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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 349TH INFANTRY REGIMENTAL
COMBAT TEAM (88TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CAPTURE
OF MONTE RUMICI, ITALY, 15 APRIL - 21 APRIL 1945
(PO VALLEY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of an Engineer Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM
IN THE ATTACK

Captain Richard T. St.Sauver, Infantry

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 349th Infantry Regimental Combat Team in the capture of Monte Rumici, Italy, from the occupation of initial positions on the line of departure on 12 April 1945, to the now historic breakthrough into the Po Valley which culminated in the utter defeat of the German Armies in Italy and their consequent surrender.

In order to orient the reader properly it will be necessary to comment briefly on the general topographic and political composition of Italy itself, and also to explain the terrain conditions immediately surrounding the initial battlefield on and near the mountains of Furcoli and Monte Rumici, Italy.

The country of Italy occupies the entire peninsula that stretches from the Tyrolean and Austrian Alps southeast into the Mediterranean Sea. On the east is the Adriatic Sea, and on the south the Mediterranean Sea. On the west between the mainland and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia is the Tyrrhenian Sea with the Ligurian Sea farther to the north. The Maritime Alps in the west separate Italy from France; the Swiss Alps in the north from Switzerland; the Dolomite Alps from Austria, and the Carnac and Julian Alps form the boundary in the east from Yugoslavia. The initial action in the first phase of the Po Valley Campaign took place in the rugged mountains of the Maritime-Ligurian mass whose altitudes vary in a continuous mountain chain from three to seven thousand feet. The length of the peninsula is seven hundred and

sixty miles, while in width it does not exceed one hundred and fifty miles. The general average width of this peninsula is approximately one hundred miles. (1)

During the heavy allied offensives in the west beginning with the landings on the beaches of Normandy and with the Russian Armies constantly rolling over and crushing the German forces in the east it became readily apparent to the commanders of the allied forces that the twenty seven Nazi divisions in Italy would have to be either constantly engaged or decisively defeated by the cosmopolitan American Fifth Army and the polyglot British Eighth Army. This action would keep the German command from withdrawing this force and employing them against our allied offensives in either the western or eastern portions of Europe.

The entire Po Valley Campaign depended primarily upon extensive preliminary operations which were to effect the deception of the enemy, and were to obtain much needed intelligence information concerning the enemy. (2)

Prior to the spring offensive which was to take place against the German named "Genghis Kahn Line" extensive allied reconnaissance action took place. This reconnaissance was accomplished by artillery fire and never ending aggressive patrol action. Its purpose was two-fold with the initial mission being the taking of prisoners of war to enable G-2 to establish enemy unit identification. The secondary purpose of this ever constant reconnaissance was to test the combat attitude of the enemy, and also to secure information as to the strength of his defensive positions. One of the main raids of this type in the entire II Corps sector was of reinforced rifle company strength led by Captain Paul Behnke of the 2nd Battalion,

(1) A-3, page 355. (2) A-4, page 1.

349th Infantry Regiment. This raid was made against strong enemy resistance in the destroyed village of Di Soto which was a defensive anchor on the Monte Rumici feature. Although three American Infantry divisions had occupied this sector for various periods of time this raid was the first to penetrate German positions on the mountain. (3)

The II Corps scheme of deception was carefully planned and coordinated in every detail. It involved the use of numerous artillery fire missions at varied intervals of time. These fires were designed to steadily increase the number of targets engaged, and also to deceive the Kraut as to D-day and H-hours. As an additional security measure the Air Corps flew no daylight missions over the II Corps front prior to D-day. The 88th Infantry Division was active in participating in the all inclusive plan of deception. (4)

Members of all units comprising the 349th Regimental Combat Team were selected to form a division reconnaissance party for an assembly area in the British Eighth Army area in the eastern portion of the Po Valley. This plan was so detailed that the parties from various units were required to establish II Corps and divisional C.P.'s (5)

The attempt of the complete deception of the enemy was furthered by active troop movements, preliminary and limited objective attacks, camouflage, defensive measures along the entire Fifth Army front, the removal of unit signs and unit markings on vehicles and equipment, and the removal of the individual unit shoulder insignias. (6)

Final regrouping and training of units in II Corps for the coming offensive began on ~~one~~¹ April 1945, and continued until the

(3) Eyewitness, self Feb. 1945 (4) A-4, page 2; personal observation (5) (6) A-4, pages 1 and 2 Eyewitness, self, and A-7, page 2.

fourteenth of April 1945. All movements were rigidly controlled within the 88th Division in order to preserve secrecy and to allow the assault troops of the regiments to gain a maximum amount of rest and training for the ever nearing spring attack. The 349th Infantry Regiment was in bivouac near LaCroce, Italy, for three weeks prior to 1 April, and had trained day and night for the coming operation. (7)

The scope of this training placed special emphasis on stream and river crossing and platoon and company leadership and coordination. This emphasis on company and platoon leadership was soon to be put to a severe test. The results were later to be listed on the asset side of war's ledger sheet. (8)

On the first of April 1945, the 349th Infantry Regiment received orders to move north. The second day of April 1945 saw the regiment entrucking. Less the Second Battalion, the entire regiment moved into reserve positions along Highway 65. The Second Battalion was attached to the 91st Infantry Division and consequently occupied front line defensive positions on Monte Delle Formiche. The remaining two battalions of the regiment with the other organic component units were attached to the 34th Infantry Division and constituted a portion of that division's reserve. Company "A" of the 313th Engineer Combat Battalion, normally the Engineer component of the 349th Infantry Regimental Combat Team, had preceded the regiment into the line by 10 days. This engineer company was engaged in engineer reconnaissance patrols, mine clearing details, liaison plane reconnaissance flights, and the construction of direct fire emplacements for medium tanks and supporting automatic anti-aircraft artillery weapons. (9) (10)

(7) A-7, page 1. (8) A-7, page 1. (9) A-7, page 1. (10) A-10, page 17, personal observation 1 April - 12 April 1945.

The 349th Infantry now had the First Battalion at Anconella, and the Third Battalion near Trasasso. While in these reserve positions the entire regiment, less the Second Battalion, went through ten days of intensive training in final preparation for the D-day attack. Upon the completion of this training the 88th Infantry Division was notified that the final phase of the II Corps regrouping was nearing completion. D-day was named as 15 April 1945. (11)

ENEMY POSITIONS ON FURCOLI RIDGE

German positions on Furcoli Ridge and Monte Rumici were well emplaced. The Kraut had taken full advantage of the long winter months. Spring found the enemy well dug in and living in caves that could only be attacked frontally. These caves also provided the Germans with escape tunnels to the rear of the hill in some cases, and provided them with almost perfect protection against both artillery fire and mortar fire. Constant and heavy patrolling by each unit of the 349th Infantry during the previous winter months only served to disclose the almost impregnable positions of the enemy, and the barrier of fire that he could lay down in front of his positions. The only road approaching the Furcoli-Monte Rumici positions was the ridge top road running from Monzuno almost due north into the face of the Kraut. All approaches to the German lines, both foot and vehicular, were mined with both anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. In addition to the enemy emplacements the Monte Rumici feature was peculiarly well adapted to defense. The lack of an adequate road net seriously hampered the effective employment of armored vehicles, and both flanks of this key terrain feature were protected by rivers which were unfordable because of their

(11) A-7, page 3.

depth and swiftness of current caused by the spring mountain thaws typical to the northern portion of Italy. Every officer and soldier in the combat team realized that it would take the utmost of cooperation and intestinal fortitude to route the German from his vaunted "Genghis Kahn Line". (12)

12 APRIL 1945

On the twelfth of April the 349th Infantry relieved elements of the 34th Infantry Division in a sector north of Monzuno, Italy. The regimental attack order had been completed on the eleventh day of April. This order was issued to the subordinate units on the twelfth. The plan of attack was given, and the regimental sector as outlined in this order was of a narrow frontage being bordered by Monte Rumici itself on the right and route 6620 (Italian Highway 64) on the left. The immediate regimental objective was Furcoli Ridge which was the base of the German defensive positions. Poised to jump off with the 349th Infantry was the 350th Infantry on the right, and the Sixth South African Division (Armored) on the left. This regimental plan of attack took into consideration the fact that the entire combat team would be pinched out four thousand yards north of the line of departure. After being pinched out the complete regimental combat team was to be withdrawn. Following the withdrawal this R.C.T. was to pass through the Sixth South African Division on the left and move north on Route 6620 which is in the Torrente Setta River valley. Attached to the 88th Infantry Division for this operation was Company "C" of the 757th Tank Battalion, the 33rd Infantry Scout Dog Platoon, Company "A" of the 100th Chemical Mortar Battalion, and Company "C" of the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Company "A" of the 313th Engineer

(12) A-7, pages 2 and 3, A-10, page 15 and personal reconnaissance by self 6 April 1945.

Combat Battalion, and the 337th Field Artillery Battalion were in direct support of the regiment. (13)

D-DAY, H-HOUR - 15 APRIL

At 2200 hours on the fifteenth of April preparatory fires of one half of an hours duration commenced. Every available weapon that could fire into the German positions opened up. Planned fires from artillery, tanks and tank destroyers, mortars, machine guns, rockets, and automatic anti-aircraft weapons converged on the Kraut emplacements. The regimental Anti-Tank Company and the Cannon Company added their fires to the seemingly already devastating inferno. Immediately following the preparation the infantrymen jumped off with the engineers staying on the heels of the assault companies to clear the anti-tank mines from the road. (14)

The 3rd Battalion launched a company strength raid in the left portion of the sector. This was to be a feint which was coordinated with the 1st Battalion attack against Furcoli Ridge. It soon became evident that the Germans had escaped the preparatory fires virtually unscathed. Flares were shot up from the enemy positions that lighted the terrain so well that it was possible to see the movements of individual soldiers as they moved forward. The Kraut opened up his final defensive fires with mortars and machine guns. After three costly assaults the Germans were driven from the rubble strewn ghost town of Furcoli. After withstanding a murderous mortar barrage and one screaming counter-attack, elements of the 1st Battalion gained a foothold on Furcoli Ridge. This foothold was gained by 1030 hours on 16 April 1945. Successive attacks were launched by other companies of the 1st Battalion to relieve the pressure being exerted on our troops on the ridge itself.

(13) A-4, annex I., A-6, A-7, page 2. (14) A-7, page 3, and personal observation.

These attacks were launched before dark on 16 April 1945, but all were unsuccessful. (15)

At 2200 hours 16 April 1945, the 2nd Battalion was committed with the mission of passing through the 1st Battalion and seizing Il Poggiale and Le Braine. The plan of attack had "F" Company, commanded by Captain Paul Behnke on the right with the mission of seizing Le Braine. To the left of Company "F" was Company "G" commanded by Captain Robert Kelly with the mission of seizing Il Poggiale. Il Poggiale would give the regiment a position from which it would be possible to shoot into the reverse slope of the German positions. The initial attack of Company "F" bogged down against heavy volumes of enemy automatic weapon and mortar fire. Company "G" through the leadership of Captain Kelly, managed to push one platoon into the lone house remaining at Il Poggiale. The remainder of the company was unable to reach this position. After withstanding an entire day of counter attacks, mortar barrages, and enemy automatic fire the platoon ran out of ammunition and grenades. They were out of sight of friendly observation and had no communication. Captain Kelly was killed and the remainder of the platoon was captured. Later reports from prisoners of war showed that this one platoon had accounted for 35 Germans known dead, and about 43 wounded. (16)

SUPPORTING ENGINEER OPERATIONS 15-17 APRIL

As the assault companies moved forward the engineer platoons of the 313th Engineer Combat Battalion followed immediately behind the infantry, but preceded the attacking armor. One hundred yards short of the village of Furcoli itself one of the attached armored vehicles blew up on a land mine. This vehicle had left the lane

(15) A-7, pages 3, 4, 5, personal observation. (16) A-7, pages 6, 7, 8, 9. Statement by regimental S-2--Major E. Aileo.

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These working parties continued probing until dawn on 16 Apr 1945. Three quarters of a mile of road had been probed literally inch by inch. One party had cleared paths for aid men to reach wounded throughout the entire night. This work was accomplished under heavy mortar and automatic weapons fire of a sporadic nature. At this time the infantry attack had been stopped and the engineer mine clearance details were forced to withdraw due to the observed enemy fire of all types that was placed upon them. (18)

During the daylight hours of 17 Apr the mine parties of the engineer platoons were reorganized and coordination was reestablished with the assault infantry-tank elements of the regiment. It was decided to resume mine clearing tasks in conjunction with the infantry attack scheduled to take off with the coming hours of darkness. A daylight engineer reconnaissance party also discovered two road demolitions that required angle dozer work before the tanks could negotiate them. (19)

(16) A-7, p. 6, 7, 8, 9. Statement by regimental S-2 -- Maj. C. Ailes. (17) Personal observation 128

(18) (19) Personal Observation + eye witness -- Capt. Paul Behnke

At first dark engineer parties of both "A" and "B" companies moved out and the probing for mines took place once again. A D-7 angle dozer was moving up into position to work on the craters in the road when it hit a mine. A terrific explosion occurred which overturned the dozer and killed one engineer guide and one mechanic and also seriously wounded the operator. Fragments of metal anti-tank mines were found with a mine detector, and a long piece of hard wood closely resembling a broom handle was also located there. This led to the conclusion that the mines had been buried about four to six feet into the ground and that a long piece of wood had transmitted the weight of the vehicle to a detonator in the mines. Orders to probe the entire stretch of roadway again were issued, and each individual engineer soldier was instructed to thoroughly investigate any wood contacted by his bayonet probe. This action brought almost instant success. Within five hours of working time seventy one holes containing from four to six tellermines each were uncovered. Needless to say this action opened the few restricted vehicular avenues of approach, and permitted the use of armored vehicles to a more desirable degree. (20)

17 - 18 APRIL

On the night of 16 - 17 Apr the situation was still precarious. Although Furcoli Ridge was partially occupied by the 1st Bn., the 3rd Bn. had been unsuccessful in its assaults against K-12. Gains were measured in yards. It was apparent, however, that the Germans were beginning to yield gradually under the continual heavy pressure that was being applied. (21)

The 2nd Bn. was ordered to continue the attack against Furcoli Ridge paying particular attention to Hills 300 and 403. The 3rd Bn. was given the mission of clearing the Vado and Nuzzano Ridges. The attack of the 2nd and 3rd Bns. jumped off under the cover of darkness on the 17th of Apr 45. It initially appeared as though the German lines would continue to hold. The attack of Co. "F", again led by Capt. Paul Behnke, began to move. Although enemy fire was intense, Capt. Behnke maintained control of his company and at 0900 hours on the morning of 18 Apr the 2nd Bn. was in complete control of Furcoli Ridge. The 3rd Bn. with the assistance of the 2nd Bn. Battle Patrol, gained Hill 427. The enemy had lost a great number of men, and his defensive position was falling. The attack continued. The 2nd Bn. with Co. "F" leading captured Le Braine and Canova while the 3rd Bn. fulfilled their mission of clearing the Nuzzano Ridge, taking Hill 403 and Vado. The objectives of Vado and Canova were both on Route 6620 and the 349th Combat Team was pinched out by the 6th South African Div. on the left and the 350th Inf. Regt. on the right. Two prisoners from the G-2 section of the German 65th Division later credited the breakthrough at Furcoli and Monte Rumici as the prime factor in the collapse of the Genghis Kahn Line. The loss to the Germans of the Monte Rumici feature contributed to the fall of Mt. Adone in the 91st Inf. Div. sector. (22)

After being pinched out by the Sixth South African Armored Div., and by the 350th Inf. Regt., the 349th Inf. Regimental Combat Team was once again entrucked and moved to Vergato, Italy. By 0800 hours on the 19th of Apr., all elements, organic and attached, had arrived in the new assembly area. On the night of 19 Apr., the troops once again entrucked and moved to the village of Lama. Here the foot elements of the regiment dismounted. Extra ammunition, rations and water were issued. Early on the morning of 20 Apr. the attack pushed forward into the mountains. The formation used was a column of two regiments with the 351st Inf. Regt. leading. A distance of one thousand yards separated the two units. Very light resistance was met and the column moved rapidly forward. The small mountain village of Lagune was reached by 1830 hours 20 Apr., but the advance was pushed forward until the troops arrived at La Torre. Here the tired troops were given a short rest and at 0300 hrs (20) PERS' Observation & participation. (21) A-7, p.9. (22) A-7, p.9, 10, 11; 122, p.9, P.O. 129

on 21 Apr., the advance continued. Resistance was still scattered and light, and it began to look as though the German had disappeared. The formation was still a column of regiments with the 351st Inf. leading. Forward elements of the 349th Inf. reached the Po Valley at 0900 hrs., 21 Apr, without being seriously engaged by the enemy. Headquarters 88th Inf. Div. issued an oral order to Col. P.E. LeStourgeon, Regimental Commander of the 349th Inf., giving the regiment a sector and committing it to front line action. Col. LeStourgeon immediately had his staff prepare Field Order number four, dated 21 Apr 1945, which gave the direction of attack as three hundred and sixty degrees with the mission of reaching the Po River in the shortest possible time. The formation for the renewed push was Third Bn. on the right, Second Bn. on the left with the First Bn. in reserve. The pursuit commenced at 1000 hours, 21 Apr, and rapidity of movement was stressed. Groups of Germans were surrendering to the American soldier without a round being fired, and when resistance was met it was scattered and light. The pursuit continued on foot until the 22nd of Apr 45, when the regiment received some tanks and tank destroyers. Troops were immediately mounted on these vehicles and the race to the Po River commenced. Soon the Allies in Italy were to complete the defeat of the German Armies, and the surrender was to be signed. At the close of this campaign the 88th Inf. Div., the workhorse of II Corps was officially credited with the capture of 24,560 Prisoners of War. The next comparable figure for an American Inf. Div. in the entire II Corps sector was 8,891. This latter figure was attained by the 91st Inf. Div. (American) (23)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation it may readily be seen that the 349th Inf. Regimental Combat Team was given a most difficult mission. This mission was one that required a frontal assault upon an enemy who possessed excellent prepared positions, and who had terrific advantages in observation and concealment.

The preparations and orders issued were complete in every respect, and each component unit had received sufficient time for training and battle indoctrination. Although the 88th Inf. Div. had suffered 9000 battle casualties in 52 days of fighting during the fall and early winter months of 1944, replacements had been received and oriented as to the standards required of them by the division. These same replacements were molded into efficient fighting teams through the mediums of training and actual combat through patrol activities and defensive warfare. The points which may be criticized are as follows:

1st: The 757th Tank Bn. had little or no previous combat experience with the 88th Inf. Div. This resulted in extreme difficulties pertinent to liaison. When units have worked together the resulting team work minimizes the liaison problem.

2nd: Division, Regimental, and Battalion Staffs, coordinated with Division Artillery, must make a continuous study of aerial photos when unobserved artillery missions are being fired. This was not done in many instances, and several cases were noted where these unobserved fires fell short on mountains defilading enemy positions.

The above two points of criticisms are more than offset by the commendable actions of the staffs from division to battalion levels, and by the ~~commendable~~

(23) A-7, p. 12, 13; A-4, p. 1, annex 8; A-9, A-10, p. 13, P.O.

courage, loyalty, and efficiency displayed by every officer and soldier in the regiment. This may be seen in the actions of all concerned on the grimmest testing ground in the world--the battlefield.

To review the results of this operation: The 349th INFANTRY REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM initially captured its objective which was denoted as the key to the "GENGHIS KAHN LINE". It fought and defeated elements of five German divisions composed of fanatical "HITLER YOUTH" whose ages were from 18-20 years. Even after suffering heavy losses it continued to fight ~~p~~ retaining its unity, effectiveness, and organization. Junior officer leadership was at its peak due to thorough training and indoctrination. Finally the regiment captured well over 10,000 prisoners of war which is a total bag greater than any attained by any other one Allied Division.

LESSONS LEARNED

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

1 - Control:

a. Phase lines: Control was exercised by unit commanders by a system of phase lines. These ~~lines~~ phase lines facilitated unit location reports which are essential for clearing of supporting fires.

b. Squad Control: Battle Drill with its thorough training of the former Able, Baker, and Charlie teams, enabled the squad leaders to obtain better control of their men.

2 - Fire and Movement:

a. Fire and movement resulted in quick advances when all riflemen delivered fire. Platoon and squad leaders must overcome the tendency of individual riflemen to withhold fire for fear of disclosing their position.

3 - Conditioning and Training:

a. Rigorous physical conditioning and thorough individual and group training make alert, tough and aggressive soldiers. The soldier in combat will only do those things he had done in training. He cannot be told what to do in combat if he had not been required to do it in training.

4 - Communication:

a. All units comprising a Regimental Combat Team should have communications with each other in the attack.

5 - Reconnaissance:

a. Vehicle and foot reconnaissance proved to be inadequate in many cases. Extensive use was made of artillery liaison planes, and this proved to be highly successful especially for engineer intelligence information. Vital road and stream information was obtained in this manner, and the additional time allowed could be spent in planning for the reduction of obstacles.

6 - Anti-Aircraft Artillery Support:

a. Anti-aircraft artillery as a ground support weapon proved to be highly successful. Provided with telephone communications they are capable of achieving large and accurate volumes of fire by the indirect methods. In order to effect direct fire support it is essential that they work together with the supported infantry unit in training and in combat. M 15's (one 37 M.M. and dual 50 cal. Machine Guns) were particularly successful when firing at caves, tunnels, observation posts and other targets distinguished by small openings or areas.

cleared of mines by the engineers. Realizing the infantry's need for a direct fire weapon the engineer officer immediately dispatched a messenger back to the second tank with instructions to personally lead this tank along the path cleared of mines up to the infantry unit. As this tank moved along the cleared portion of the roadway with the engineer guide leading, it too hit a land mine which killed the engineer guide and a member of the tank crew. All other crew members of this tank were either shaken up severely or wounded. After hearing the explosion and the cries of the wounded men the engineer officer hurried back to the second tank casualty. Upon reaching the tank it was noticed that an unusually large crater had been blown by the charge, and also that an unusual amount of damage had been done to the vehicle. Close supervision had been exercised over the mine clearing squads, and the personnel composing these squads were experienced in all types of mine clearing work. Knowing that the clearance work had been thorough and unhurried the engineer platoon leader realized that the Germans had used either the new non-metallic "Topf Mines", or were using plain demolitions buried deeply into the ground. The size and roundness of the crater indicated the use of several Topf mines in one hole. Being non-metallic this mine could not be picked up by our mine detectors. While inspecting the crater a messenger from the engineer platoon sergeant arrived with a message for the platoon leader informing him that both the infantry and engineers had suffered casualties from the vicious German "Shoe Mine". The mine detectors were immediately set aside and mine probing parties were formed. One probing party commenced work where the initial anti-tank mine had been encountered. (17)

(17) Personal observation.

These working parties continued probing until dawn on 16 April 1945. Three quarters of a mile of road had been probed literally inch by inch. One party had cleared paths for aid men to reach wounded throughout the entire night. This work was accomplished under heavy mortar and automatic weapons fire of a sporadic nature. At this time the infantry attack had been stopped and the engineer mine clearance details were forced to withdraw due to the observed enemy fire of all types that was placed upon them. (18)

During the daylight hours of 17 April the mine parties of the engineer platoons were reorganized and coordination was reestablished with the assault infantry-tank elements of the regiment. It was decided to resume mine clearing tasks in conjunction with the infantry attack scheduled to take off with the coming hours of darkness. A daylight engineer reconnaissance party also discovered two road demolitions that required angle dozer work before the tanks could negotiate them. (19)

✓ At first dark engineer parties of both "A" and "B" companies moved out and the probing for mines took place once again. A D-7 angle dozer was moving up into position to work on the craters in the road when it hit a mine. A terrific explosion occurred which overturned the dozer and killed one engineer guide and one mechanic, and also seriously wounded the operator. Fragments of metal anti-tank mines were found with a mine detector, and a long piece of hard wood closely resembling a broom handle was also located here. This led to the conclusion that the mines had been buried about four to six feet into the ground and that a long piece of wood had transmitted the weight of the vehicle to a detonator in the mines.

(18) (19) Personal observation and eye witness--Captain Paul Behnke

Orders to probe the entire stretch of roadway again were issued, and each individual engineer soldier was instructed to thoroughly investigate any wood contacted by his bayonet probe. This action brought almost instant success. Within five hours of working time seventy one holes containing from four to six tellermines each were uncovered. Needless to say this action opened the few restricted vehicular avenues of approach, and permitted the use of armored vehicles to a more desirable degree. (20)

17 - 18 APRIL

On the night of 16 - 17 April the situation was still precarious. Although Furcoli Ridge was partially occupied by the 1st Battalion, the 3rd Battalion had been unsuccessful in its assaults against K-12. Gains were measured in yards. It was apparent, however, that the Germans were beginning to yield gradually under the continual heavy pressure that was being applied. (21)

The 2nd Battalion was ordered to continue the attack against Furcoli Ridge paying particular attention to Hills 300 and 403. The 3rd Battalion was given the mission of clearing the Vado and Nuzzano Ridges. The attack of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions jumped off under the cover of darkness on the 17th of April 1945. It initially appeared as though the German lines would continue to hold. The attack of Company "F", again led by Captain Paul Behnke, began to move. Although enemy fire was intense, Captain Behnke maintained control of his company and at 0900 hours on the morning of 18 April the 2nd Battalion was in complete control of Furcoli Ridge. The 3rd Battalion with the assistance of the 2nd Battalion Battle Patrol, gained Hill 427. The enemy had lost a great number of men, and his defensive position was falling. The attack

(20) Personal observation and participation. (21) A-7, page 9.

continued. The 2nd Battalion with Company "F" leading captured Le Braine and Canova while the 3rd Battalion fulfilled their mission of clearing the Nuzzano Ridge, taking Hill 403 and Vado. The objectives of Vado and Canova were both on Route 6620 and the 349th Combat Team was pinched out by the 6th South African Division on the left and the 350th Infantry Regiment on the right. Two prisoners from the G-2 section of the German 65th Division later credited the breakthrough at Furcoli and Monte Rumici as the prime factor in the collapse of the Genghis Kahn Line. The loss to the Germans of the Monte Rumici feature contributed to the fall of Mt. Adone in the 91st Infantry Division sector. (22)

After being pinched out by the Sixth South African Armored Division, and by the 350th Infantry Regiment, the 349th Infantry Regimental Combat Team was once again entrucked and moved to Vergato, Italy. By 0800 hours on the 19th of April, all elements, organic and attached, had arrived in the new assembly area. On the night of 19 April, the troops once again entrucked and moved to the village of Lama. Here the foot elements of the regiment dismounted. Extra ammunition, rations, and water were issued. Early on the morning of 20 April the attack pushed forward into the mountains. The formation used was a column of two regiments with the 351st Infantry Regiment leading. A distance of one thousand yards separated the two units. Very light resistance was met and the column moved rapidly forward. The small mountain village of Lagune was reached by 1830 hours 20 April, but the advance was pushed forward until the troops arrived at La Torre. Here the tired troops were given a short rest and at 0300 hours on

(22) A-7, pages 9, 10, 11; A-4, page 9, personal observation.

21 April, the advance continued. Resistance was still scattered and light, and it began to look as though the German had disappeared. The formation was still a column of regiments with the 351st Infantry leading. Forward elements of the 349th Infantry reached the Po Valley at 0900 hours, 21 April, without being seriously engaged by the enemy. Headquarters 88th Infantry Division issued an oral order to Colonel P. E. LeSturgeon, Regimental Commander of the 349th Infantry, giving the regiment a sector and committing it to front line action. Colonel LeSturgeon immediately had his staff prepare Field Order number four, dated 21 April 1945, which gave the direction of attack as three hundred and sixty degrees with the mission of reaching the Po River in the shortest possible time. The formation for the renewed push was Third Battalion on the right, Second Battalion on the left with the First Battalion in reserve. The pursuit commenced at 1000 hours, 21 April, and rapidity of movement was stressed. Groups of Germans were surrendering to the American soldier without a round being fired, and when resistance was met it was scattered and light. The pursuit continued on foot until the 22nd of April 1945, when the regiment received some tanks and tank destroyers. Troops were immediately mounted on these vehicles and the race to the Po River commenced. Soon the Allies in Italy were to complete the defeat of the German Armies, and the surrender was to be signed. At the close of this campaign the 88th Infantry Division, the workhorse of II Corps was officially credited with the capture of 24,560 Prisoners of War. The next comparable figure for an American Infantry Division in the entire II Corps sector was 8,891. This latter figure was attained by the 91st Infantry

2 - Fire and Movement:

a. Fire and movement resulted in quick advances when all riflemen delivered fire. Platoon and squad leaders must overcome the tendency of individual riflemen to withhold fire for fear of disclosing their position.

3 - Conditioning and Training:

a. Rigorous physical conditioning and thorough individual and group training make alert, tough, and aggressive soldiers. The soldier in combat will only do those things he has done in training. He cannot be told what to do in combat if he has not been required to do it in training.

4 - Communications:

a. All units comprising a Regimental Combat Team should have communications with each other in the attack.

5 - Reconnaissance:

a. Vehicle and foot reconnaissance proved to be inadequate in many cases. Extensive use was made of artillery liaison planes, and this proved to be highly successful especially for engineer intelligence information. Vital road and stream information was obtained in this manner, and the additional time allowed could be spent in planning for the reduction of obstacles.

6 - Anti-Aircraft Artillery Support:

a. Anti-aircraft artillery as a ground support weapon proved to be highly successful. Provided with telephone communications they are capable of achieving large and accurate volumes of fire by the indirect fire methods. In order to effect direct fire support it is essential that they work together with the supported infantry unit in training and in combat. M 15's (one 37 M.M. and

dual 50 cal. Machine Guns) were particularly successful when firing at caves, tunnels, observation posts and other targets distinguished by small openings or areas.