germans in the face of our fierce attack succeeded in maintaining their positions. We committed the 135th Infantry from reserve to the left flank of the Division. Even the 109th Engineer Battalion was sent into the line as infantry. Nothing was held back. Rome was the goal — all or nothing. Finally on 2 June, with the town of Velletri captured and his line in danger of encirclement, the enemy suddenly gave way. His units, patched up remnants of the troops who had borne the shock of the breakout from the beachhead, had fought surprisingly well. The German High Command had used every effort to bolster them with replacements from the butchers, bakers, tinkers and tailors of rear area units.

By the morning of 3 June the enemy was in full retreat. The 100th Infantry Battalion made a very determined attack to clear a road block on Highway 7 which led to Rome. A motorized task force with infantry, tanks, tank destroyers, engineers, field artillery and reconnaissance troops, was constituted and ordered to press on north with all speed to seize crossings of the Tiber River southwest of Rome. The Germans had honored their undertaking to consider Rome an open city, but all the Tiber River bridges between Rome and the sea were destroyed. Our engineers worked fast to make crossings and within a day the entire Division had passed to the northern bank. The Germans conducted their retreat very skillfully. They lost no time in evacuat-

ing their heavy equipment, which by day and night marches, fell back, protected by a screen of motorized infantry, self-propelled guns and engineers. In spite of the terrific toll taken by our air forces in their bombing and strafing attacks along the highways, the German troops were able to evacuate much of their materiel and seriously impeded our advance by means of their well executed demolitions and roadblocks.

The 1st Armored Division and the 34th Division were given the mission of an all-out pursuit of the enemy north and northwest of Rome. During this time the 135th Infantry was re-attached to the 1st Armored Division and was pursuing the Germans north of Rome to the Viterbo airfields. The 34th Division, advancing day and night at top speed, re-

Pursuing the enemy south of Civitavecchia.



lieving the lead battalion from time to time so as to maintain the freshness of the troops and the vigor of the pursuit, reached the town of Civitavecchia during the morning of 7 June.

During this advance the work of the service troops was absolutely outstanding. The 34th Signal Company whose unobtrusive efficiency had almost come to be taken for granted now excelled all its efforts by tirelessly linking the Division units by telephone and by maintaining radio contact. During the operation a few hours prior to the capture of Civitavecchia, the Division advanced forty-one miles and telephone communication was continuously maintained between the Division headquarters and Corps headquarters far to the rear, as well as to leading elements of the Division. To maintain the speed of the pursuit only those vehicles that were necessary for the job could be permitted to move on the roads. The 34th Military Police were given the task of controlling traffic to this end and they rose to the occasion. The quartermaster company, hauling rations and gasoline from dumps far to the rear, enabled all troops to push on with the confidence that their supplies would always be maintained.

With the capture of the port of Civitavecchia there was every indication that the German rear-guards were rapidly being overtaken for just south of the town our troops had pressed to a ridge just in time to see an important bridge along Highway 1 being blown up by the Germans.

The chase was nearing a climax. The 133rd Infantry passed through the 168th Infantry, who had taken the port, and moved to a line of hills a few hundred yards south of the town of Tarquinia. Here



34th INF. DIVISION
ITALIAN CAMPAIGN
ANZIO - TARMQINIA

- LEGEND:
 — 133rd INF. REGIMENT (with 100th BN. of rd.)
 — 135th INF. REGIMENT
 — 168th INF. REGIMENT
 [Symbol] UNDEVELOPED: IMPORTANT ENGAGEMENTS
 [Symbol] BEACHHEAD AREA



the Germans had decided to attempt a stand for the first time since they relinquished their hold on Lanuvio. The troops they had chosen for this job consisted of the 40th Jaeger Regiment from the 20th German Air Force Field Division. This formation had been brought down from Denmark, passing the Normandy invasion front which had been opened only a few days before, and was rushed to Italy in an attempt to help prevent the much disorganized German Armies from being overrun. The engagement with this fresh regiment was joined shortly after noon on 7 June. The day was warm, visibility was excellent. Our troops looking down from one ridge could see Germans fully in the open busily digging foxholes and machine gun positions. The enemy, apparently not expecting such a vigorous chase, had not placed a strong screen of outposts to the south of their proposed line. They were wide open. In one terrific punch the 133rd Infantry completely smashed the entire German regiment. Within a few hours the enemy had been scattered and were retreating northward in great confusion. Prisoners from practically every company in the regiment had been taken and the way north was once more open. However, during the night of 8-9 June, the 361st RCT, part of the newly arrived 91st Infantry Division, relieved the 133rd Infantry and continued the advance under the command of the 36th Infantry Division.

The 34th Infantry Division reassembled in the vicinity of Civitavecchia and when pressing supply needs necessitated our evacuation of the port, the Division moved on 12 June to the vicinity of Tarquinia for rest and training.

CHAPTER XVI

CECINA - Scattering

The Division spent two enjoyable weeks out of the line. The weather was fine and bivouac areas were selected on the sides of gently sloping hills overlooking the Mediterranean coast and the busy airfields and docks which, thanks to the rapidity of our troops' advance, were already in operation. For once fatigue was not the most critical factor in influencing the withdrawal of the 34th from the line. A certain number of replacements had to be assimilated to replace losses incurred at Lanuvio but even more important was the job of closing together all of the units which during the hectic days of the chase had become scattered. The 135th Infantry was relieved of its attachment to the 1st Armored Division and rejoined the 34th in the Tarquinia area.

A very important change in the composition of the Division took place during this time. So successful had been the experimental attachment of a unit of Japanese-Americans to a first class fighting formation that the War Department had decided to attach a complete regimental combat team of Nisei to the 34th Division thus increasing its organic strength to four full combat teams. The 442nd Infantry Regiment, together with artillery, medical troops and engineers, began the shaking-down process which always comes whenever one joins a new unit. The 100th Infantry Battalion, by now battle-wise combat troops, though retaining their separate identity, were assigned to the 442nd In-

fantry.

On 24 June the Division began the long dusty movements by truck from Tarquinia to the front which by then had moved many miles to the north—so far north indeed, that it was a hard job to find an assembly area close enough to the front to make a relief possible before the pursuing troops had gone too far forward again.

On 26 June the 133rd Infantry and the 442nd Infantry, the latter in their first combat assignment, passed through elements of the 36th Infantry Division just north of Piombino and almost at once ran into an enemy delaying line which was based on the line of hills running from Suvereto to the sea. The 442nd Infantry was committed to attack Suvereto from the south. In a brilliantly executed move the 100th Infantry Battalion, by-passing the town to the east, overran an enemy battalion command post, captured a great deal of German equipment and captured and killed a large number of enemy troops. In recognition of this outstanding performance the 100th Infantry Battalion was awarded a unit citation by the War Department.

While this action of the 100th Battalion was being supported by the rest of the 442nd Combat Team, who moved methodically through the hills to clear Belvedere, the 133rd Infantry's advance along Highway 1, parallel with the coast, approached gradually nearer to the defile at S. Vincenzo where the road and railway run almost along the seashore. Due to the high bluffs which push out from the main mountain mass on the right of the highway any movement which seeks to leave the road is contained within a very narrow space. The



Men of the 100th Inf. Bn. moving up to the front.

enemy took advantage of his chance and deployed a force just south of S. Vincenzo which required our troops a whole day to clear. The Division's right flank during this time was being protected by the 168th Infantry who found the going extremely difficult due to the virtual absence of roads in its mountainous sector.

The fighting during the next few days was of a very localized type. Lateral communications were difficult and the regiments, after being assigned the directions in which they were to make their attacks, completed their missions more or less upon their

own initiative. Castagneto was cleared by the 133rd Infantry after an advance along the highway and through the hills to the right of it causing the enemy very severe losses. The 442nd Infantry reached the Bolgheri River while the 168th Infantry cleared Monteverdi during which an enemy group of battalion strength was hacked to pieces by the massed fire of all arms.

On 29 June the 135th Infantry passed through the 442nd Infantry and the Division maintained a steady northward advance along a twenty-kilometer front. After several sharp skirmishes the Cecina River was reached on 30 June. At this time the 168th Infantry on the right found the going through exceptionally difficult terrain too slow for effective pursuit to be carried out. Accordingly, the troops were moved in trucks around the rear of the Division and re-entered the line preparatory to advancing north across the Cecina River to seize the town of Riparbella. The Cecina River was not a particularly formidable barrier, consisting of a shallow stream running in a wide bed with many scattered banks of shale. A valuable enemy field order taken off of a German prisoner disclosed that the enemy had retired to the north of the Cecina river and was going to delay our crossing for as long as possible. The German units consisted of the 16th SS Reconnaissance Battalion on the coast while further inland was deployed the 19th German Air-force Field Division which had under its control a certain number of Turkoman troops from the 162nd Infantry Division (which had been very severely handled during the advances of the preceding few weeks). The enemy command had become so

Men of the 135th Inf. Regt. take a break for chow in Rosignano.



alarmed at the way in which their units were being scattered and confused by our thrust, that they had instituted a system of straggler patrols in their rear areas who seized any unfortunate German who did not seem to be doing anything, placed him, with others in a similar situation, into small groups who were then committed to action.

The crossing of the Cecina River was made along a front of almost twenty kilometers and everywhere succeeded except in the extreme coastal sector where the SS troops defending the town of Cecina (on the south bank) put up a most stubborn resistance.

The 133rd Infantry, in cooperation with the 135th Infantry on its right, made a pincers attack upon the enemy, who were decisively beaten. This was one of the sharpest actions in the history of the 133rd Infantry and also one of the most successful, for the enemy left many dead and prisoners and much equipment in our hands.

The country through which the advance now had to move was very difficult. A series of jagged mountains separated by deep gorges and covered with forests and underbrush made communications very difficult and the supply of food and ammunition a matter of great exertion. The 135th Infantry, pinching out the 133rd Infantry, was now the left flank unit of the Division while the 442nd Infantry held the center leaving the 168th Infantry on the right.

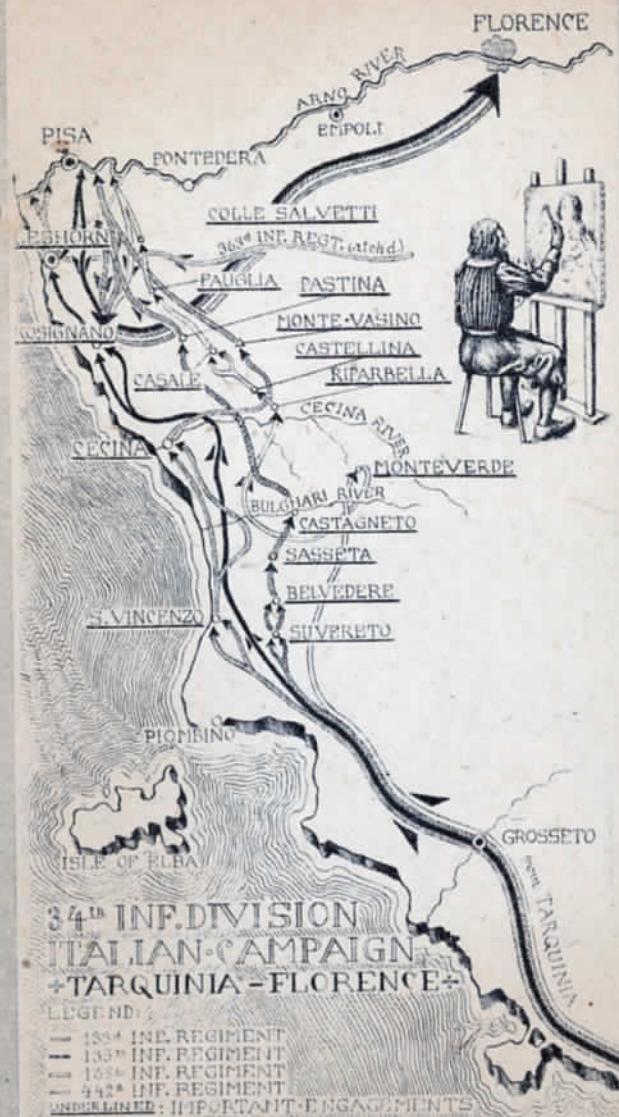
By 3 July a steady progress had resulted in the capture of Riparbella on the right while elements of the 135th Infantry entered Rosignano during the early evening. In this village the Germans put up a very stubborn resistance. The terrain in the area was such that it was not possible to flank the town since any attempt to do so would have exposed the encircling unit to fire from the town itself. There was nothing for it but to engage once again in the bitter house to house fighting with which the Division had become all-too-familiar during its earlier days in Italy.

On the coast little possibility existed for speed since the road at this point ran along a ledge hewn out of the mountainside where it fell in a sheer slope down to the sea. All that could be done was to block Highway 1 to prevent enemy units from harassing our left flank. The 168th Infantry on the right

was, during this time, surrounding and annihilating whole companies who rashly allowed themselves to become cut off during the defense of isolated hilltops.

Sec. of War Henry L. Stimson during a tour of the Italian front poses with Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder, Brig. Gen. Harry Sherman, Asst. 34th Div. C. G., Brig. Gen. Joe Foster Tate, 34th Div. Art. Off., and Maj. Gen. Ernest Harmon, C. G., 1st Armored Div.





CHAPTER XVII.

LEGHORN - Slugging

By 6 July Rosignano was cleared leaving so many enemy dead that the town was quarantined to prevent epidemics and the 168th Infantry had closed in on Castellina, a little town in the mountains about ten kilometers further north up the twisting, narrow road from Riparbella. To the west of this town the 442nd Infantry had occupied a ridge-line covering the lateral trail connecting Rosignano with Castellina. The obstinate fighting of these past few days had seen the enemy extend the front of the 16th SS Division gradually to the east, committing the 35th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment at the side of the 16th SS Reconnaissance Battalion, defenders of Cecina. To the east of the SS troops the 19th German Airforce Field Division was in a bad way. So much so that the enemy command rushed the crack 26th Panzer Grenadier Division from the central Italian front to oppose the 34th Division and to prevent a break-through by us which would immediately menace the port of Leghorn and greatly simplify our advance to the Arno River valley. On our side, too, we had received reinforcements since the 363rd Regimental Combat Team, of the 91st Infantry Division, together with tanks and tank destroyers, had been sent in on the right flank of the Division as a task force known as Brigade Ramey, after its commander. Thus the 34th Division at this time had command of no less than five regimental combat teams plus other attached troops and the Division sector was as much

as thirty kilometers wide.

During the morning of 7 July the Division received a temporary setback on its extreme right flank where the newly arrived troops of the 26th Panzer Grenadier Division counter-attacked elements of the 363rd Infantry and drove them from a hill. On the same afternoon the 133rd Infantry, from reserve, closed up behind the 168th Infantry, preparatory to relieving this regiment and entering the line on the left of the 363rd Infantry. Our intention was to make our main drive in the right Division sector and to push forward as hard as possible due north to seize the dominating ground overlooking the Arno Valley and by-pass the town of Leghorn since it would be relatively easy for the Germans to defend this part in the extremely rugged country to the south of it.

During 8 July the advance continued against weakening opposition in our right sector although the 135th and 442nd Infantry Regiments on the left met isolated enemy strongholds which required considerable time to reduce. The next few days were tough and strenuous and took the form of an out-and-out slugging match between two stubborn enemy divisions and the 34th. Our troops experienced almost as much trouble in overcoming the difficulties of poor communication as they did from direct German opposition. The roads, never in very good shape, were not designed for the heavy traffic we were obliged to put over them and, furthermore, the German engineers had demolished every bridge and culvert, had caused land-slides at points where the trails ran along shelves cut into sides of hills, and had blown craters in the road at awkward hairpin

bends. Much toil and much time was involved in clearing the way for our supplies to move to the forward elements.

On 12 July the 363rd Infantry came under control of its parent division which had taken over a sector on the right of the 34th, so that on 14 July our drive was resumed with the main effort on the east and with all four regiments committed in the line. In our desire to put a maximum punch behind our right-hand regiments a certain weakness on the left had been accepted but this was considerably off-set by the fire of anti-aircraft guns whose commander volunteered his services in support of our attack. In the face of many local counterattacks our progress was necessarily slow and in order to try to prevent undue fatigue in the assaulting elements, frequent reliefs of the battalions in the line were made.

By 17 July our troops had emerged into less hilly country and it was possible to use more armored vehicles in support of the infantry and for flank protection. We were now within striking distance of Leghorn. Higher headquarters directed us to exert all our efforts for the capture of this place rather than pursue our original intention of first seizing control of the Arno Valley. Accordingly, the Division sent every available support to the attack of the 135th Infantry who were slugging it out with SS troops in stubborn fighting among the hills southeast of the objective. During the night 18-19 July the 363rd Infantry was again attached to the 34th Division and it was to this regiment that went the honor of being the first American troops to enter the city. They did so after a rapid infantry-tank thrust.

Infantrymen of the 34th Division entering Leghorn.



arriving at the northeastern outskirts of Leghorn during the early hours of 19 July. The 135th Infantry, with a determined spurt, arrived in the southeastern suburbs shortly afterward.

In order to safe-guard the prize of this great seaport it was essential to drive back German elements south of the Arno River and to prevent enemy raiding parties from trying to penetrate to the city. Strong patrols were at once pushed forward to the river line but very few enemy were encountered and it was evident that the Germans had withdrawn the

bulk of their force to the northern bank leaving only outposts and patrols within the big loops which the Arno made in the flat land east of Pisa.

The 34th Division temporarily set up defensive positions along the southern bank and kept close watch on the enemy posts opposite them including the city of Pisa itself, where enemy weapons could frequently be seen shooting at us. We were unable to take adequate retaliatory action for fear of destroying some of the priceless treasures of this ancient town.

At that time it was not known whether our halt would be short, so plans and reconnaissances were made to cross the Arno in the event that we were ordered to do so. After a few days of patrolling, the 34th Division was relieved while our infantry went back to the resort town of Castiglioncello and other villages along the coast south of Leghorn for a period of rest. Certain advisers were left behind for a short time until the new men had settled in. The artillery rejoined the Division a little later when it was seen that their fire power for the repulse of a possible enemy attack south of the river was no longer needed.

During the static period just prior to the Division's relief, Major General Charles W. Ryder, who had led the 34th since Ireland, left for a higher command in another theater. He was succeeded on 21 July by Major General Charles L. Bolte. Under General Bolte's direction the 34th proceeded to train for future operations and to enjoy the usual experience of several weeks on end out of the fighting line during which it could enjoy the facilities offered by the Mediterranean resort coast in summer.

The war in Italy paused. With the invasion of Southern France many of the units who had fought alongside the Division left for new battlefields. The 34th remained in Italy, waiting until it should be called upon to take part in the assault on the strongest German positions yet encountered—the Gothic Line along the Appennines.



Maj. Gen. Charles L. Bolte, C. G., 34th Division,
addressing men of the 34th Division.