

22
Staff Department
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1949-1950

OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 350TH INFANTRY
(88TH DIVISION) IN CLEARING A REGIMENTAL SUPPLY ROUTE
TO ROCCASECCA, ITALY, 21 - 25 MAY 1944.
(ROME - ARNO CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion S-3)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION
CLEARING A SUPPLY ROUTE IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

Major Erwin B. Jones, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 88th Division G-2 and G-3 Journal for May 1944
Film D-238. Item 1826 (TIS Library)
- A-2 350th Infantry Historical Narrative,
S-2 and S-3 Journal for May 1944
Film D-238, Item 1830 (TIS Library)
- A-3 The Blue Devils In Italy - The History of 88th
Division in World War II
By John P. Delaney (TIS Library)
- A-4 Fifth Army History, Part V, U. S. Army, Fifth Army
(TIS Library)
- A-5 A Military Encyclopedia, Based on Operations in the
Italian Campaigns, 1943-1945
Headquarters, 15th Army Group Italy
(TIS Library)
- A-6 Training Memo #2, Digest of Combat Experiences, 15 Mar 45,
Med Theater of Operations, U. S. Army APO 512,
(TIS Library)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY	2
ORIENTATION	3
Introduction	3
The General Situation	4
88th Division Situation and Plans	7
The 350th Infantry Plan	8
350th Infantry (Minus one Battalion) Moves to ROCCASECCA	8
NARRATION	9
The S. Biagio Valley Fight	9
First Day on the Trail	13
23D --- The Second Day	16
Third Day on the Trail	20
The Fourth Day	21
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM	23
LESSONS	25
MAP A Gustav Line	
MAP B Cassino to Rome	
MAP C Fondi to Roccasecca	
MAP D Action in S. Biagio Valley	
MAP E M. Calvo Action	

OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 350TH INFANTRY
(88TH DIVISION) IN CLEARING A REGIMENTAL SUPPLY ROUTE
TO ROCCASEGCA, ITALY, 21 - 25 MAY 1944
(ROME - ARNO CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion S-3)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This is an account of an Infantry Battalion that got left about ten miles behind the other two battalions. During the Italian Spring Offensive in May 1944, the 2nd Battalion, 350th Infantry, 88th Division had to clear and protect the Regimental supply route from FONDI to ROCCASECCA.

"Since the landing at SALERNO on 9 September 1943, the divisions of the Fifth Army had been fighting almost continuously, first the drive past NAPLES to the German Winter Line behind VENAFRO and MIGNANO, then from 15 November 1943, in the harsh winter campaign to CASSINO." (See Map A) (1)

On 22 January 1944, two divisions landed at ANZIO. (See Map A) At CASSINO and ANZIO the attack had been stopped.

In May 1944, the southern front was the MINTURNO-CASSINO line. (See Map A) The Germans held the mountainous terrain to their front with the famous GUSTAV LINE.

The Allied Armies in Italy (AAI) planned a spring offensive. Their intentions were to inflict the maximum losses on the enemy and drive him to the RIMINI-PISA line. (See Map A) (2)

This would be a simultaneous attack by both armies on the southern front. (3)

(1) A-4, p. 1 (direct quotation)

(2) A-4, p. 21

(3) A-4, p. 21

The beachhead forces would be ready to attack at any time from D plus 4. Their mission was to cut HIGHWAY 6 in the VALMONTONE area. (See Map B) (4)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

With the arrival of new troops and in order to insure success on the next attack, a major regrouping was made along the southern front.

The east coast sector was under the British V Corps and Eight Army controlled the central sector. Fifth Army had the area between the TYRRHENIAN SEA and the LIRI RIVER. Also, the Fifth Army remained in command of the ANZIO BEACHHEAD. (See Map B) (5)

The Fifth Army had the French Expeditionary Corps (FEC) on the right and II Corps along the sea.

II Corps had the American 85th and 88th Divisions. The 91st Division arrived in the MEDITERRANEAN Theater in April 1944, but its employment was indefinite for sometime. (6) The 36th Division constituted the mobile reserve of the AAI.

The two divisions of II Corps were fresh troops and were yet to be tried in the attack.

The 88th Division was the first All-Selective Service Division in combat in World War II, and it took over a sector of the front in March 1944. The men and officers felt that the Division would be successful in any type of operations. Since July 1942, it had trained in Oklahoma, maneuvered in Louisiana, and polished its tactics in North Africa. During

(4) A-4, p. 22
(5) A-4, p. 2
(6) A-4, p. 16

March and April, the Division had adjusted to front-line activity in readiness for an attack.

Morale was high. All supplies were plentiful, even though some positions had to be reached by mule train.

Although the action described herein takes place some ten days after the jump-off, it is necessary to cover the missions and actions of the various units beginning with breakout of the winter line.

The Eighth Army was to break through the enemy's positions into the LIRI VALLEY.

The Fifth Army mission was defined in Field Order No. 6, 20 April 1944 as: Fifth Army from present GARIGLIANO positions with Corps abreast, secure ANSONIA defile, advances south of the LIRI RIVER to cut the PICO-ITRI ROAD.....Subsequent advance on Army order. (See Map B) (7)

The Army plan was bold and difficult. It meant simply that all units would take the dominating mountain features in their assigned sectors.

II Corps would attack with the 85th Division on the left and the 88th Division on the right. The plan of maneuver consisted essentially of slugging through the defenses of the GUSTAV LINE and then continuing through the mountains to the PICO-ITRI ROAD.

At 2300 hours, 11 May 1944, the Spring Offensive was launched.

On the right flank of the Fifth Army the FEC took all of its objectives on schedule. Its' operations during 11-19 May form one of the most spectacular and most important parts of

(7) A-4, p. 26 .

the drive on ROME. On 19 May the FEC front was nearly along the east side of the PICO-ITRI ROAD and it was ready to attack the strong point PICO. (8)

In II Corps' sector, the initial push met immediate success on the right flank but in the center around MINTURNO the battle swirled in indecision for three days. Then the enemy began a hasty retreat along the sea, followed closely by II Corps. (9) This rapid pursuit pushed through FORMIA and GAETA into ITRI. (See Map B) (10)

Fifth Army had by 19 May completed its first mission. Its' front was along the PICO-ITRI ROAD, and so far ahead of Eighth Army that it threatened the enemy in the LIRI VALLEY from the rear. (11)

The FEC had employed all four of its divisions. Three were in line and one in Corps reserve. II Corps still had the 85th and 88th Divisions in the line and the 36th Division had not been committed. (12)

On 19 May a new objective was given II Corps: to cut the SEZZE-FROSINONE ROAD with maximum speed. (See Map B) (13)

The 88th Division was to drive across the hills northwest of FONDI toward ROCCAGORGA while the 85th Division moved on its left flank toward SEZZE. The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and elements of the 85th Division were to smash through the TERRACINA bottle neck and push into the PONTINE MARSHES beyond the town. (See Map B) (14)

The area facing II Corps was a series of high mountains, deep gorges, river valleys, and flooded coastal plains. The

-
- (8) A-4, p. 54
(9) A-1, Item 1826
(10) A-4, p. 55
(11) A-4, p. 79
(12) A-4, p. 79
(13) A-4, p. 81
(14) A-4, p. 81

sector varied in width from 10 to 20 miles; from ITRI to SEZZE the distance across the mountains was 30 miles. (15)

NOT RECORDED IN A-4

The defense line which II Corps would hit was the much publicized HITLER LINE, prepared by the Germans to serve as a second defense if the GUSTAV LINE were breached. This line ran generally through the mountains along TERRACINA-FONDI-PICO to PONTECARVO and across the LIRI VALLEY to PIEDEMONTE. (See Map B) (16)

Withdrawing into this line was the badly disorganized German Tenth Army which had been holding the southern front.

The weather was good spring warm days with cool nights. There had been no rain since the jump-off. The troops felt good over their first successes and had not had time to think of their losses. The cry was "ROME AND HOME". (17)

88TH DIVISION SITUATION AND PLANS

On 19 May the 351st Infantry held M. GRANDE north of ITRI; the 349th Infantry lay in the town proper and the 350th Infantry was just to the east. (18)

During the night of 19 May the 349th moved northwest toward FONDI. By 2200 hours, 20 May, FONDI was taken and the high ground to the northeast of town. The 351st moved up to other mountain features that cut the FONDI-LENOLA ROAD. (See Map B) (19)

The 350th Infantry followed the 349th along HIGHWAY 7. Reinforcements now began to stream up this road from ITRI to FONDI. The highway was filled with trucks, armor and artil-

-
- (15) A-4, p. 82
(16) A-4, p. 82
(17) Personal knowledge
(18) A-1, Item 1826
(19) A-4, p. 83

lery and both sides of the road were lined with marching troops. (20)

During the night of 20 May, the 350th was ordered to pass through FONDI and attack to the northwest toward ROCCA-SECCA. The 349th would attack on the right. The 351st would take the mountain features along the LENOLA-VALLECORSA ROAD and protect the division right flank until the French caught up. (See Map B) (21)

THE 350TH INFANTRY PLAN

The regimental plan was for the 1st Battalion to take M. CASARECCIO; the 3d Battalion to take M. LATIGLIA and the 2d Battalion M. CALVO. M. CALVO was to be the regimental objective for 21 May. (See Map C) (22)

The 1st Battalion would move directly from FONDI toward its' objective and secure it. The 3d Battalion would then move through the 1st Battalion to take M. LATIGLIA. The 2d Battalion would move west along HIGHWAY 7 about 6000 yards and attack M. CALVO from the south. (See Map C) (23)

The regiment would then move to ROCCASECCA, taking each mountain feature in turn.

350TH INFANTRY (MINUS ONE BATTALION) MOVES TO ROCCASECCA

At dawn 21 May the regiment moved through FONDI. (24)
The 1st Battalion followed by the 3d moved toward S. MAGNO, and the 2d Battalion moved west along HIGHWAY 7. (See Map C)

The 1st Battalion moved over M. CASARECCIO without

-
- (20) A-4, p. 83
(21) A-2, Item 1830
(22) A-2, Item 1830
(23) Personal knowledge
(24) A-3, p. 83

encountering any resistance. It then proceeded to M. LATIGLIA and then M. CALVO in turn.

Spending the night on M. CALVO the 1st and 3d Battalions moved out early on 22 May along the trail to the northwest to M. ALTO, where they stopped for the night. The 1st Battalion was on M. ALTO and the 3d Battalion to the south on SALVATORE. On the 23d the 1st Battalion moved into ROCCASECCA and the 3d garrisoned the high ground overlooking the town. (See Map C) (25)

This point was 10 miles ahead of Fifth Army lines. These two battalions lead by the regimental commander, Colonel J. C. Fry, had slipped through the HITLER LINE. (26)

NARRATION

THE S. BIAGIO VALLEY FIGHT

As the other two battalions moved directly northwest on the 21st May, the 2d Battalion moved west from FONDI along HIGHWAY 7 for about 6000 yards. There was no contact with the enemy. Elements of the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron reported that except for some blown craters in the highway there was no evidence of the enemy for several miles further to the west. The Italian civilians reported that the Germans had all gone. (27)

The battalion turned north off HIGHWAY 7 along a good road that would lead directly to the foot of the mountains and to a trail that led to their objective, M. CALVO. (See Map C) They were in a column of companies; E-G-F. The Heavy

-
- (25) Personal knowledge; Statement of Col. J. C. Fry, then CO, 350th Infantry, 25 May 1944
(26) A-2, Item 1830
(27) Personal knowledge

Weapons Company's machine guns were in direct support of the two leading companies. Just as Company E's leading platoon reached the SAN BIAGIO-S. MAGNO ROAD, 600 yards north of HIGHWAY 7, it was fired on from positions north of this road by machine guns and rifles. Company E took up the fire fight from positions along and on the left of the road. There was a creek and a canal to the right and an orchard on the left. There was very little cover in the orchard. (See Map D) (28)

The Battalion Commander and Battalion S-3 went forward and contacted E Company Commander. The enemy had excellent positions in the side of the hill covering to the south and the Valley. They were well dug in and hard to locate. There was no way to estimate their strength. There was no other direction to attack the hill.

E Company Commander stated 10 or 12 men had been wounded including the leading Platoon Leader. Men of this platoon were returning the fire. The orchard was a poor place from which to launch an attack. The enemy had good fields of fire through the trees in the orchard. There was very little room to maneuver to the right of the road because of the big canal. (29)

G Company was then turning north off HIGHWAY 7. The Company Commander went forward to the Battalion Commander. They decided for Company G to maneuver out in the valley to the left and hit the German position with two platoons abreast with their right on S. BIAGIO-S. MAGNO ROAD. They would assault from the middle of the Valley.

E Company would put two platoons on line and attack,

-
- (28) Statement of Corbett Williamson, then Commander of the 2nd Battalion, 350th Infantry, on 31 Oct 1949
(29) Personal knowledge

swinging as far to the right of the north-south road from HIGHWAY 7 as they could. (See Map D)

The Artillery Liaison Officer called for artillery in the town of S. BIAGIO as it dominated the west side of the valley. There would be no mortar or artillery on the rear positions as Company E was too close.

Company G's 60 mm mortars went into position and fired six rounds on the side of the hill to the north. Time was the important element.

It is well to insert here that the rest of the battalion was along HIGHWAY 7 and the highway was covered with vehicles and troops. Corps artillery was being brought up. From this position an 8 inch gun could fire on SEZZE which was also reached by the 8 inch guns at the ANZIO BEACHHEAD. (30) An officer with the 8 inch gun watched G Company's 60's fire and immediately decided that that would be a poor place for his gun. (31)

Company G was ready to assault the position in less than 30 minutes. The company commander had put his support platoon in position to fire toward S. BIAGIO and to the north. He was worried about the western side of the Valley and wanted to send a platoon up to S. BIAGIO. The Battalion S-3 agreed but the Battalion Commander decided there was not enough time. The next day the 85th Division had to commit an entire Battalion to take the hill.

Both companies moved out in the assault and were on top of the enemy dugouts before the Germans were aware of what was

(30) A-4, p. 85

(31) Statement of G Company's Weapons Platoon Leader on 21 May 1944.

*Why? my
accuracy of position
on this hill*

*Significance
of this is
not clear*

happening. This action had drawn lots of observers as it was close to the main highway and the enemy was supposed to have been routed.

Just as E Company had gained some distance up the mountain and was able to fire down at the enemy, the 350th Infantry Regimental Commander came riding up on a light tank from HIGHWAY 7. He pointed out some enemy machine gun positions and had the tank fire on them. The results were excellent and this assisted E Company a great deal. Then the Regimental and Battalion Commanders joined the assault troops as they moved through the enemy positions.

There was no control after the hill was reached. Also no set objective for any one group. But the assault groups kept moving, breaking up into little groups as they definitely located a position. The two company commanders and the Regimental and Battalion Commanders directed traffic and soon there were fights going on in 10 or 12 places at one time. There was no mortar or artillery in the fight by either side. The enemy used machine guns, rifles and automatic pistols. The 2nd Battalion used hand grenades, rifles and BARs.

It was an intense fire fight, but it was over in another 45 minutes. The Regimental Commander ordered the battalion to hold what it had as he ^{had} just found out that this valley belonged to the 85th Division. Company E was ordered to organize the position and they set up in just about the same positions as the Germans had held but higher up the hill. (See Map D)

The battalion suffered 43 casualties. Seven were officers including the Battalion Artillery Liaison Officer, who was killed.

E Co's
mountain
is not clear!

The MG's
positions &
fire are not
clear.

One of the members of the 88th Division General Staff came up and counted the prisoners. He told the 2d Battalion Commander that there was 110 of them. Company E later reported that they counted 40 dead on the position. (32)

At about 1500 hours the 2d Battalion was ordered to return to the vicinity of FONDI to constitute the division reserve. Company E joined the battalion at 2100 hours. That night the battalion served hot chow and got a good nights rest.

FIRST DAY ON THE TRAIL (MWB C)

At 0900 hours, 22 May the 2d Battalion was relieved as Division Reserve and told to join the regiment. They were informed that it was nearby to ROCCASECCA.

The 350th had set up a rear command post at S. MAGNO. The Regimental Commanding Officer had rejoined the 1st and 3d Battalions and was leading them to ROCCASECCA.

After a hot breakfast the battalion moved northwest along the road from FONDI to S. MAGNO. As the head of the column reached the rear command post in S. MAGNO an artillery barrage came in from the northwest. The Regimental Adjutant who had come out to meet the battalion was killed and several of the battalion were wounded.

The mission of the 2d Battalion was obvious. Join the other battalions but clean up those who were firing on the regimental rear command post.

The battalion moved into the mountains, following the trail of the other battalions.

As the battalion moved out it is necessary to look at the situation. The other two battalions were several miles ahead and the enemy had closed in on the trail.

(32) Personal knowledge

The objective was still 20,000 yards to the northwest with only mule trails through the mountains. Regiment had not laid wire nor had they marked the trail that they used.

The Battalion Commander decided to take a supply train in the battalion column. (On the previous day the pack train was to be brought up after the objective was secured.)

The battalion started with 40 mules. Their load consisted of two days C and K rations, water, an ample supply of batteries for the SCR 300 and 536 radios, rifle, machine gun and mortar ammunition, and forage for the mules. These Italian mule skimmers and mules had been working with the battalion since April.

Riflemen had two hand grenades and two bandoliers of ammunition besides their rifle belts. All light machine guns and two 81 mm mortars were hand carried, and every available weapons man had ammunition.

No packs were carried but the individual had a field jacket, raincoat, extra pair of socks and one days K ration. It was SOP for each individual to have halizone tablets, oil, and patches for his weapon.

As the column moved out Company G was leading, followed by Companies E and F. The leading platoon moved out 100 yards in front of the remainder of the company. But there was no interval between any of the other platoons or companies. The trail went around the east side of M. CASSARECCIO, and to the east of M. LATIGLIA. A squad from G Company was sent to the crest of M. LATIGLIA and as it neared the crest it was fired on from the crest of the hill. (See Map C)

G Company Commander and the Battalion S-3 were with the leading platoon and this platoon was north of the crest when the firing commenced. The Company Commander quickly started the lead platoon to the top of the hill over the difficult terrain. Among the many huge rocks they had excellent cover. When he reached his squad near the top, the firing had stopped. He found out that there had been only two or three Germans and the squad couldn't place them. He moved his platoon up to the crest and along the crest to the western slope.

Then they saw a group of Germans running away from them and down the mountain less than 200 yards away. Most of the platoon opened fire and the enemy took cover among the rocks. The Company Commander yelled down for them to surrender, and 21 of the enemy stood up and surrendered. Captain Roeder could speak Pennsylvania Dutch.

This was the artillery observation party and some strays that were picked up but the battalion questioning could not get them to disclose the position of their artillery.

The battalion started moving again and reached M. CALVO by night fall.

The Regimental Executive Officer had followed the battalion up and stated that the other battalions were moving without opposition and that the 2d Battalion should push on and join them. He suggested that we continue the march during the night. The battalion for the most part which was stretched out along the trail was ordered to its feet and the march was continued.

The march continued until the Regimental Executive Of-

Sentences
Structure
Analyze
Improved.

AN.K.
Sentences

*How showed
the ambush
& perhaps with a*

ficer went back to the rear command post. Then security was put out and the battalion slept and rested the remainder of the night. (33)

23D --- THE SECOND DAY

M. CALVO was in the shape of a wide V. To the west it extended for about 3000 yards to M. MARINO and to the northeast the ridge line held up to M. PIZZUTO, about 3500 yards away. (See Map C)

The Battalion's route led along the ridge toward M. MARINO.

At first light of day on 23 May, Company F led the battalion along the trail to the west toward M. MARINO. Company G was next and then Company E.

After the column had been moving about 20 minutes, Company F was hit by a force from the northeast. It was no ambush, but rather a meeting engagement. The enemy was moving along the fairly good terrain from the northeast.

The Battalion Commander and S-3 were with F Company Commander and it looked as if the enemy had a strength of about 20 riflemen with two machine guns.

Parts of two platoons of Company F opened fire, and as they faced to the right they were in good positions to hold the trail. Firing was moderate and F Company had five or six casualties. Company F was on higher ground and could move around a little, but they couldn't move to either flank. Their entire company was along the trail and the enemy could observe 600 to 700 yards of it. (See Map E)

(33) Statement of Corbett Williamson, then 2d Battalion Commander, 350th Infantry, on 31 Oct 1949.

The Battalion Commanding Officer told F Company Commander that one of the other companies would move in from the flank and when that unit started firing, that F Company should move forward. Meanwhile keep up firing moderately.

E Company Commander was contacted by SCR 300 radio and told to get ready. The Battalion Commanding Officer went back through the column to a good covered position that would lead to the enemy's flank. He then believed that a platoon would be as large a group that could be controlled over this terrain.

The Platoon Leader was briefed, showed the enemy line and told to move out. This Lieutenant had joined the company two days previously in FONDI. He moved his platoon out in good style and went around a hill toward the enemy's rear. After briefing the Lieutenant the Battalion Commander went back up to Company F. He left the Battalion S-3 with E Company. Nothing happened for about thirty minutes except a little firing in F Company's area. E Company Commander tried to call the Lieutenant on the SCR 536 radio. After the platoon had been gone about 40 minutes the Platoon Sergeant of the flanking platoon came rushing back to the trail from the direction the platoon had gone. He said the platoon was captured. He said they had gone too far and also that he had not seen but about ten Germans. He said a German told them in English they were surrounded and that the Platoon Leader took a white handkerchief out and told all the men to give up.

E Company Commander immediately started getting the remainder of his company together. The Battalion S-3 notified

the Battalion Commander of the situation over the radio and asked if E Company could go after that platoon. The Battalion Commander replied, Okay, move out, and that he was moving F Company out too and for G Company to cover the trail.

By this time every man in the battalion knew the situation. All of E Company took off with the Company Commander and the Platoon Sergeant from the captured platoon leading.

The enemy had started to the northeast with its prize. As E Company Commander got within 150-200 yards of them every man in the company started shouting and shooting. The Germans started firing but then left the captured platoon and started running.

In the meantime Company F succeeded in overrunning the Germans that were left as a covering force and was driving along the crest of the ridge toward Company E. The enemy started surrendering and some of them gave up that could have gotten away.

E Company Commander had given the order to run all the Germans down but the Battalion Commanding Officer came up with Company F Commander and ordered Company E to get back on the trail.

The unfortunate platoon leader was thoroughly oriented by his Company and Battalion Commanders. 50 prisoners were captured, mostly by F Company and they were used to carry wounded men back to the rear. Thirty of the enemy were killed and Companies E and F had twenty-one casualties.

The battalion moved out again and crossed the north side of M. MARINO. The trail that Regiment had taken was hard to

follow. There were no markings and many trails look alike.

Regiment had set up a radio relay station of four men on M. MARINO and this station had gone off the air earlier in the morning. Their last words were that they were surrounded. F Company found three of the team's bodies but the radio and the other man were missing.

Regimental rear sent the battalion a message that five companies of Germans were moving to M. MARINO from the south west and also that the 2d Battalion had the mission of protecting the regimental supply route as well as pushing to ROCCASECCA. Also that the Battalion was going too slow.

Although not the highest feature around, M. MARINO was the most important in this area. Especially with five companies of Germans moving toward it.

Company F was ordered to go into positions on M. MARINO.

Regimental rear then radioed that the message regarding the five companies was incorrect, and that they were sending up a 90 mule train for regiment.

The battalion left Company F on M. MARINO to protect the trail. They were instructed to put out patrols along the trail. The contact points were to be decided by the company. The battalion then moved out along the trail toward M. SPORAGO. (See Map C) The trail ran along the east slope of a long ridge that went up to M. SPORAGO.

About mid-afternoon the 90 mule pack train from the rear started around M. MARINO and was ambushed. Company F was not in position to prevent it, but quickly came to their aid. The mule train had not taken the same trail ^{as} of the battalion and

had gone some 700 to 800 yards to the north of M. MARINO. The battalion column could see this action from across the valley but were over 2000 yards from it. Machine guns were set up and fired across the valley without results.

Company F captured ten of the ambush party and found that they were from AMASENO and had the mission of occupying M. MARINO. They said that they had thirty men in their company and also they did not know the 2nd Battalion was on the trail.

The battalion was in good position to stay for the night. The battalion mules were put in the middle of the battalion area and a perimeter defense was set up.

A Lieutenant ^{W.C.} that was bringing up the ambushed train was given help in trying to salvage some of the supplies. The mule skimmers had run off during the ambush and only a few of them could be found. The Germans had shot most of the mules, and few of the rations were found.

During the night a message was received from the regimental rear command post, relayed through Company F, directing the battalion to contact the 85th Division that was coming up on the left. This was done over the SCR 300 radio and the Battalion Commander found that the 339th Infantry had gained SONNINO that day. (See Map C)

THIRD DAY ON THE TRAIL

At dawn on the 24th, with Company G leading the battalion column moved over M. SPARAGO. The daily ambush was hit by the leading man in the column. This time the enemy's position was well chosen and in a saddle.

Captain Roeder, G Company Commander, lead a platoon up over the top of a hill so that he could fire down on the enemy. This was a slow way to attack the position but it was felt that fewer casualties would be suffered.

It took G Company over an hour to break through and capture 17 and kill two. G Company suffered five casualties, three of them litter cases. As the battalion had no more stretchers with it, poles were cut, litters improvised, and the POW's were used to carry the wounded back the long trail to the rear.

Company E was ordered to leave one reinforced platoon on M. SPARAGO. Their mission was to protect the trail and contact Company F by patrols. A SCR 300 radio was left with them.

The battalion moved without further contact with the enemy to M. ALTO. Another E Company platoon was left on MONTICEHIO. The battalion spent the night of the 24th on M. ALTO.

THE FOURTH DAY

Early on the morning of the 25th the battalion moved out toward ROCCASECCA. The last rifle platoon of E Company, a section of machine guns and E Company Headquarters were left on M. ALTO. They also were given the mission of protecting the trail.

The trail was down hill to the town and the battalion column was much shorter. It moved rapidly and soon contacted elements of the 3d Battalion which garrisoned the high ground overlooking ROCCASECCA.

The Battalion Commander and S-3 reported to the Regimental Commander and he asked them why they let a few snipers hold them up.

Summary of this action: The 2d Battalion, 350th Infantry failed to make the trip with the rest of the regiment because of its first day's action. But the enemy had expected the main attack to move through this position. (34) While the 2d Battalion was hitting this enemy strong point the rest of the regiment was able to move to the objective.

When Battalion Headquarters and Company G finally reached ROCCASECCA and the word was sent back along the trail to Companies E and F, the entire battalion felt that it had done a good job.

The battalion had 19 killed and 69 casualties -- 7 of them officers. They had captured 198 Germans and actually counted 72 killed.

The 2d Battalion was accused of being held up by snipers but it was generally considered a good job after the facts were known.

The battalion had moved with both flanks open, no artillery support and daily contact with the enemy.

G Company Commander and a Company F Platoon Sergeant were later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for other actions.

Five months later this battalion held M. BATTAGLIA (not shown on Map) for several days against difficult odds. For which action it received the Distinguished Unit Citation.

(34) Personal knowledge; POW, 21 May 1944

*Not
shown
on
map*

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. ACTIONS OF THE REGIMENTAL AND BATTALION COMMANDERS

Whenever contact was gained with the enemy the Battalion Commander moved to the scene to ^{make} take an estimate of the situation. As soon as he committed his companies, he assisted the front line leaders in controlling their units.

The Regimental Commander with the light tank was a determining factor in the fight on 21 May. Since three of E Companies platoon leaders were wounded, the Regimental and Battalion Commanders greatly assisted E Company Commander in leading his company through the assault.

2. PLATOON LEADERS MUST LEAD

As evidenced by the fact that six platoon leaders were wounded on 21 May, the platoon leaders had a difficult job in moving their units. E and G Company Commanders always took the lead. Also their platoon leaders moved out in front of their platoons. This was probably not unique to this organization but in the mountains, the men could conveniently find cover and this made the job of the platoon leader much harder. Once the men started moving and firing, the leaders job was mostly control.

3. COMMITMENT OF SUPPORT AND RESERVES

On each encounter with the enemy, support platoons or reserves had to be used. The quicker these units went into action, the better the results. On the 21st the enemy was not set for both Company G from the west and Company E from the

south. Although there was no fire fight, Company G Commander would not have captured the observation group on the 22d unless he had not moved a platoon immediately. On M. CALVO there was some delay in committing a reserve. Then when it was used it was too small. Only through the aggressiveness of E Company Commander was the platoon saved and the fight won. On M. SPARAGO, G Company Commander personally led his flanking force and mopped up the resistance.

4. SUPPLY

The Battalion Commander did not want to put a mule train in the column but was afraid that he too would get cut off from the rear. The uncertainty of the situation made it imperative that the battalion be able to operate without resupply for at least 48 hours.

5. MARKING OF TRAILS

Had the 2d Battalion clearly marked the trail, the ambush of the pack train might have been avoided. Regiment was supposed to mark the route they used but failed to do so. Many of the trails looked alike and some of them fail to show or were incorrect on the maps. The battalion did not have any white tape and no other means was improvised.

6. TERRAIN EVALUATION

The battalion committed a grave error in neglecting to secure the high ground before they tried to pass through S. BAIGIO VALLEY. Even though there was no contact with the

enemy, the battalion should have made certain that the enemy had not set up an ambush. This should be done without holding up the battalion column. Company F failed to secure the long approach from the northeast on M. CALVO before the battalion moved across the mountain.

As it was impracticable to cover the crests of all the mountains, the battalion checked only those over which it passed.

7. COMMUNICATIONS

The SCR 300 radios operated very effectively. They had to be moved around quite often for better reception. Due to their weight, operators would take turns in carrying them. If the battalion had not brought a sufficient supply of batteries they would have been without communication. The SCR 536 radios were not used very much. The platoons relied on messengers during most of the operation.

8. OUT-GUESSING THE ENEMY

The 2nd Battalion walked into a well planned position on the 21st of May. On M. CALVO the leading company was caught in a bad position. On the 23rd the ambush was located by the leading men in the column as the Battalion formed on the trail. There was practically no way to disclose the enemy's position other than walking into it.

LESSONS

1. The presence of the Regimental or Battalion Com-

mander in the thick of a fight will greatly inspire troops and assist the front line leader in closing with the enemy.

2. In mountain fighting, where there is ample cover, company commanders and platoon leaders must physically lead to the objectives.

3. When moving in a column through the mountains, speed is of the utmost importance when committing support and reserves.

4. In order to keep moving and be effective in the mountains, supply problems must be anticipated and supplies insured.

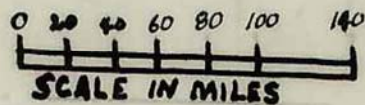
5. When operating over mountain trails, established communication and supply routes must be plainly marked.

6. In clearing routes over mountain terrain, special attention must be given to approaches that the enemy can use to attack the trail as well as to commanding high ground.

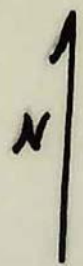
7. In attacking over extended distances and rough terrain, radio must be relied upon as primary communications.

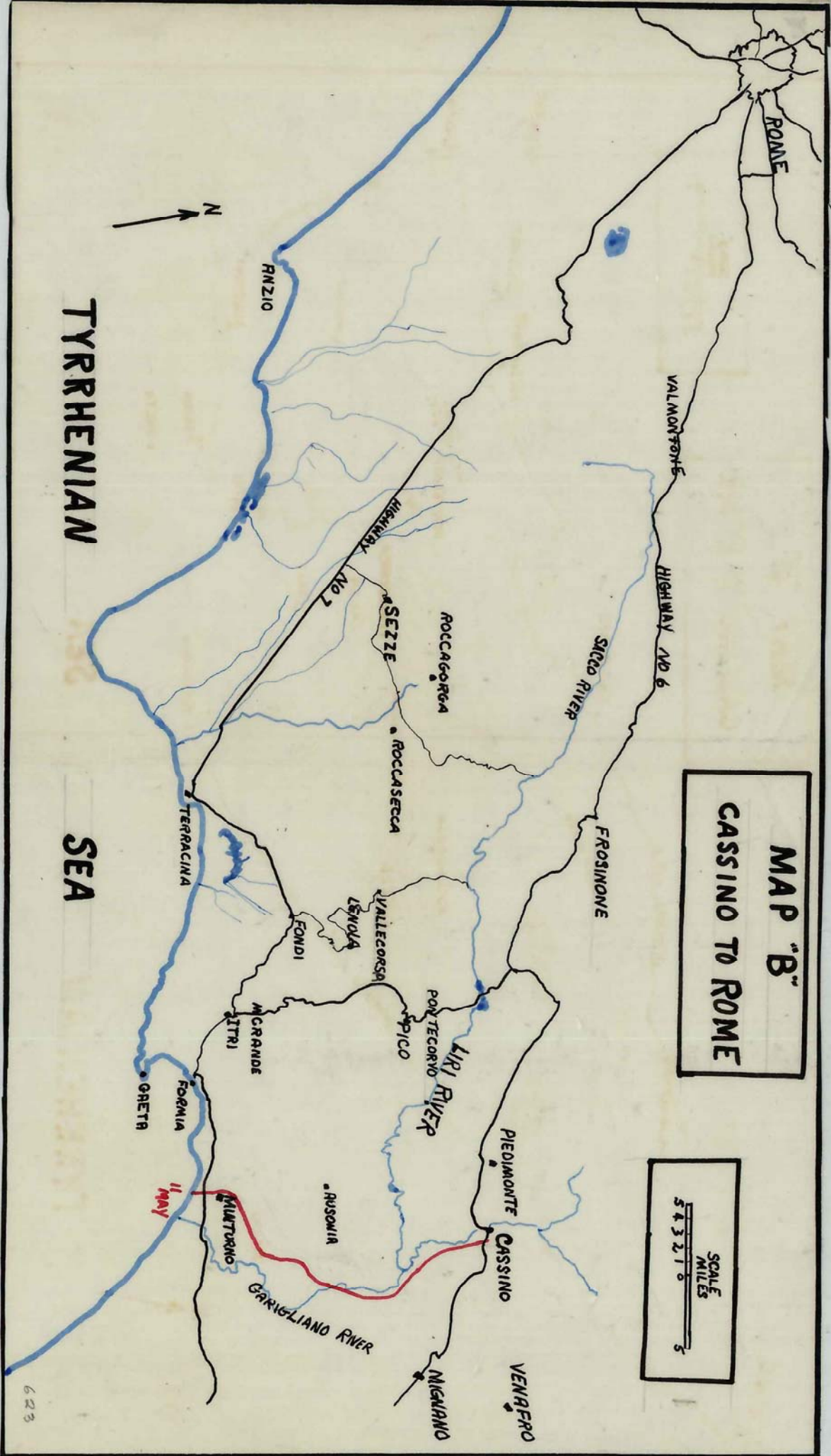
8. Although it was poor practise to disclose an ambush by hitting it head on, there was practically no other method in this type operation.

MAP "A" GUSTAV LINE IN ITALY

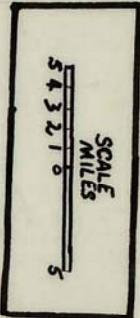


"A"





MAP "B"
CASSINO TO ROME



MAP 'D'
ACTION IN S. BIAGIO
VALLEY 21 MAY 1944




**MONTE
S. BIAGIO**

← TO TERRACINA


HIGHWAY NO 7

TO FONDI →

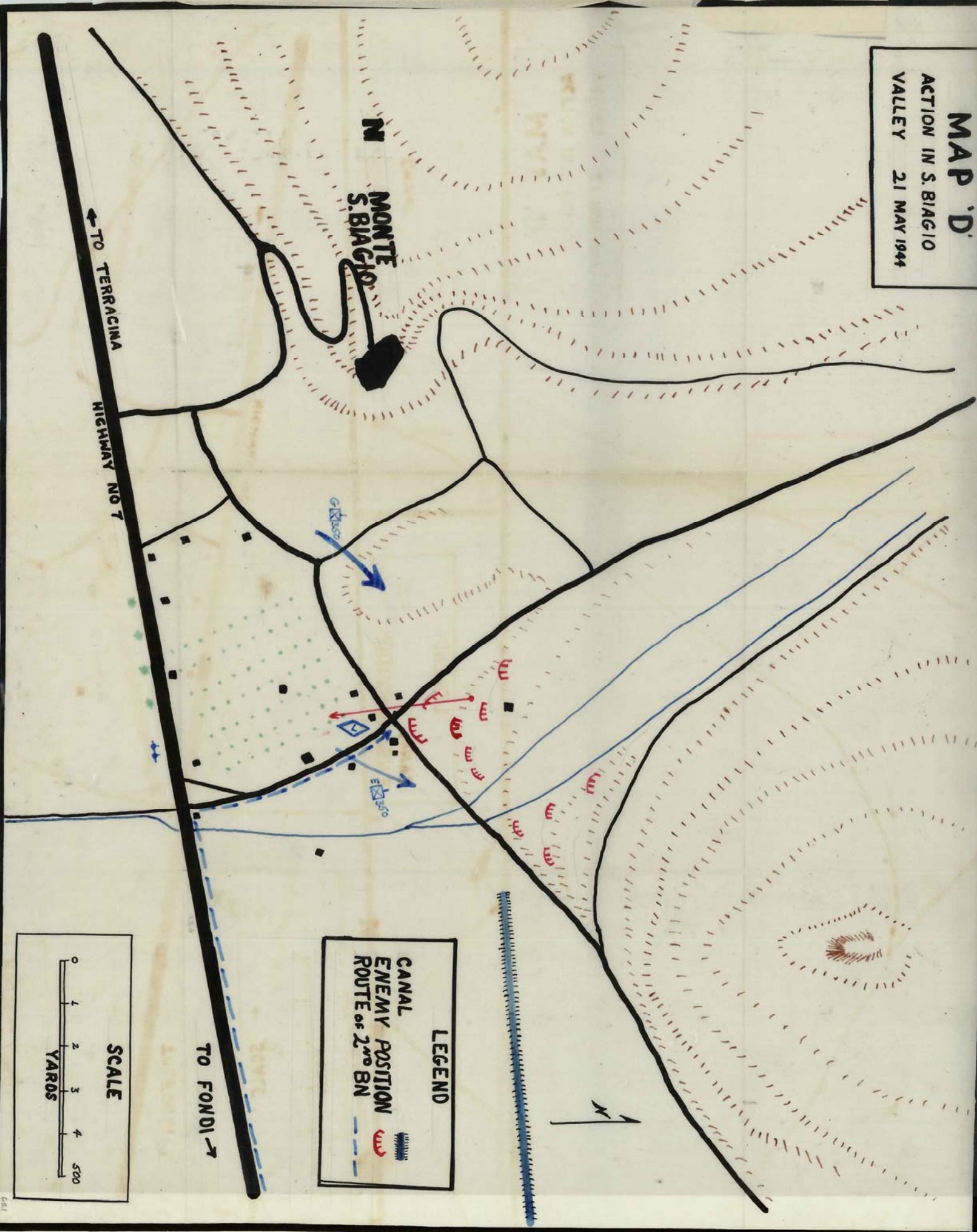
LEGEND

-  CANAL
-  ENEMY POSITION
-  ROUTE OF 2ND BN


SCALE



0 1 2 3 4 500
YARDS



MAP 'E'
M. CALVO
ACTION

LEGEND
2ND ROUTE 
ENEMY POSITION 

