

company disorganized after suffering heavy casualties, Captain Thomas S. Cussans, the Battalion S-3, of Flint Michigan, took command and saved the battalion as well. He then led the company to the next hill, going from man to man to encourage them.<sup>37</sup>

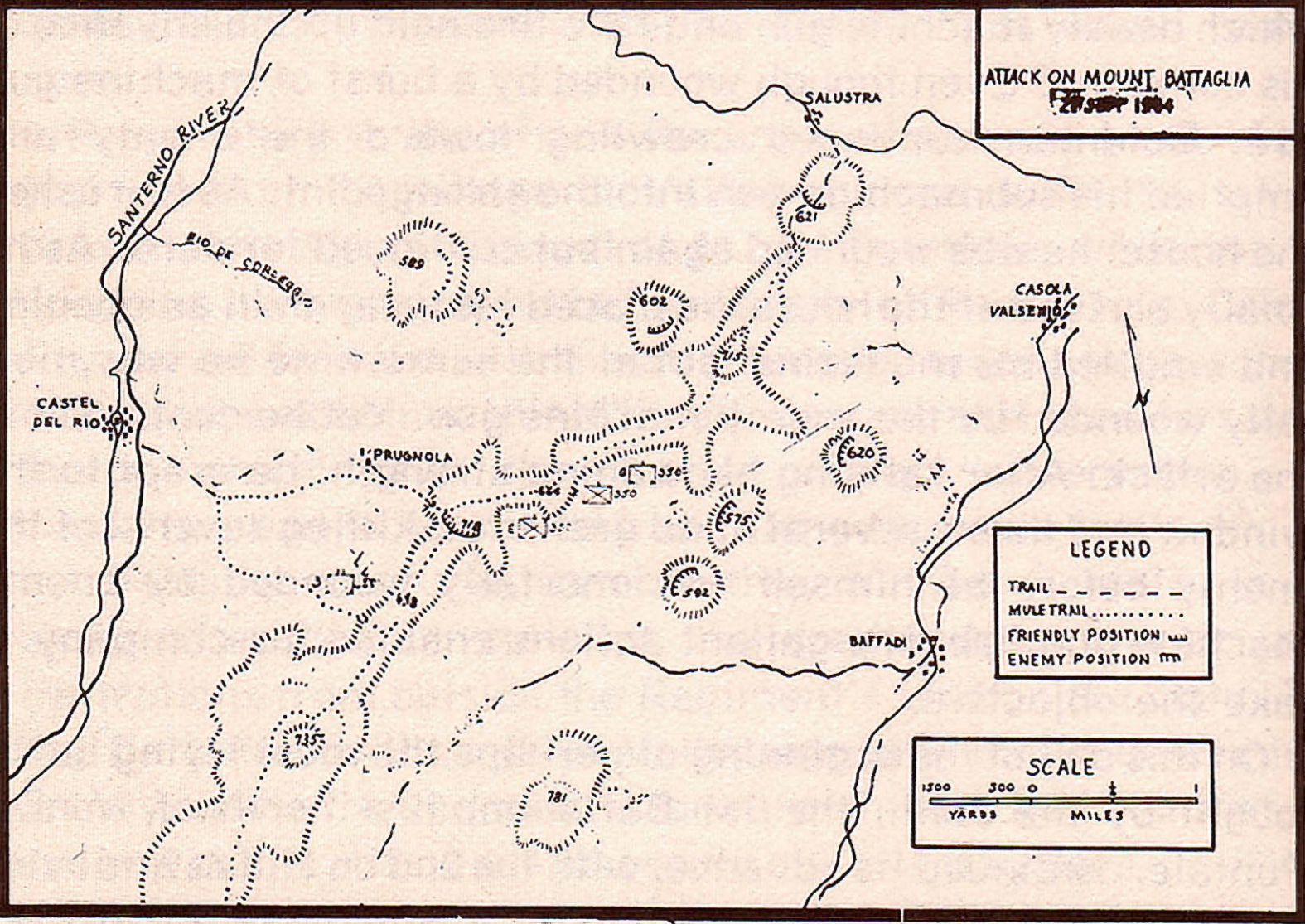
On this day the Second Battalion was just short of Mt. del Puntale, and the Third was on top of rocky and barren Mt. Delle Croce. The day before, Lt. George H. Carpenter, Company I CO from Malvern, Arkansas, had promised Colonel Fry that his troops would be on top of the hill the next morning; he kept his word, although he fell from a sniper's bullet on the 26th.<sup>38</sup> On the 24th Captain Edward J. Maher of Flushing, Long Island, CO of Company L, received a bullet through his chest but was saved by first aid.<sup>39</sup>

By the 25th the Regiment was well ahead of the 351st Infantry Regiment in the valley on the left, south of Castel del Rio. Not only was the 350th suffering from heavy concentrations of artillery on the left and from the front, but also from the area of Palazzuolo, in front of the British slowly advancing troops on the right. The much-needed rest deserved by the valiant attacking Blue Devils would have to wait, however, as the message from Division Headquarters commanded: "Fifth Army plans require the capture of Carnevale and Battaglia. Take them as soon as possible."<sup>40</sup> (See Map 8.)

By this date the 88th was preparing to take the last commanding peaks in its zone—the aforementioned Carnevale and Battaglia in the 350th zone, with Mount Pratolungo on the left in the 349th zone. These heights were of paramount importance to the Germans, for "the loss of this chain of mountains, extending west to east through Castel del Rio, would deprive the Germans of the strongest defensive positions between Castel del Rio and the Po plains." The task of the 350th was to clear the ridge stretching from Mount Acuto to Mount Battaglia.<sup>41</sup>

The attack, set for 0600, September 26, began on schedule. During the first day of the attack the 2nd and 3rd Battalions reached positions north of Mount Acuto, and the 1st Battalion on the right seized Mount del Puntale. The advance, however, broadened the gap between the Regiment and the British 1st Division to as much as 8000 yards. More and more units from Army reserve were called up to man the long exposed flank to

ATTACK ON MOUNT BATTAGLIA  
27 JULY 1904



CASTEL  
DEL RIO

SANTERNO RIVER

RIO DE SOBREGUERO



SALUSTRA

CASOLA  
VALSENO

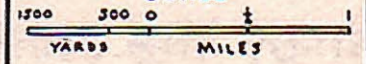
PRUGNOLA

BAFFADI

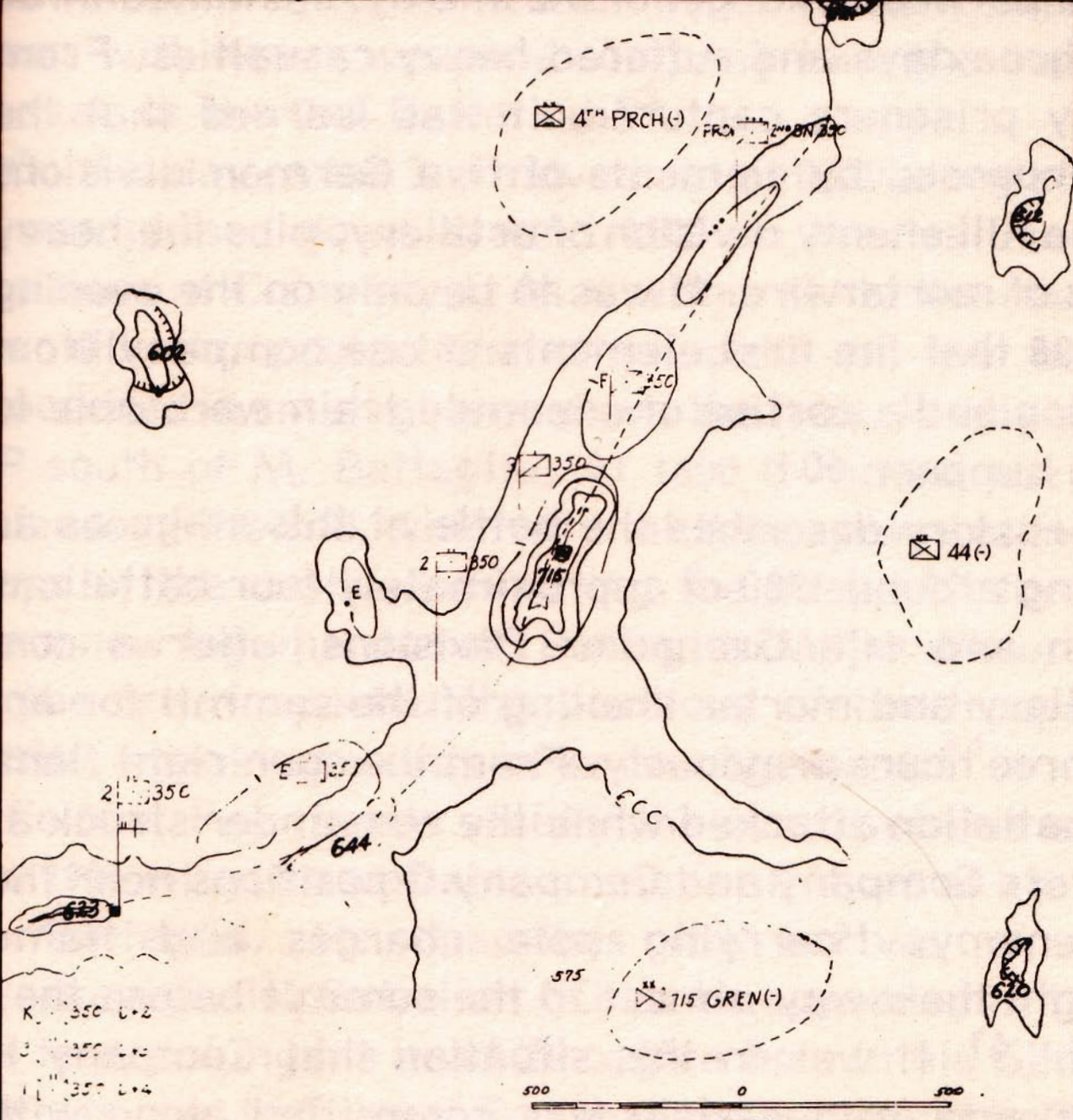
LEGEND

- TRAIL - - - - -
- MULETRAIL .....
- FRIENDLY POSITION 
- ENEMY POSITION 

SCALE



DEFENSE ON M. BATTAGLIA



K 350 L-2  
3 350 L-3  
1 350 L-4

500 0 500  
YARDS



The picture my memory retains is of Major Mike moving across the battlefield with a heavy walking stick in his hand setting a proper example of courage, and the individual soldiers moving up the slopes of Puntale as if on parade. The sun was shining brightly on the red slopes and our heavy artillery support fire splashed about the crest of the hill and around a peasant's house on the east slope...Occasionally one of our soldiers fell but the line moved on steadily.<sup>43</sup>

At the end of the day, the 3rd was in position to move on Carnevale. Colonel Fry moved his CP to their positions to be near the approaching battle for Mount Battaglia. The 2nd Battalion, scheduled for the attack on Battaglia on the morrow, moved in with the 3rd at 2330, 26 September, to be ready to pass through the latter battalion.<sup>44</sup>

To prepare for reserves on Battaglia, Colonel Fry ordered Major Mike of the 1st Battalion to move to the vicinity of Battaglia and dispatched the 760th Tank Battalion, under Major Andrew R. Cheek, to guard the flank on the 27th.

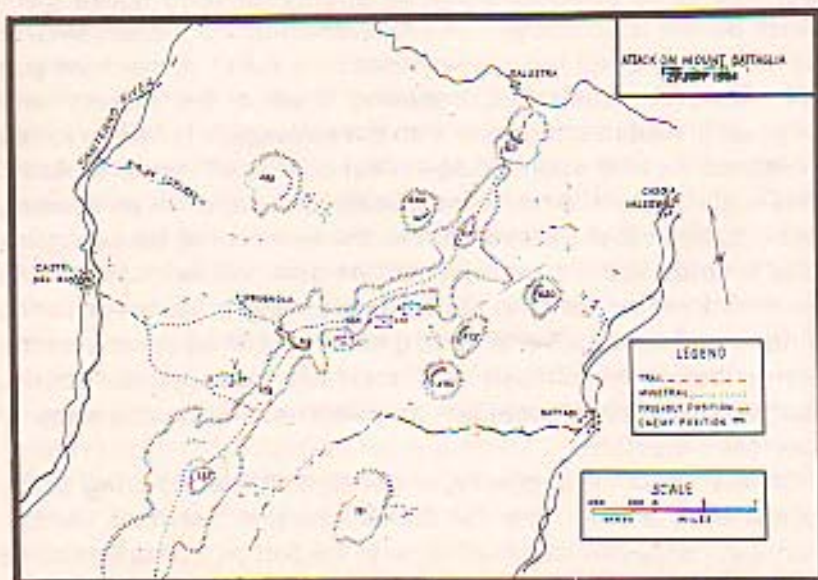
It was on this day in the vicinity of Castel del Rio that PFC Herbert G. Goldman of Brooklyn, New York, paid the supreme sacrifice as he attacked alone an enemy-fortified house from which deadly machine gun and rifle fire held up the advance of his company. Even though wounded by a burst of machine gun fire, Goldman continued crawling toward the enemy and emptied his submachine gun into the strongpoint. As he rushed the house, he was wounded again but continued forward. As he finally arrived at the house, he placed his weapon in an opening and emptied his magazine, but at the same time he was mortally wounded by the enemy machine gun. Yet he continued in the attack. After rallying his waning strength, he crept to the window and threw several hand grenades, killing several of the enemy before he himself was mortally wounded by enemy machine gun fire. His gallant actions enabled his company to take the objective.

On this day of the beginning of perhaps the most trying battle fought by the 350th, the 1st Battalion, just north of M. Del Puntale, continued its advance, with the 2nd on Hill 669, moving through the village of Vallamaggiore and heading for Mt. Carnevale, while the 3rd was also moving forward in the at-

tack.<sup>45</sup> The First, moving from Mt. Faggiola, met strong enemy positions around 1500 hours, notably Company C, and dug in and held gains amidst heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. Beginning its attack at 0500, the 2nd advanced through the 3rd to reach the summit of Battaglia during the day.<sup>46</sup> After having captured Mount Carnevale and having sent 20 prisoners to the rear, the 2nd, before waiting for the 3rd to move up, moved on to Mount Battaglia, reaching the crest at 1535 hours.

In its drive toward Battaglia the 2nd drove the enemy, in its process of digging in, from Mt. Carnevale, whereupon the Jerries ran in retreat into the distance. The enemy then shelled the area with heavy artillery and mortar concentrations, inflicting heavy casualties. The 3rd moved out at 1300 and passed through previous 1 Company positions, the scene of a fierce counter attack the night before. Numerous German bodies and equipment dotted the area. Amidst rain the battalion set up its CP in the vicinity of Val Maffione.<sup>47</sup>

At 1535 Colonel Fry received word that his 2nd Battalion was on Mt. Battaglia, whereupon he ordered them to hold and consolidate their positions. A congratulatory message from Speedy 6 (Corps II Commander, Major General Geoffrey Keyes) cheered the leaders. (See Map 9).



Chapter 5 — Map 9

By this time the 351st on the left had invested Castel Del Rio, but the British on the right flank were still from seven to eight thousand yards in the rear, enabling the enemy artillery to fire at an exceptional rate. As the 2nd moved on to Battaglia, Colonel Williamson, the CO, radioed: "Hell, Colonel, I can see the Po." Lt. Charles Lesnick, with Company G and from Seattle, Washington, stated that the enemy, apparently never suspecting the 350th that far forward into their territory, came forward in double column and were killed to the last man.<sup>48</sup>

After the first attack the Second Battalion formed a type of U-shaped defense. Before moving on to Battaglia, the commander of the Second Battalion, Colonel Williamson, had met General Ramey at the foot of the mountain. General Ramey told him to watch the flanks. Colonel Williamson then sent Captain Roeder's Company G out, with Company E on the left and Company F on the right. Companies G and E formed somewhat to the front, with Company F slightly in the rear to be used as reserve. Captain Roeder of Company G established the main defense. Immediately the Germans reacted with heavy mortar fire and small patrol attacks. There would then be attack after attack. Captain Roeder was all over the place exemplifying at all times superior leadership.

Captain Stoner of the Medics set up his aid station on the bottom floor of the castle atop Battaglia. He and his valliant medics would continue their treatment of the wounded for three days without sleep. At first the command post located on the third floor of the castle but later moved to the bottom floor with the medics.<sup>49</sup>

To this day there persists contrary views of the role played by the Italian partisans in the battle of Battaglia. Douglas Orgill, the author of *The Gothic Line*, states that the 36th Garibaldi Brigade, which had been engaged in local fighting around Bologna earlier in the month, guided the 2nd to the peak and later also claimed much of the credit for its successful defense. The Italian Resistance history describes the struggle as "the episode in which, more than in any other in the course of the Italian campaign, final victory was really a joint one, with equal sacrifice and will to fight."<sup>50</sup> Although armed with sten guns and German machine pistols, the partisans had not set up an organized defense. The orders from General Keyes to the battalion was to hold until the 351st came abreast on its left.

The road to Imola appeared open (and with it the possibility of trapping elements of the German 10th Army) as Mount Battaglia was the last important feature in the line of hills.<sup>51</sup>

Colonel Fry seriously questions the intent of an Italian partisan who voluntarily led him forward that evening. Fearing that he was purposely being led into enemy territory, Colonel Fry halted and began later to retrace his steps to make contact with the bulk of the attacking troops. As he halted for the night in a peasant's house, a German patrol attacked, killing two enlisted men. By this time the weapons were clogged with mud, the men were rain soaked, and Colonel Fry was caught with a single company far from his command post. A wounded man brought in at this time received first aid from the dedicated medic Owen L. Sanderlin, but because of a fault in the blood transfusion mechanism, the precious plasma flowed on to the ground with the result that the wounded man died.<sup>52</sup>

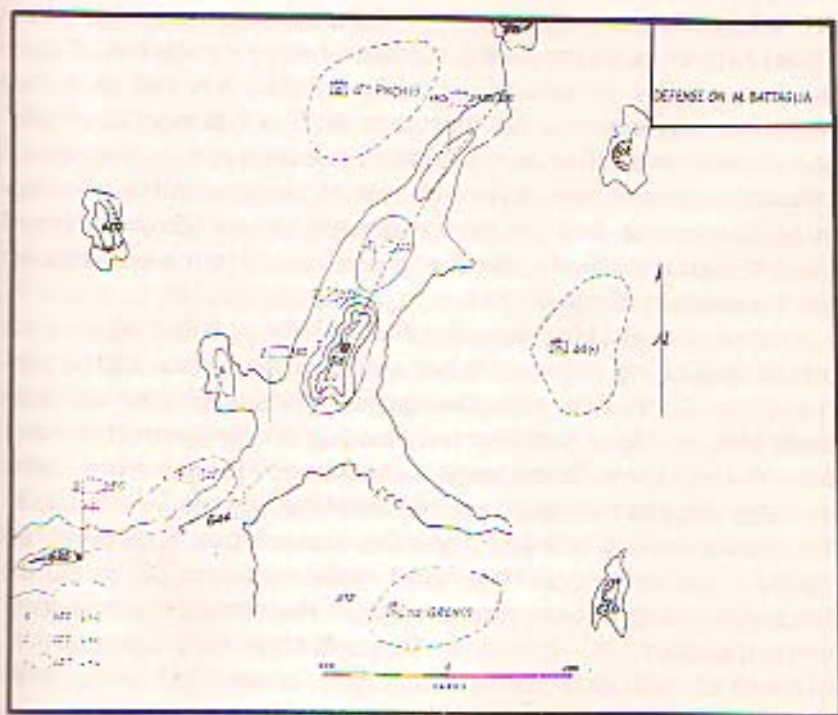
As all the battalions continued advancing, the supply situation increasingly grew extremely difficult. Rations had to be hauled by 2 ½ ton trucks as far forward as possible, then jeeped further before being loaded on to mule trains to the regiment, then located at Monduccio. The 1st Battalion reorganized for the attack on this day and moved out at 1800 hours, bivouacking near Mt. Faggiola at 1900 hours, approximately a two mile distance from the starting line.<sup>53</sup> For the 2nd Battalion, this would mark the beginning of almost incessant enemy counter attacks for the next five days as they grew in ferocity with each new encounter. The Battalion's reports read: "The enemy artillery fire was directed with great effect by well established OP's and was aided by extremely inclement weather, rain, and heavy fog, which hindered our own observations."<sup>54</sup>

Even before Companies E and F had taken position along the north-east spur on the day of the capture of Battaglia, elements of the 44th and 715th Grenadier Divisions launched a counterattack during a heavy rain in company strength. Company G courageously held on to its position, under the valiant leadership of its commanding officer, Captain Robert C. Roeder, of Summit Station, Pennsylvania. So critical was the situation that every man with a rifle in Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion "was sent up to defend the left flank, where

they remained for three days." 55 In this large scale coordinated counterattack from the right left and left rear, the enemy, estimated at a regiment and a half, was thrown back down the hill only after fierce hand to hand combat. 56

As the first day came to a close, the 1st Battalion occupied M. Carnevale and extended along the ridge to northeast and made contact with the 3rd which had two companies forward of La Carrovavaccia with one company occupying the hill in the area. 57

For three days Company G of the 2nd Battalion, under the superb leadership of Captain Roeder for September 27 and 28, continued as the base company in the defense of Battaglia. (See Map 10). Before extending its positions to the peak of Battaglia, Company G had paved the way for its advance by first seizing Vallamaggiora, a subsidiary peak of Mt. Battaglia. For 72 hours thereafter Company G continued to carry out the brunt of the defense. 58



Chapter 5 — Map 10

On September 28 at dawn the enemy began his fanatical counterattacks again. Groups of 30 to 40 Germans tried to infiltrate unsuccessfully through the lines during the later morning. It was on this day that S-Sgt. Rocco "Rocky" Cotoia of New Canaan, Connecticut, made his way back through heavy shelling and obtained 19 men to lead them back to the virtually besieged castle-after he had lost all but four of his machine gun section. The machine guns began firing again upon his return.

When the last officer of his rifle company became a casualty, T-Sgt. Ralph N. Grippo of Union City, New Jersey, took command, led his men in the attack, and fired his BAR from the hip in order to get a better field of fire down the slope. He killed 24 with his BAR and two more with grenades.<sup>59</sup>

It was during one particularly heavy artillery barrage on the peak on September 28 that Captain Roeder was struck and instantly killed. The enemy artillery fire at this time was practically unopposed by American artillery support. In the heavy dense fogs and steady heavy rains of these days, the Battalion CP, a particular target of the enemy, sustained three direct hits in three days and suffered heavy casualties. From the few enemy prisoners captured, it was learned that the battalion was opposed by elements of five German divisions and at least one full enemy division of artillery, plus the heavy concentrations of mortar fire. It was to be only on the evening of September 28 that the first elements of one company from the 3rd Battalion and a portion of one mule train were able to get through in support.<sup>60</sup>

Fifth Army History describes the battle at this stage as an attack beginning around 1700 of approximately four battalions from the 715th and 44th Grenadier Divisions, after a concentrated artillery and mortar shelling of the summit for approximately three hours previously. From the open right flank an estimated battalion attacked while the remainder struck at the Headquarters Company and Company G positions near the castle. The enemy, "carrying pole charges and flame throwers...fought their way almost to the summit before they were repulsed."<sup>61</sup> It was in this situation that Company K arrived at 1930 and immediately was committed along with Company G in the summit positions.

The next day of battle, September 29, found the Regiment in the process of consolidation, removing dead and wounded, and

preparing for further counter attacks. As the 2nd Battalion continued to beat off counterattacks, all of the 350th's supporting artillery fired everything available during this critical period. Extra litter bearers came forward as another counterattack caused heavy losses on both sides. Replacements, ammunition, and rations packed by mule arrived to the beleaguered units. By 2050 the 6th Armored Infantry Task Force had moved its last troops on to the ridge between Vallamaggiore and Il Canovaccio, with the 14th Armored Task Force, under Major Cheek, protecting the right flank and the 6th Armored Task Force the supply lines. The Regiment then moved its entire force to hold M. Battaglia and the neighboring high ground. Word was then received that the Regiment was to hold its positions another day and a half until relieving forces of the British arrived.<sup>62</sup>

The 1st Battalion history accounts for the movement of the Battalion on this day from near Mt. Faggiola at approximately 0800 hours in a march of approximately six miles to a support position for the 2nd in the vicinity of Valsalva, arriving at 1700 hours with heavy weapons company taking a support position in rear of the 3rd Battalion.<sup>63</sup>

On this day as the 3rd moved out at 0630 along slippery trails, it was pinned down around 1100 on the trail in front of old positions of Company I. As it withdrew to the reverse slope of the hill for protection, other units of the battalion then proceeded in small groups down the trail, finally establishing a CP south of M. Battaglia. At 1600 it moved out again to the defense of the 2nd, which at that time spread along the reverse slope of the castle dominating the peak. All three Battalions were now together to hold Battaglia. Major Witter, commander of the 3rd, inspected the positions of the troops around the castle, speaking words of encouragement.<sup>64</sup>

Colonel Fry recalls vividly the events of this crucial day of the 29th when he was able to move all three of his battalions on to Battaglia. He describes the arrival of Major Mike Oreskovich, 1st Battalion CO, as he appeared in the opening of his tent, poking his head through a hole in his German poncho. He reported to Colonel Fry that the 1st would be there shortly. General Fry then invited Major Mike to sit down and have a cup of coffee. Then he said: "We're going forward to Battaglia. Orders are to hold that hill and from all I can gather I think

Williamson (2nd) is about chewed up. Witter (3rd) should be there by this time and we will get there before dark." 65

To his commander's question about the number of men he had in the 1st, Major Mike responded: "Only about one hundred per company; we really caught hell on Puntale."

By that time, the wounded were coming down the mountain past Colonel Fry's outpost. A few days later when he returned along that trail, Colonel Fry observed that almost every rock was marked by blood. One of the wounded, Lt. Charles Lesnick, unabashedly weeping, reported that Captain Roeder had been killed. Major Mike placed his arm around Lt. Lesnick (who had not wanted to leave the area although wounded) and said something in Polish. Colonel Fry then remembers their moving on toward Battaglia, where he located his battle headquarters in a small, partially destroyed house 300 yards from the top. As Colonel Fry made his way to the partially-hid top of the pyramid-shaped hill, he was enshrouded in smoke, mist, and dust from mortar fire.

Near the crest Lt. Edmund B. Maher, of Providence, Rhode Island, met Colonel Fry, questioningly seeking an answer to the hours and days the battle would continue. With rifle, bazooka and bayonet, Lt. Maher had knocked out a mortar crew and then led a platoon in repelling an attack. In subsequent action he then dashed to the castle and bayoneted four Nazi paratroopers as they reached the doorway. All around German and American bodies lay one upon another. Inside the half-destroyed stone wall on the perimeter of the crest, the body of Captain Roeder lay where his men had carried him; even in death Captain Roeder seemed to continue to inspire his men just by his presence. As the mortar fire lifted, the muddy and disheveled but determined men rushed from cover of rocks and scrub bush to fire, and in the face of such determination the Germans had little heart to continue.

Throughout the night of September 29-30, the 350th men suffered through continuous mortar and artillery fire. At daybreak the enemy counterattacked again, this time with flame throwers, and drove the 350th troops from the castle; but immediately the determined "Battle Mountain" warriors reorganized and started driving the Krauts right back out again. Close hand to hand fighting proved the equal determination of the enemy and the Blue Devils to hold the ground.

As urgent calls for grenades and flame throwers went out; replacements began to arrive along with grenades, blankets, and dry socks and more ammo. A welcome message from General Ramey to Colonel Fry informed the Regiment that a British unit now on the right flank would relieve the 350th the next night in their present positions. Upon relief the 350th was to move to the M. Acuto area in reserve and for rest.<sup>66</sup>

It was in this attack in the morning hours that an officer came into Colonel Fry's headquarters yelling that the castle had been taken. After issuing orders and then moving onto the crest, Colonel Fry met Lt. Walter Scott, a bloody bayonet-tipped rifle in his hand. "We've got it back," said Lieutenant Scott, stepping over a dead German body. In all there were six stalwart German paratroopers lying dead there. The enemy replacements repeatedly had been brought from miles to the rear to attack. Colonel Fry thought that they had either been doped or were drunk.

With the Germans now realizing that their attack had failed, they laid down a mortar and artillery barrage on top of the hill to cover the retreat of the survivors. After going forward to check with the artillery observer, Lt. Nicolas Vergot, Colonel Fry came back down the hill where he encountered Lt. Scott and ordered him to relieve G Company. Lt. Scott then undertook to place his men in battle order. It was at this time that Colonel Fry was wounded in the arm from a mortar shell burst.

The next day when the Germans attacked, the lines held easily. New German bodies were lying outside around the command post. It was during this attack that Colonel Fry paid tribute to a valiant sergeant:

Sergeant Manuel Mendoza earned the Distinguished Service Cross by taking his defiant stand on the enemy side of the castle where, with a machine gun cradled in his arm, he mowed down an enemy force that was following their barrage up the hill.<sup>67</sup>

Sergeant Mendoza became a legendary figure. Colonel Fry related the story told him by Lt. Scott about the sergeant when he was leading his troops to beat the Germans to the crest after an artillery barrage. Mendoza told a replacement to follow him. The frightened boy replied: "I can't, I'm just a replacement," to which Sgt. Mendoza replied: "I know you

can't shoot, but come on and watch me."

The exploits of Captain Dick Hardwood, originally from Gulfport, Mississippi, deserve recounting. As a whole line of fleeing men came down from an attic during an artillery attack and stampeded over the ground floor where wounded were lying, Captain Harwood charged them like a football player and thus protected the wounded man, John Breen, from being trampled underfoot. Another bizarre exploit of Captain Harwood's concerned the capture of an escaping German, who had deserted his company. While he was walking around the front of the CP unnoticed after having been given a cigarette by Colonel Fry's trusted companion, Rocky, Captain Harwood recognized the Jerry by his helmet and potato masher grenades. Again he made a tackle, catapulting the surprised captive into the room. Such was the situation, sometimes half-comical, on Battaglia.

On September 30 B Company moved from positions near Mt. Carnevale at approximately 0800 hours to take over positions of G Company, the latter company then reverting to temporary 1st Battalion control. On the two mile march of Company B to these new positions, it was constantly shelled by heavy artillery and mortar fire concentrations. The relief was accomplished at approximately 1500 hours, with other companies occupying reserve positions in the immediate front.<sup>68</sup> At this critical juncture Company G had been reduced to approximately 50 men.<sup>69</sup>

The 3rd Battalion command post during this day remained in the same locality south of the castle. Fierce Kraut counterattacks were beaten off with hand grenades and machine gun fire. After the castle had been re-occupied, Captain Cussans personally directed the defense on this day. He moved forward through murderous enemy small arms, machine gun, and mortar and artillery fire to lead in the defense of the castle. Captain Cussans at one time ordered 60-mm mortar fire only 25 to 30 yards ahead of his own troops, but it effectively broke up one of the counterattacks.<sup>70</sup>

Major Witter personally made inspections throughout the day and gave words of encouragement. For this day, the Third Battalion history concludes: "Still raining, foxholes full of mud; the only officer left in L Company is Lt. Hebel, WIA, and SGT. Grippo has now taken over command. Lt. Smith has been

transferred from M Company and made CO of L Company."<sup>71</sup>

After September 30 the defense of Battaglia became easier as units on the right and left flanks moved abreast of the 350th. With the capture by the 351st Infantry of Mount Cappello and the arrival of British units on the right, the enemy could no longer attack from the flanks.<sup>72</sup>

October 1 was the fifth consecutive day for the Regiment on Battaglia. As the gray blanket-like fog hid the shattered castle from view, the enemy counterattacked again at dawn against the weary but determined defenders. Following the usual artillery barrage, the Jerries, carrying flame throwers in the attack, were again repulsed by accurate rifle fire and grenades.

By 0700 the next day word was received that the enemy apparently would discontinue the attack but would continue with mortar and artillery concentrations. Security patrols were posted out 1000 yards to the northwest to Mt. Cappello as 59 men came up to haul back the wounded at 0945. Approximately 30-40 prisoners were taken. On this day American planes strafed enemy positions. An officer from the 1st Grenadier Brigade of the Welch Guards arrived at 1230 and was taken forward by the S-3 of the 1st Battalion, Lt. Lynch.<sup>73</sup> The morale of the troops was much better that day as the clear skies permitted the use of Allied planes against the enemy.

Even when it was about to be relieved on October 2, the 2nd Battalion still had to fight off another enemy attack. After seven days of continuous action, the 2nd left the mountain, relinquishing its position to the 13th Corps.<sup>74</sup> As relief was being effected, German artillery and mortar fire continually searched all areas of the trails and routes of approach to the battle area. After dark the British moved forward and relieved Companies C, D, I, K, G, and 1st Battalion Headquarters, completing the operation at 2040 hours. There was light enemy artillery fire throughout the night.<sup>75</sup>

Companies I and K were relieved by Companies A and B, and the former, along with the rest of the companies mentioned above, dug in near Valsalva, after a march of approximately six miles from the front, closing into the area early the next morning. Companies A and B and two platoons of Company D were still on front lines attached to the 3rd Battalion.<sup>76</sup>

While the 3rd Battalion maintained defense on Battaglia on

October 2, Sergeant Lee H. Beddow of Company L and Detroit, Michigan, protected the regimental headquarters from assaults by German paratroopers. As the enemy launched a vicious counterattack in an effort to regain the strategically important Mt. Battaglia, Sergeant Beddow directed his squad's fire and continuously fired his submachine gun at the attacking enemy, killing and wounding several. When he observed enemy paratroopers to enter the castle housing the regimental command post, he ignored the heavy mortar and artillery fire to move toward the building and engaged the krauts at close range, killing every German who had entered the castle. He then took his position at the doorway, where he killed every German who attempted to enter. He courageously held his positions against German machine pistols and grenades until he was seriously wounded and blinded by a mortar shell burst.

On October 3, Colonel Fry, at the castle on Battaglia, requested all available air OP's to be in the air if there was a sign of counterattack, but when the enemy did not choose to try to drive the defenders back, the evacuation of the wounded was begun. Blankets, codine, blood plasma and many litter bearers were dispatched to the forward aid station to care for the great number of casualties. At 2030, after another counterattack and after an urgent call for hand grenades and 60 mm mortar ammo, everything was again under control at the close of the day.<sup>77</sup>

In this attack Company B, entrenched on Battaglia and attached to the 3rd Battalion, aided in repulsing the enemy.<sup>78</sup> At this time men from the defending companies stood up on the crest of the hill, firing their rifles and throwing grenades. Most of the automatic weapons clogged and thus were of little use in repulsing the attack. Mortar fire was also used to good effect, sometimes only 25 yards in front of the embattled defenders. The 3rd Battalion historian reports that one man stood on the crest of the mountain and fired his automatic rifle from the hip in order to get a better field of fire.

October 4 found the relief of the Regiment continuing, with Companies E, F, parts of M, and H leaving by 0245. By first light only a portion of the Regiment was still on Battaglia, but because of enemy fire, movement was held to a virtual standstill during the day. The remainder of the Regiment later moved to the vicinity of the village of Valsalva to bivouac for a

short time, where it reorganized, re-clothed, and received hot meals. The constant rains turned the bivouac area into a sea of mud.<sup>79</sup>

On October 5 the Regimental CO, Staff, and the remainder of Headquarters Company finally left Battaglia and closed into the new bivouac area. Companies A and B and two platoons of Company D arrived and bivouaced in the assembly area near Valsalva at 0300 hours after marching 12 miles from the front line positions.<sup>80</sup> For the 3rd Battalion Protestant Church Services were held in the Battalion CP, and the companies received some badly needed replacements. The presence of Red Cross girls giving out coffee and doughnuts, plus the PX and beer ration, raised the morale of the troops even further.<sup>81</sup>

During the September battles and particularly on Battaglia, the Medical Detachment performed magnificently. Since advances by the Regiment were rapid at first, the Medical Detachment encountered great difficulty in evacuation and supplying needed medicines and materials for treatment, especially since elements of the Regiment were at times 8,000 air line yards from the nearest passable jeep trail. To provide the maximum in treatment of the wounded, the Regimental Medical Section set up aid stations and evacuation systems over a broad area which moved in the rear of the battalions.

The treatment and evacuation of wounded had never before been so tedious and difficult as on this occasion. The almost impossible obstacles to overcome included steep terrain everywhere and continuous rain and mud throughout the entire operation. The aid stations on Battaglia cared for an extreme load of wounded, in particular from the 2nd Battalion, but the stations functioned smoothly and admirably even though under heavy shellfire almost continuously.

Most of the evacuation from Valsalva to Vallamaggiore had to be done at night, but the drivers of the medical jeeps performed tirelessly and courageously to evacuate the wounded over the slippery, muddy trails. No patients were injured, although the trip was perilous even in daytime. Four medical men were killed in action during this phase: Pfc Rook; Pvt. Fernandez; Pvt. Shreve; and Pvt. Bartosk. A total of 19 medical enlisted men were evacuated during the two week combat period for wounds from enemy fire. During the battle

from September 20 to October 5, the number of patients evacuated included the following: Wounded, 503; Injured, 98; Disease, 262.<sup>82</sup>

There was no dearth of heroism among all the ranks in the Battle for Battaglia. For years to come children and grandchildren will be telling about the exploits of their fathers, grandfathers, and relatives in the struggle for "Battle Mountain," the meaning of the word **Battaglia**. In the recounting of after action sessions and reports, the men might confuse the time element involved, especially since each day and night merged into the next 24 hour period with hardly any perceptible division of time. A true account of these awe-inspiring and glory-filled days would not be complete without recounting the feats of these courageous Blue Devils-exploits that really appear incredible when one reads about them in the comfort of peaceful surroundings today; but nevertheless they are the true record of the brave Americans who fought and died on the crags of the Appenines north of Florence.

The account must include the action of 1st Lt. Edmund D. Maher of Providence, Rhode Island, who knocked out a mortar crew, led a platoon in repelling an attack, and then dashed to the castle and bayoneted four Nazi paratroopers coming to the doorway. The sacrifice of Pfc. Felix B. Mestas of Laveta, Colorado, for his buddies in giving them time to re-form and beat off an attack reflects credit on the valor of courageous American men who have served in the military. Pfc. Mestas manned a position on the forward slope of Battaglia for three days with his BAR, mowing the enemy down like grass as they vainly tried to get past him. After killing 24 of the enemy before they overran his position, Pfc. Mestas gave his buddies the time needed to re-form before he himself was killed.

T-Sgt. Beni Mazarella of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, seeing the castle overwhelmed by the strongest Kraut attack, picked up a handful of grenades and charged the castle, killing six and wounding more. He then used a machine gun, charging alone at the remaining Krauts who broke and ran as he came out of the fog. The actions of S-Sgt. Lewis R. Hamm of Olney, Texas, demonstrate great perserverance of one continuing to close with enemy, although burned by a flame-thrower and wounded by a bullet in the hand. He killed the flamethrower operator and three more Krauts before he finally was evacuated.

At times rocks became the only weapons available. Pfc. Cleo Peek of Center, Colorado, an assistant gunner on a BAR, held off the enemy with his M1 when the BAR jammed; when the M1 jammed he threw grenades until they ran out and then hurled rocks at the enemy less than 25 yards from his position. The exploits of Pfc Jose D Sandoval of Santa Fe, New Mexico, are similar. After his BAR heated and jammed, he secured the machine gun of a dead crew, fired it from the hip, and killed an unestimated number of the enemy. Sgt. Alfred E. Cassidy of Cincinnati, Ohio, used his rifle like a mortar, pumping out rifle grenades like he was operating a mortar.

S-Sgt. Raymond O. Gregory of Kings Mountain, North Carolina, savagely played "King of the Mountain" as he rolled huge boulders down the hill into confused enemy ranks. The unselfish heroism of T-Sgt. Manuel V. Mendoza, a legend in his time, exemplified the indomitable will of the Blue Devils to hold their position on Battaglia. The account of his exploits is a vividly told tale of indomitable will and courage:

During one counterattack, Mendoza opened up with a tommy gun on 200 Jerries charging up the forward slope. Ten of them died where they fell, others lay wounded, but the rest came on. Mendoza, now using a carbine, emptied his entire ammo supply of five clips into their ranks. A flamethrower licked out at him but he killed the operator with a pistol shot. Jumping into a machine-gun pit and pushing aside the dead gunner, Mendoza sprayed the surviving attackers until the gun jammed, then pitched hand grenades until the Krauts withdrew. Severely wounded himself by now, he nevertheless ran down the forward slope, retrieved enemy weapons lying there, captured a wounded Kraut and returned to consolidate his platoon positions.

The medics performed diligently and courageously under the most trying conditions. Sgt. John J. Regan of Waterbury, Connecticut, and B Company, 313th Medics, although wounded from a mortar barrage, treated five of the doughboys and patched up two members of his litter squad. Removing the

wounded to a building, Regan then started back to get help from his collecting stations, a journey of fifteen hours, but he made it. Then he collapsed. The 2d Battalion surgeon, Captain Williard Stonner of Chagrin Falls, Ohio, never ceased from treating the wounded, although his aid station was reduced to a single room by enemy shelling. T-4 Joseph E. Silva saved countless lives as he worked tirelessly, shifting his patients from room to room as Kraut shells burst through the walls.

Two GIs, T-Sgt. Roscoe A. Webb of Columbus, Ohio, and Pfc. George O. Porter of Boston, Massachusetts, sweated out rifle grenades, flamethrowers and even pole charges as they consistently picked off enemy attackers in one bitter brawl. Major Erwin B. Jones of Brighton, Alabama, directed artillery fire on the attackers at one battalion point when Kraut artillery had wounded all the members and cut them off from the main unit. He personally killed 19 Jerries before relief came up.

On September 30 when T-Sgt. Ralph N. Grippo of Union City, New Jersey, took command of his company, two of his men, Pvt. Russell P. Glass of Akron, Ohio, and Sgt. John McKenzie of Lowell, Massachusetts, paused in the heat of battle to replace a firing pin in their machine gun, McKenzie covering with a tommy gun while Glass performed the repair job.<sup>83</sup>

These accounts of a few individuals' heroism attest to the courage, valor, perseverance, and intrepidity of the "Battle Mountain Regiment," as the 350th was now named. Thousands of unrecounted individual acts of valor do not alter the supreme effort and sacrifice of the Blue Devils of the 350th Infantry Regiment. Having been a member of that valiant team on Battaglia is a badge of praise to each individual soldier. The fact that their roles in this gigantic undertaking have not been retold does not detract at all from the glory due them.

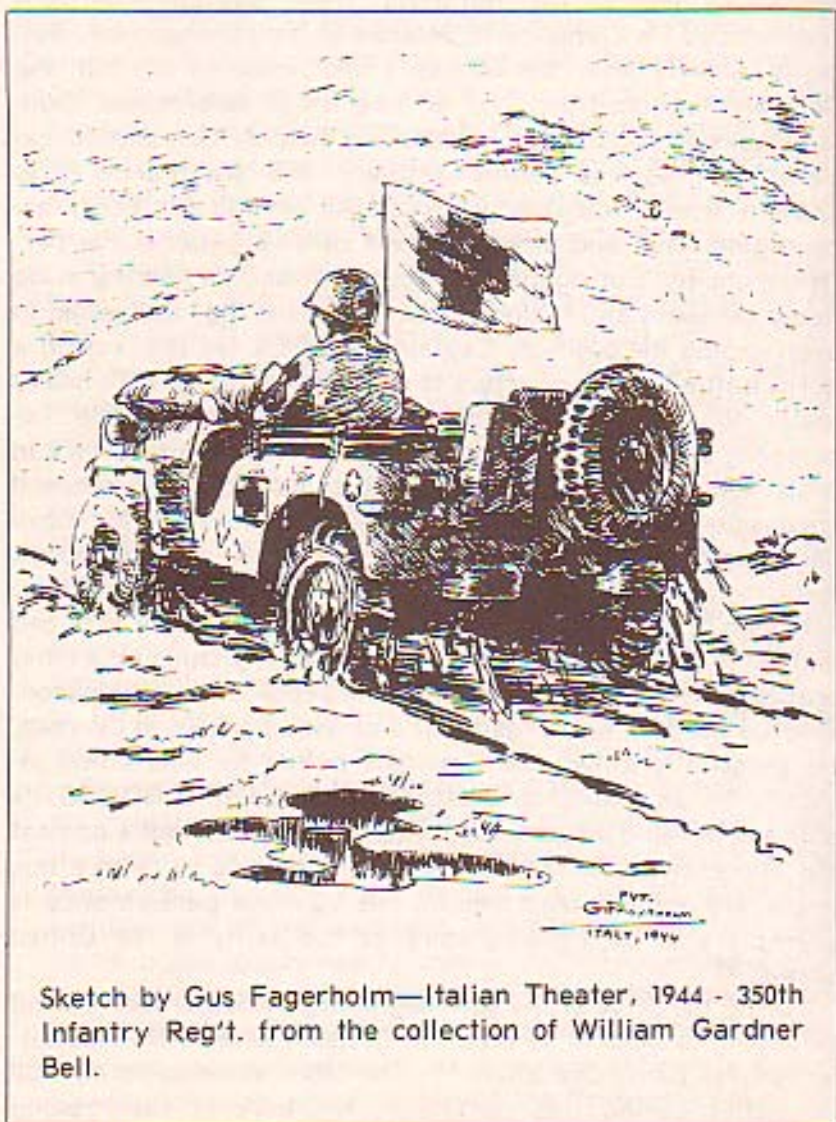
Recommendations for award were started through channels for the gallant men of the 350th. On Battaglia they had stood off the enemy from September 28-October 5, although "exposed on three sides, denied air and ground observation, under terrific artillery and mortar barrages, and hampered by bad weather which made supply nearly impossible."<sup>84</sup> A number of officers and men received the awards of the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, and the Bronze Star medals; but the courageous action beyond the call of duty of Captain Robert E. Roeder, killed in action, deserved the Congressional of Medal

of Honor, awarded to him posthumously. For its stand there, the Battalion under which he served, the 2d, was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation. The citation to Captain Roeder praises the unselfish devotion to duty of an officer in the Army of the United States:

Captain ROBERT E. ROEDER, 01285307, Infantry, Army of the United States. For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 27 and 28 September 1944 on Mt. Battaglia, Italy. Captain ROEDER commanded his company in defense of the strategic Mt. Battaglia. Shortly after the company had occupied the hill, the Germans launched the first of a series of determined counterattacks to regain this dominating height. Completely exposed to ceaseless enemy artillery and small-arms fire, Captain Roeder constantly circulated among his men, encouraging them and directing their defense against the persistent enemy. During the sixth counterattack, the enemy using flame throwers and taking advantage of the fog, succeeded in overrunning the position. Captain ROEDER led his men in a fierce battle at close quarters to repulse the attack with heavy losses to the Germans. The following morning, while the company was engaged in repulsing an enemy counterattack in force, Captain ROEDER was seriously wounded and rendered unconscious by shell fragments. He was carried to the company command post where he regained consciousness. Refusing medical treatment, he insisted on rejoining his men. Although in a weakened condition, Captain ROEDER dragged himself to the door of the command post and, picking up a rifle, braced himself in a sitting position. He began firing his weapon, shouted words of encouragement, and issued orders to his men. He personally killed two Germans before he was killed instantly by an exploding shell. Through Captain ROEDER's able and intrepid leadership his men held Mt. Battaglia against the aggressive and fanatical enemy attempts to retake this important and strategic height. His valorous performance is exemplary of the fighting spirit of the Army of the United States.<sup>85</sup>

During the drive of the 88th beginning on September 21 and extending to October 3, 1944, the Division as a whole had suffered 2,105 battle casualties.<sup>86</sup> The 350th alone suffered 1420 casualties during this campaign, the bulk of them being

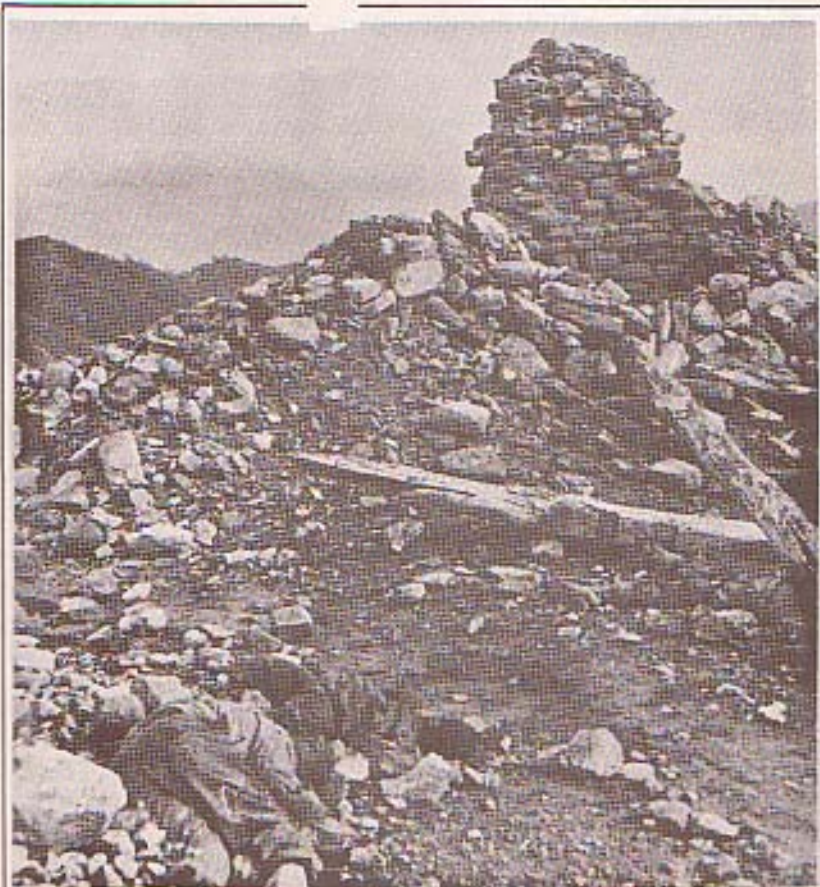
sustained on Battaglia. The casualties resulted in 235 men killed in action, 277 missing, and 908 wounded.<sup>87</sup> Paying tribute to the Division (and by inference to the 350th particularly), the Fifth Army historian states: "The drive of the 88th Division toward Imola, and in particular the defense of Mount Battaglia, came close to equaling the total casualties of II Corps during the 6-day period of the breaching of the Gothic Line."<sup>88</sup>



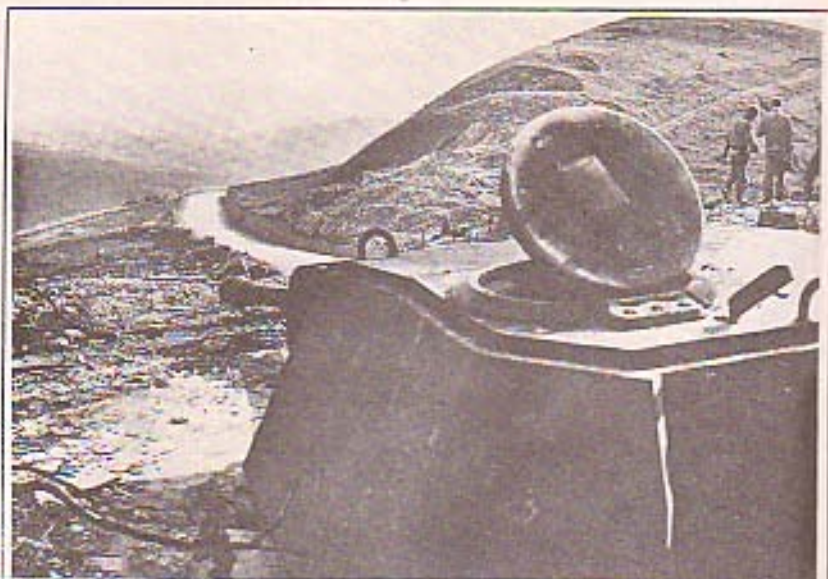
Sketch by Gus Fagerholm—Italian Theater, 1944 - 350th Infantry Reg't. from the collection of William Gardner Bell.



Monte Battaglia and adjacent mountains.



American dead in the castle ruins on Monte Battaglia.



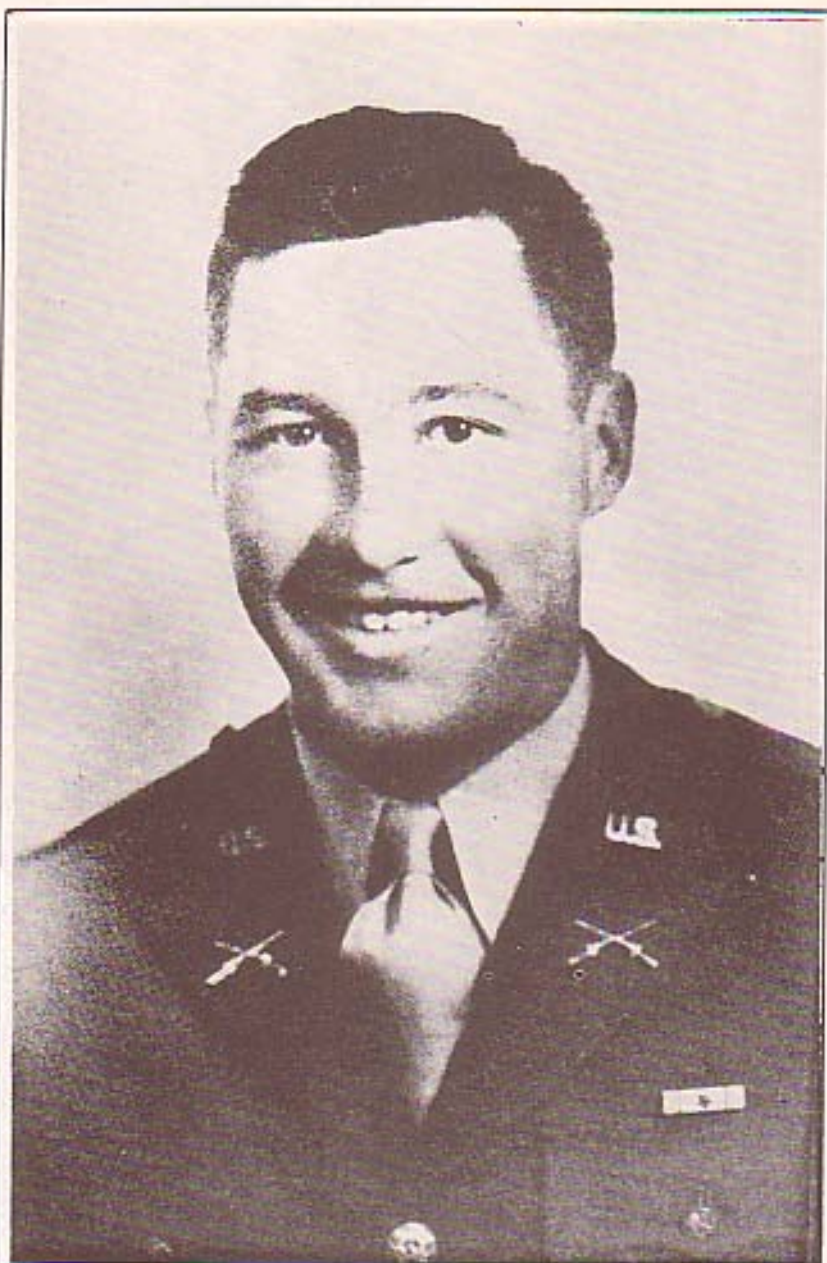
Tiger turret commanding part of the Futa Pass.



Monte Battaglia (Battle Mountain) near Castle Del Rio.



Castle atop Mt. Battaglia.



Captain Robert G. Roeder, awarded Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for action on Monte Battaglia, September, 1944.



Engineers prepare to remove a trestle bridge which has been undermined

Footnotes to Chapter V

- <sup>1</sup> Walter P. Hall and William S. Davis, *The Course of Europe Since Waterloo* (New York, 1947), 1977.
- <sup>2</sup> 350th Infantry Regiment History, September, 1944.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, September, 1944.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Douglas Orgill, *The Gothic Line: The Italian Campaign, Autumn, 1944* (New York, 1967), 183-184.
- <sup>6</sup> Colonel J.C. Fry, U.S.A., "One Week in Hell," *Saturday Evening Post* (June 25, 1949), 36.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> Second Battalion History, September, 1944.
- <sup>9</sup> Third Battalion History, September, 1944.
- <sup>10</sup> First Battalion History, September, 1944.
- <sup>11</sup> John P. Delaney, *The Blue Devils in Italy* (New York, 1947), 128.
- <sup>12</sup> 350th Infantry Regiment History, September, 1944.
- <sup>13</sup> Fifth Army History, *The Gothic Line, Part VII, 91*.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Fifth Army History, *Part VII, 91-92*.
- <sup>16</sup> Major General James C. Fry, *Retired, Combat Soldier* (Washington, D.C., 1969), 175.
- <sup>17</sup> First Battalion History, September, 1944.
- <sup>18</sup> "P.W. Interrogation Report," Headquarters 350th Infantry, September 24, 1944.
- <sup>19</sup> Personal Account of Former Lieutenant C. Ashcraft to the author, August, 1976.
- <sup>20</sup> Captain Roule C. Mazingo, "The Battlefield Commander Must at All Times Assure Himself that his Security is Adequate and Alert," *Advanced Infantry Officers Class No. II, 1949-1950, TIS, Fort Benning, Georgia*. Information concerning occurrences in the command post obtained from Lt. Col. James Riffs, then Executive Officer of the First Battalion, 350th Infantry.
- <sup>21</sup> Lt. Ashcraft remembers only one guard; Lt. Col. Riffs gives the number as two,

- one of whom was killed in the original encounter with the enemy.
- 22 Personal Account, Lt. Ashcraft.
  - 23 Lecture, Captain Mazingo, Fort Benning, Georgia.
  - 24 *Ibid.*
  - 25 Personal Account, Lt. Ashcraft.
  - 26 Lecture, Captain Mazingo, Fort Benning, Georgia.
  - 27 Personal Account, Lt. Ashcraft.
  - 28 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 92.
  - 29 350th Infantry Regiment History, September, 1944.
  - 30 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 93.
  - 31 *Ibid.*
  - 32 350th Infantry Regiment History, September, 1944.
  - 33 Third Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 34 *Ibid.*
  - 35 Fry, *Combat Soldier*, 189.
  - 36 350th Infantry Regiment, History, September, 1944.
  - 37 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 93.
  - 38 350th Infantry Regiment History, September, 1944.
  - 39 Second Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 40 Third Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 41 Fry, *Combat Soldier*, 181.
  - 42 Personal Interview with Lt. Col. Corbett Williamson, Ret., October, 1976.
  - 43 Roberto Battaglia, *Storia della Resistenza Italiana* (Turin, Italy, 1953), 406, as reported in Orgill, *The Gothic Line*.
  - 44 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 94.
  - 45 Fry, "One Week in Hell," 121.
  - 46 First Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 47 Second Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 48 Private Gerald S. Root, "Mt. Battaglia Battle Was 350th's Race," *The Stars and Stripes*, November 3, 1944.
  - 49 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 95.
  - 50 350th Infantry Regiment History, September, 1944.
  - 51 Second Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 52 Root, "Mt. Battaglia Race Was 350th's Race," November 3, 1944.
  - 53 Second Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 54 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 95.
  - 55 350th Infantry Regiment History, September, 1944.
  - 56 First Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 57 Third Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 58 Fry, *Combat Soldier*, 184.
  - 59 350th Infantry Regiment History, September, 1944.
  - 60 Fry, *Combat Soldier*, 184.
  - 61 First Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 62 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 96.
  - 63 Root, "Mt. Battaglia Battle Was 350th's Race," November 3, 1944.
  - 64 Third Battalion History, September, 1944.
  - 65 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 96.
  - 66 350th Infantry Regiment History, October, 1944.
  - 67 First Battalion History, October, 1944.
  - 68 350th Infantry Regiment History, October, 1944.
  - 69 First Battalion History, October, 1944.
  - 70 Third Battalion History, October, 1944.
  - 71 350th Infantry Medical Detachment History, September, 1944.
  - 72 Delaney, *The Blue Devils in Italy*, 139-144.
  - 73 *Ibid.*, 145.
  - 74 General Orders No. 31, War Department, 17 April 1945.
  - 75 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 97.
  - 76 Fry, *Combat Soldier*, 192.
  - 77 Fifth Army History, Part VII, 97.