

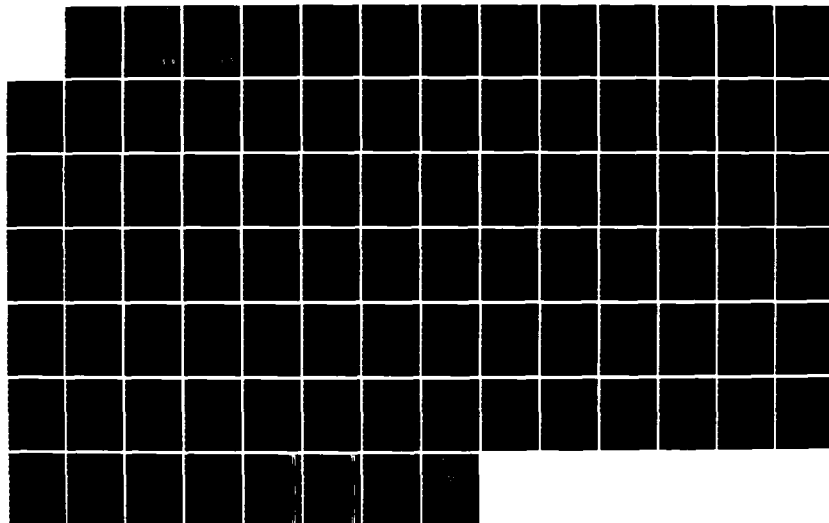
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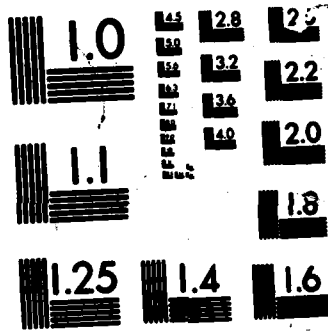
BATTLE ANALYSIS: THE BATTLE OF MONTE ALTUZZO OFFENSIVE  
DELIBERATE ATTACK. (U) ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF  
COLL FORT LEAVENWORTH KS COMBA. R L NORMAN ET AL.  
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<p>In September 1944, the Fifth US Army, as part of a coordinated effort with the British Eighth Army, launched an offensive against the German Gothic Line, in the Appennines Mountains of North Central Italy. Not wanting to assault the heavily defended key terrain of the Futa Pass, the II Corps decided to outflank it by taking the II Gigo Pass to the east. The 91st Division attacked to seize the high ground to the west (Monte Monticelli) while the 85th Division attacked Monte Altuzzo on the east. Although elements of both divisions were involved, the battle was primarily a regimental-sized fight, with most actions involving</p>			

THE BATTLE OF MONTE ALTUZZO  
OFFENSIVE, DELIBERATE ATTACK, MOUNTAIN  
85th AND 91st INFANTRY DIVISIONS  
SEPTEMBER 1944

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## ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: Monte Altuzzo (September 1944)

TYPE OPERATION: Offensive, Deliberate Attack, Mountain

OPPOSING FORCES: American: 5th US Army  
II Corps  
85th Division  
337 Regimental Combat Team  
338 Regimental Combat Team  
339 Regimental Combat Team  
91st Division  
363 Regimental Combat Team

German: 4th Parachute Division  
12 Parachute Regiment  
2d Battalion, Grenadier Lehr Brigade  
10th Parachute Regiment

SYNOPSIS: In September 1944, the Fifth US Army, as part of a coordinated effort with the British Eighth Army, launched an offensive against the German Gothic Line, in the Appennines Mountains of North Central Italy. Not wanting to assault the heavily defended key terrain of the Futa Pass, the II Corps decided to outflank it by taking the Il Giogo Pass to the east. The 91st Division attacked to seize the high ground to the west (Monte Montecelli) while the 85th Division attacked Monte Altuzzo on the east. Although elements of both divisions were involved, the battle was primarily a regimental-sized fight, with most actions involving platoon or squad-sized maneuver. After an arduous and often confusing fight, Monte Altuzzo was seized. This victory was the initial breach in the Gothic Line, and opened the way for continuing the attack northward to the Po Valley.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: See Annex A.

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## I. INTRODUCTION TO THE BATTLE OF MONTE ALTUZZO

The battle of Monte Altuzzo occurred in mid-September 1944, and was the first breaching of the Gothic Line by U.S. forces. The U.S. 5th Army's II Corps captured the II Gioio Pass by securing Monte Altuzzo and the adjoining heights.

A number of sources of information about the battle are available. A bibliography is listed at Annex A. The primary source was the book Three Battles: Arnaville, Altuzzo and Schmidt, by Charles B. MacDonald and Sidney I. Matthews. MacDonald wrote the portion on Altuzzo based upon his interviews with participants and retracing the battlefield. His account provides an extremely detailed analysis of the battle. It is, however, the only source our group could find which detailed the battle itself, and it does not provide much information about the events leading up to the battle, the enemy situation and other pertinent matters.

Few sources could be found which dealt with the units actually making the assault on Monte Altuzzo. The battle was essentially a regimental-sized fight, and most official historical accounts of the period give it little note. Volume III, 5th Army History: and Cassino to the Alps by Ernest F. Fisher are straight-forward accounts of the Italian Campaign, and provide good general information about the Gothic Line assault. But they make only passing reference to the Battle of Monte Altuzzo.

Two personal accounts were available, which proved most helpful in our research. One was an after-action report written in 1947 by LTC Robert Cole, commander of the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry Regiment. Although his battalion was not the main effort on Monte Altuzzo, his analysis was extremely valuable. LTC Cole's comments on command and control, reconnaissance and artillery fire support verified our group's conclusions in these areas.

Another account was that of former SGT James E. Stokesbury, who was involved in one of the key actions of the battle, at Peabody Ridge. His account was interesting and helped provide a good feeling for the nature of the action, but was very limited in scope.

General Albert Kesselring's postwar analysis of German problems during the Italian Campaign, while not directed specifically at the Gothic Line battles, proved helpful in assessing the German Army's fighting condition. However, detailed information on German capabilities and problems (especially logistics), casualties and other matters at Monte Altuzzo is extremely lacking.

## II. STRATEGIC SETTING

In the Fall of 1944 the Allies in Italy had moved north of the recently captured city of Rome and were preparing to push the front toward the North Apennine Mountains. Along this rough

physical barrier the Germans, now without the aid of their former Axis partner Italy, had constructed a formidable defense known as the Gothic or Green Line. Monte Altuzzo was only one of the battles that would contribute to the eventual allied breakthrough of the Gothic Line.

In 1944, neither Germany nor the United States saw Italy as the major front of the European Theater. In spite of British (more specifically Churchill) belief in the importance of the Southern Front, the invasion of France in June 1944 had shifted the focus of Allied attention and resources to the assault on Germany from the West. The Germans, faced by attacks from both western armies in France and the Red Army in the East, viewed Italy as a secondary threat to their war efforts. Germany's prime interest in Italy was to prevent the Allies from using the northern plains of the Po River region for airbases from which strong air attacks could be mounted against the southern and southeastern regions of the German Reich (or what remained of it).

The German High Command envisioned a defense of the Po Valley region along the Gothic Line. Limited resources and the rugged terrain of the upper Italian Peninsula caused the Germans to adopt a peculiar defensive concept. Major terrain features were used to anchor the defensive line. Along these lines numerous defensive positions, echeloned one behind the other, were constructed to permit the ability of operations. Using these prepared positions, the Germans left

that they would be able to rapidly shift their forces laterally along the defensive line to meet the major axis of any Allied effort. Thus, through the advanced construction of hard defensive positions integrated into a total tactical plan of fires and obstacles, the Germans believed that they would be able to combine an economy of force defense with a more active and fluid approach to defeating the anticipated Allied offensive in the fall of 1944.

The Allied camp was less unified in its approach to the Italian Campaign of late 1944. The successful invasion of France had shifted attention, at least U.S. attention, from the Mediterranean. Although still a significant effort, the Allied Armies in Italy had already been reduced by two corps and several divisions to support Overlord and the supporting invasion of southern France, Dragoon. By the Summer of 1944, senior U.S. officers were urging a further reduction in the tempo of operations in Italy with a concurrent reinforcement of operations in France. Britain, charged with theater command, saw Italy, and more generally the Mediterranean, in global terms. Through Italy, Britain envisioned a northeastern thrust into the Balkans that would both threaten the German southern flank and counter the Red Army expansion that Churchill feared. Both the rapid advance of the Soviet forces and the very real British fear that the U.S. might further reduce their forces in Italy, made the British eager to achieve a rapid breakthrough of the Gothic Line. To accomplish this

end, Field Marshal Alexander, the AAI commander, planned an assault against the Gothic Line for the Fall of 1944. The operational plan provided for a general attack all along the line with Clark's U.S. Fifth Army on the left and the British Eighth Army on the right. The concept of operations provided for the main attack to be made by the Eighth Army along the eastern coastal region of Italy with supporting attacks by the Fifth Army. In general terms, Alexander's war-gaming foresaw the Germans shifting their limited forces east along the Gothic line to meet the British attack thus hopefully reducing their resistance to Mark Clark's forces.

As September 1944 began, northern Italy became a battleground between a poorly resourced defensive effort and a British driven race to gain entry to the Reich's "soft southern flank". It was in this setting that the battle of Monte Alferio began.

#### THE ANTAGONISTS

By Monte Alferio, the Axis had become a hollow shell of former greatness. Japan had never effectively joined with the European partners in any but diplomatic endeavor. Italy had left the Axis in 1944 to surrender to the Allies. This Germany, with the weak assistance of Romania, stood alone in Europe. By the fall of 1944, Germany's national objectives could be traced in two ways: Adolph Hitler sought to defeat

the Allies -- to fight until their alliance broke under the stress of opposing ideologies and, in that moment of fragmentation, to defeat them. Hitler's generals more reasonably sought to bring the war to a standoff -- to force the Allies to accept peace with terms that would favor neither Germany nor the Allies, but rather a peace that would avoid the draconian measures of the treaty that ended WWI.

In pursuing these divergent objectives, the German Reich could draw upon several unique strengths: The Reich, as a fully mobilized state, possessed a unity of national will. The German people, indoctrinated by one of the earliest effective propaganda machines and united in hatred for the terror bombing allies, stood resolutely behind their government. This social unity was exceeded only by the political unity of the Reich. There was but one political force: Adolph Hitler. Germany's economic strength was less impressive. 1944 had seen the fruition of the Allied strategic bombing program. Thousand plane raids were becoming possible and few areas of the Reich were beyond the effective range of large bomber formations. Strategic bombing had a substantial effect on the German economy. Transportation facilities were specifically hard hit. Manufacturing was also badly damaged, but Speer, the czar of war production, had managed to sustain high rates of war materials production. However, Speer could do little to compensate for the loss of raw materials. As Germany lost its overseas territories, it lost access to the raw materials it

needed to continue the war. Of particular import was Germany's increasing isolation from sources of oil.

After 5 years of war, the German armed forces were in varying states of readiness. The Navy had lost almost all of its effective surface combat units. With the exception of a rapidly shrinking submarine force and a small torpedo boat arm, the Navy was no longer a force in being. This was especially true in the Mediterranean theater where torpedo boats were the only effective German naval presence. The German Air Force had fared little better. Allied bombing had specifically targeted aircraft production and airfields. The weakened Luftwaffe had been forced to meet the tremendous strategic air assault by shifting its production, training and flight fuel use to the air defense of the Reich. By late 1944, German offensive air and tactical air operations had almost ceased. Only the German Army had maintained (to a large measure) its ability to effectively engage the Allies. The Wehrmacht however was heavily outnumbered on the continent. Although superbly led by an extremely well experienced general staff, few of its divisions were anything more than marginally manned and equipped. Germany's high losses in 5 years of war had almost exhausted available manpower stocks. Replacements were made available only by dramatic relaxation of age limits and extensive use of foreign nationals (as fillers and volunteer units). These exceptional personnel measures, while filling the ranks, materially reduced the combat effectiveness of

German ground units. In spite of these shortcomings, and regardless of the vulnerability of Wehrmacht logistical elements to Allied tactical air, the German Army was still capable of decisive combat (as had so recently been proven at Anzio).

On the surface, the Allies shared a joint objective: the defeat and unconditional surrender of the Axis. In the instance of Germany, allied insistence on unconditional surrender was strong. A general conviction to preclude a German military resurgence such as that achieved after WWI dominated the Allied camp. On a national level, each of the allied nations had additional objectives. Both Britain and the Soviet Union saw the defeat of Germany as but an element in the eventual political maneuvering for spheres of influence within a weakened continent. The United States more naively maintained its disinterest in the political dimensions of the conflict. The U.S. objective was to achieve victory as quickly and as cheaply (at least in terms of human life) as possible.

Unlike Germany, the Allies did not enjoy a unity of social and political forces. Although the peoples of the allied nations shared a hatred for the Nazis and a conviction in the justice of the war, the similarity between the Allies ended there. Only the U.S.S.R. was, like the Nazis, able to totally mobilize the people under a single unchallenged political structure. Both the U.K. and the U.S. were subject to the dangers (and at times during war) effects of public dissent.



and the open political process. Consequently, the leaders of both the U.S. and the U.K. had to be more sensitive to public opinion. One result was an obvious requirement to limit casualties.

Economic factors greatly favored the Allied war effort. The manufacturing capacity of the Allies exceeded any requirements of the Armed Forces. With the exception of some Axis submarine and air interdiction, the Allied war machine had free access to most of the world's raw materials. No shortages plagued their efforts. The excessive production of materials allowed extensive use of fire and air support to reduce casualties and, in many cases, caused an dependency on an overwhelming preponderance of fire.

The Allied armed forces were, by 1944, at their zenith. Millions of men were under arms. While mismanagement caused some local shortages, Allied forces did not suffer from undermanning. Equipment provided to those forces was excellent (though not always technically superior) and always plentiful. Combat leaders were, for the most part, battle tested and experienced. None the less, the Allied Armies had shown themselves lacking in the higher order technical combat skills an obvious in the Germany Army. The Allies had won previous battles by overwhelming weight of arms and not finesse. Where that weight could be effectively brought to bear, victory was assured.

### III. THE TACTICAL SITUATION:

#### A. Area of Operations:

1. Climate and weather: The climate and weather in the Il Giogo Pass/Monte Altuzzo area of operation during September 1944 was characterized by warm, dry days with cool nights and early morning mist and chill drafts which swept over the hills. While the soldiers of the 338th Infantry had field jackets, olive drab uniforms, and summer underwear (in which they would swelter in the daytime), they were stripped to the barest essentials for the fighting, thirsted in the daytime and shivered at night. Weather and climatic conditions were not severe enough to materially affect the outcome of the battle; however, some concealment of troop movement was possible under the cover of the early morning mists. Conversely, dry and dusty conditions aided observers and allowed them to spot vehicular movement at long ranges. In neither case were these conditions tactically significant to the extent that they affected the outcome of the battle.

2. Terrain. The Il Giogo Pass/Monte Altuzzo area was a part of the German defensive area known as the Gothic Line. The Gothic Line defenses utilized the rugged Apennines mountain range, which in themselves present a formidable obstacle to any attacking force. Here peaks rise from the Arno valley to a great ridgeline with tops reaching heights from 3000 to 5000 feet. The Germans were fully confident of stopping the Allied drive along

this line especially since the Organization Todt, which had also built the German Westwall, had constructed extensive fortifications, barriers, and obstacles for over a year prior to the offensive. Construction of this defensive line on the southern slope of the Apennine Mountains between Florence and Bologna was part of the total German plan for successive defensive positions on the Italian peninsula. Because of the extremely rugged nature of the terrain the defenses could be concentrated on the passes through the mountains. Construction was undertaken initially by 28,000 Italian workers supervised by the Organization Todt as mentioned earlier. Work was accelerated in June 1944 after the fall of Rome, when responsibility for the defenses was assigned by the German Commander in Chief, Southwest, to the units which were to defend the line.

The barrier system of the Gothic Line (now called the Green Line) was intended to function as a position to which the Germans could fall back if necessary. Since the Apennines are in themselves a barrier, the barrier system was designed to improve on the natural obstacles. The positions for fortification were well selected and mutually supporting. Defensive positions and obstacles were primarily sited to cover the main road through the pass, with many of the positions cut into solid rock.

German records have not produced figures on the number of obstacles placed in the area attacked by the 85th Division at Il Giogo Pass nor the amount of material used in the construction.

effort; However, for the sector immediately to the east of the German 4th Parachute Division (occupying the Il Glogo defenses) data is available which shows the extent of the construction. The table below gives a good indication of the number and types of obstacles that may be assumed to have been installed in the Il Glogo Pass sector.

	READY	UNDER CONSTR.	PLND.
Machine gun positions	80	102	5
Positions for antitank guns, mortars and infantry guns	5	16	0
Dugouts	71	123	3
Infantry observation post	2	5	0
Small cut-and-cover shelters	9	4	0
Connecting trenches (length, meters)	120	0	0
Observation post for artillery observers with dugouts	0	1	0
Antitank ditches (length, meters)	0	40	0

Surface wire obstacles

2,200

0

1,800

Road construction (meters)

200

0

0

As described in the 85th Division G-2 report on the operation, "The enemy's defenses consisted chiefly of bunkers constructed of earth and logs, fortified houses, machine gun positions cut into rock and innumerable mortar emplacements. The positions were well planned and generally mutually supporting. The fortified houses on Hill 732 and Vennuca were circled by bands of mines and barbed wire; the heavy vegetation growth was cleared and openings in the walls at ground level allowed machine guns to employ grazing fire. Bazookas were ineffective against the thick walls of these houses. Similarly, bunkers and pillboxes were so well constructed that they survived all but direct hits by the artillery or by the aerial bombardment".

The Gothic (Green) Line just east of the Il Giogo Pass (and Highway 6524) is dominated by Monte Altuzzo, and on the west by Monte Monticelli. In order to control the pass it would be necessary to first capture these objectives. The confusion of brush-clad ridges and gullies which characterized the approaches to the two heights were in turn subject to observation and crossfire from the adjoining heights and the bunkers thereon. The narrow, knife-edged ridges were covered with stunted brush and

scattered patches of pines except where bare rock outcroppings and sheer cliffs furnished no foothold for vegetation. There were a few standing trees on the forward slopes of the mountain but many more had been felled to create barriers as well as clear fields of fire. Artillery shells tore away most of the remaining trees during the course of the battle. Very little cover and almost no concealment was available for the attacker.

The portion of the line just east of the Il Giogo Pass where the 338th Infantry was to make its main effort is shaped like a huge amphitheater with two wings extending south from Monte Altuzzo (Hill 926) (photomap enclosed). Situated on the floor of the amphitheater is the La Rocca farmhouse and its associated fields and pastures, which were under the direct observation and fire of the enemy from Hill 782, Knob 1 and Knob 2 located on the eastern wing leading to the summit, and the western peak (Peabody Ridge) located on the western wing. Only a coordinated attack against the heights on both sides of the amphitheater could achieve success against the enemy occupying this portion of the Green Line.

#### B. Overview of friendly forces:

1. General: The 5th Army was stopped along the Anno River, which served the Germans as a general outpost line for their main defense line, the Gothic Line. The Gothic Line ran east to west across 170 miles of the North Apennines Mountains. In August

1944, the British 8th Army held the eastern four-fifths of the line and the US 5th Army held the remaining one-fifth on the west. The plan of attack was for the 8th Army to initiate the attack and get the Germans to commit their reserve to blunt the 8th Army attack. Once the German reserves were committed, the 5th Army would launch its attack against the Gothic Line.

On 10 September 1944, the 5th US Army launched its attack. Two Corps was to make the main effort for the 5th Army and the 85th Infantry Division was to make the main attack for Two Corps. The 5th Army numbered roughly 262,000 troops and included ten combat divisions. Of this force, less than a thousand men were involved in the attack. In fact, the assault force that bore the brunt of the fighting was never larger at any one time than two rifle companies numbering some 350 men. Two Corps units involved were the 34th, 85th, 88th, and 91st Divisions. The 34th, 85th, and 91st Divisions were to attack north and the 88th Division was in reserve.

The 91st Division's objective was to secure the Monticelli Hill mass while one of its regiments and the 34th Division made holding attacks in the west. The 85th Division was to pass through the 91st Division and secure Monte Altuzzo. By seizing the dominate terrain on either side of Highway 6524, the Grocco Pass would be secure allowing II Corps to penetrate to the Gothic Line into the Po Valley.

2. Strength And Composition:

85th Infantry Division

Task Organization

337 Regimental Combat Team

337th Infantry Regiment

328th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)

Company A 310th Engineer Combat Battalion

Company A 310th Medical Battalion

338 Regimental Combat Team

338th Infantry Regiment

329th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)

84th Chemical Weapons Battalion (4.2 inch mortar)

Company D, 752 Truck Battalion

Company B, 310th Engineer Combat Battalion

Company B, 310th Medical Battalion

339 Regimental Combat Team

339th Infantry Regiment

910 Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)

Company A, 84th Chemical Weapons Battalion

Company C, 310th Engineer Combat Battalion

Company C, 310th Medical Battalion

85th Division Artillery

403th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm)



85th Cavalry Troop (Mech)  
310th Engineer Battalion (-)  
310th Medical Battalion (-)

Hqs Special Troops

HHC  
785th Ordnance Ligth Maintenance Company  
85th Quartermaster Company  
85th Signal Company  
85th Military Police Platoon

Attached to the 85th Division

752d Tank Battalion (medium)  
805th Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP)  
84th Chemical Battalion (4.2 inch mortar)  
105th Anti Aircraft Artillery Battalion

In Support of the 85th Division

Hqs, II Corps Artillery  
178th Field Artillery Group  
178th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm)  
248th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm)  
339th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm)  
939th Field Artillery Battalion (4.5 inch gun)

423th Field Artillery Group

697th Field Artillery Battalion (240mm/8-in gun)  
698th Field Artillery Battalion (240mm/8-in gun)  
985th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm)

The division's plan was to attack with two regiments abreast, the 338th Infantry on the left was to secure Monte Altuzzo and the 339th Infantry on the right to secure Mount Vennucci. The 337th Infantry was the division reserve.

Approximately 50% of the 85th Division had experienced combat in the drive through the mountains to Rome or with patrols or holding actions along the Arno River. The 85th Division enjoyed air superiority throughout the battle, though its impact was insignificant. The 85th Division and II Corps artillery, however, played a very significant part in the battle. In fact Lt Col Robert H. Cole, the commander of the 2d Battalion 338th Infantry Regiment during the battle, attributes the success of US forces in taking Monte Altuzzo to heavy harassing artillery fire. "I believe the enemy could have withstood all of our infantry attacks providing the front line enemy troops could have been supplied. Supply for the Germans became the critical factor, and when their most desperate efforts at resupply failed, the German line naturally began to crumble. The reason the enemy resupply failed was due to the constant, heavy, harassing fire which isolated the front line German troops from his supporting troops." Although the mobility of the tanks and self propelled tank destroyers was severely restricted by the terrain, their

flares were very effective in destroying bunkers or suppressing their fires.

3. Technology: There was no significant difference in the technology that impacted on the battle. Had the German concussion grenades been more effective (many duds) they could have inflicted more casualties on US forces, however, it would not have changed the outcome of the battle. On the other hand, had the radios of the US forces worked properly, they may have been able to secure their objectives sooner and with fewer casualties. Most communication between the front line units and their respective headquarters was accomplished by runners.

4. Logistics and Administrative Systems: The terrain severely restricted the ability of the uncommitted forces and logistic personnel to resupply the committed forces with any class of supply. In particular, availability of hand grenades for the platoons of the 338th Infantry making the main effort, posed some serious problems in clearing bunkers and trenches. The terrain also adversely affected the reserve replacement personnel/units' ability to reach the committed units. Replacement personnel as a whole were well trained, equipped and fed.

5. Command, Control and Communications: Generally, the 85th Division was well organized for combat (see task organization). Due to the rugged, restrictive nature of the

terrain, commanders and their staffs should have moved their locations closer to the front lines to enable them to more accurately assess the situation. Steep slopes and narrow ridges made coordinated assaults difficult particularly with an absence of orders/information from higher headquarters. Radio communication was almost nonexistent between front line troops and higher headquarters and resulted in uncoordinated attacks by the front line units. To further aggravate matters, the inability of the platoon leaders and company commanders to locate themselves or their units on the ground posed problems for artillery fire. As the battle progressed, the platoon/company runners became the primary means of communication. Initial operation orders were well thought out and coordinated on paper, however, once the battle began no further orders/plans were received by the front line troops other than "push on".

6. Intelligence: The initial intelligence from corps and division was weak and remained weak throughout the battle. An intelligence summary distributed to the battalions described the objective area as less prepared than other portions of the Gothic Line although "they formed nonetheless a formidable defense sector". The enemy situation was described as vague and alluded to the poor quality of enemy troops. Intelligence, once the battle began, was predominantly from units in contact. Little if any of this intelligence/information reached regiment or higher levels of command. Intelligence had little influence on how the actual battle was fought and was not integrated into operation

orders/guidance from the 85th Division as there was no guidance other than "push on" as alluded to earlier.

7. Doctrine and Training The 85th Division's plan of attack called for two regiments abreast to make the main attack with one regiment in reserve. The regiments were formed into regimental combat teams with the normal slice of combat support and combat service support (see task organization). As stated earlier, roughly 50% of the division had combat experience. The terrain impacted in two major areas of doctrine and training. The first area affected was the forces' ability to mass which resulted in piece-mealed, uncoordinated attacks. This allowed the Germans to defend company size frontages with platoons and sometimes with squad size units. Thus, US forces were forced to completely clear areas and not by-pass any enemy force as these enemy units could bring effective fire on the attacking unit. Secondly, the terrain was such that all leaders had a very difficult time locating themselves on the ground. This resulted in the sparse use of artillery to strike enemy front line units for fear of injuring friendly troops. The terrain complicated the situation further by restricting the utilization of the weapons platoon. The machine guns and 60mm mortars were not effective against the enemy defenses (i.e. bunkers, mortar pits). The terrain offered natural camouflage to the German fortifications making it extremely difficult to locate enemy positions, even when they were firing on US forces. Lt Col Cole summarized the difficulties of Monte Altuzzo by stating that his battalion

started the operation with three disadvantages against it: (1) no time was available for reconnaissance, planning and coordination by battalion and smaller sized units; (2) the objective and mission were too vague due to the nature of the terrain (i.e. Hill 770 was not a hill at all but merely an elevation on the map. It overlooked nothing, it controlled nothing, nor did it add anything to the success of the battle); and (3) the zone given his battalion prevented him from taking any action which could aid or assist the division's total effort.

8. Conditions, Morale and Leadership: The soldiers of the 85th Division were in good physical condition and their morale was high. "Loaded down with full packs and blanket rolls, they had marched on foot from Uaglia, twelve miles up and down hills. Despite their fatigue, they did not seem depressed about the impending attack. Few suspected that a hard fight lay ahead, and most shared the confidence of their officers".<sup>2</sup> Generally, the soldiers expected this to be an easy fight. As the battle began, morale was high and remained high except for some front line units that received heavy casualties. In these units, the majority of the soldiers fought bravely and maintained a high state of discipline, however, there were some who ran and some who surrendered without a fight. For the most part, platoon leaders, platoon sergeants and squad leaders took positive measures to maintain high morale by leading by example and not exposing their men to unnecessary danger. The terrain adversely affected morale by restricting mutual support by adjacent and

follow on forces. When one unit was taking fire, an adjacent or following unit could not fire for fear of hitting friendly troops. The terrain also affected morale by causing resupply of class I and V to be intermittent at best. Because of the terrain, small unit leaders were continually challenged to develop new approaches to solve battlefield problems. Communication with their higher headquarters was almost nonexistent, forcing sergeants and lieutenants to make the decisions which ultimately led to the accomplishment of the mission of the 85th Division.

C. Overview of Enemy Forces:

1. The Germans had five Divisions on the Gothic line. One of them, the 4th Parachute Division had an extended frontage, with three regiments on line as follows: 10th Regiment at Monte Frassino, 11th Regiment at Monte Calvi, and 12th Regiment at Monte Altuzzo. In addition, a Lithuanian Labor Battalion and 2d Battalion, Lehr Brigade were available as the 14th Army Reserves.

2. The 4th parachute Division was manned by only a small nucleus of experienced paratroopers who saw combat at Anzio. Most troops were inexperienced boys with only three months training. The division's reserves were green troops who had never fired ball cartridges. Nevertheless, morale was good and the German soldiers were prepared to defend their positions with great determination.

3. The Germans had suffered heavy casualties in the allied breakout from the Anzio beachhead and the pursuit to the Anno

River. Although the half of the allied offensive at the end of July had given the Germans as well as the Americans a chance to absorb reinforcements and equipment, Fourteenth Army's (to which the 4th Parachute Division was assigned) strength was well below that of the US 5th Army. It had been weakened even further after the British 8th Army had launched its earlier Adriatic Coast attack; as a total of four German divisions, including three from the II Corps zone, had been shifted to the Tenth Army on the east to meet this threat.

4. Logistics and Administrative systems:

a. Long distances from the front lines to rear supply points made supply a problem, especially for construction materials needed to prepare defenses.

b. Constant change of command authorities in the German higher echelons made it difficult to have priorities set for the few supplies to go the units that needed them most.

c. Allied air superiority made it increasingly difficult to maintain an adequate rate of supply to Gothic Line troops. The few roads in the high rugged Appenines Mountains were under constant Allied air engagement, meaning that most supplies had to be moved at night. As a result, the 14th Parachute Division was short of ammunition and supplies.

D. IMMEDIATE MILITARY OBJECTIVE:



1. BACKGROUND:

The following are extracts from the II Corps and 85th Division operation orders:

a. 5th US Army attack with mission of penetrating the Gothic Line and debouching into the Po Valley.

b. II Corps: Attack north on a three division front. Main effort is on the right. Penetrate Gothic Line and debouch into the Po Valley. Capture objectives at each phase line. Continue attack to next objective or exploit on axial routes within zone IAW Duchess Plan.

c. 85th Division: (Phase I - Red Line) Pass through forces holding Orange Line within zone. Attack north and capture Monte Altuzzo and Monte Frena. Protect II Corps' right flank. (Phase II - White Line) Continue attack to north with maximum force and capture Monte Coldreta and Monte Canda. Continue attack to northeast or exploit north along Highway 6524 IAW Duchess Plan. (Phase III - Blue Line) On Order of II Corps, continue attack north or exploit on routes of advance within respective zones IAW Duchess Plan.

d. 88th Division. II Corps reserve.

2. Discussion of Military Objective: Very careful, detailed and coordinated plans and objectives are always necessary in the assault of a strong defensive position, as was in the case of the Gothic Line. If this is not done a planned coordinated attack degenerates into a series of small unit uncoordinated attacks aimed at meaningless objectives. In

studying this operation one is impressed with the initial planning of the 5th US Army and II Corps for it reads just like a school solution given at CGSC, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After the initial attack, however, no further orders, except to push on, were given. Personal initiative at the battalion, company and platoon level is what drives the battle and includes the taking of the final objective. Offensive action to the right and to the left were not coordinated and guidance that should have come from 85th Division and II Corps did not materialize. Another problem area is that objectives should be key terrain features or communication centers and not just a goose egg on the map. An example is Hill 770. This objective for 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry was not a hill at all but merely an elevation on the map. It overlooked nothing, it controlled nothing, nor did it add anything to the success of the battle. This problem was compounded by the fact that no reconnaissance was done by the infantry commander at any level. Given the time to conduct this much needed reconnaissance, an intermediate objective would have been planned for the maneuver as well as for the fire support assets.

3. Enemy objective: The enemy's main line of resistance on Monte Altuzzo was manned by 250 to 300 men in all which is numerically equivalent to one under strength German battalion or one and one half companies of American infantry. Because of the terrain, poor communications and lack of control, at no single time during the five day battle did the Americans throw as many troops into action on Monte Altuzzo as did the defenders.

Although forced to bring up various non-infantry units for reinforcement, the local German commander had decided to hold Monte Altuzzo and the mountains on the east and west of the Giogo Pass with all the strength they could muster. On 8 September each soldier in the 12th Parachute Regiment, 4th Parachute Division, had received orders that the position was to be held to the last man despite lack of supplies and intensive artillery or mortar fire. Only on authority of the company commander may the position be abandoned. The message was clear, their objective was to hold the Gothic Line.

E. COURSES OF ACTION:

1. Friendly Course of Action:

a. The initial course of action was a II Corps coordinated attack with the 34th Division on the left, 91st Division in the center and 85th Division making the main attack on the right to secure Monte Altuzzo and Il Giogo Pass.

b. The initial course of action was changed when the 263d Infantry of the 91st Division crossed the Sieve River and advanced to the Gothic Line against relatively light German resistance. On the night of 11 September the regiment found itself approximately 2,000 yards south of Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo. Since stiff opposition had failed to develop, the II Corps commander kept the 85th Division in reserve and ordered the 91st Division to continue its attack the next morning. Its objective was to advance as far as possible toward the two

dominating peaks. The 91st Division launched its 12 September attack in the early morning with the 363d Infantry making the main effort up Highway 6524 to capture Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo. While the 1st Battalion kept pressure on the enemy on the left flank, the 3d Battalion attempted to seize the two objectives. Company K pushed toward Monticelli; Company I toward Fonte Fredda along the highway between the two mountains; and Company L towards Monte Altuzzo. German resistance stiffened, and neither of the division's attacking regiments got farther than the enemy's outpost positions.

c. The II Corps commander thereupon ordered his original plan for a coordinated attack to go into effect at 0600 the next morning. Specifically this course of action had the 34th Division on the left and the 91st in the center keeping pressure on the enemy, the 85th Division, taking over the attack zone east of Highway 6524, would make the main effort to seize Monte Altuzzo and Il Giogo Pass. The weight of the 91st Division attack was to fall against Monticelli along the west side of Highway 6524. The II Corps commander ordered the 91st Division to continue pressure on the enemy through the day of the 12th and to advance as far as possible before the 85th Division launched the main effort. The II corps commander realized that there would be confusion when the 85th Division units passed through the 91st Division before the latter was ordered to halt its attack. He believed, however, that uninterrupted pressure against the enemy was necessary until the 85th Division took over the main effort.

Although both courses of action were feasible, the proper staff and command work was not done prior to execution. To effect passage of lines, when the unit to be passed through is actively engaged with the enemy, is a very difficult operation. Enough confusion existed without adding more unnecessarily. The 3d Battalion, 363d Infantry Regiment, which was attacking, was disorganized, had not yet captured its objectives, and the location of the forward companies was not known. The 95th Division then was expected to make a passage of lines, with a shift of boundaries for the 91st Division, and continue the attack without loss of momentum. There are three alternatives to the actual executed course of action. First, commit all three divisions at a known line or at the very beginning of the II Corps attack. Second, would be to give the 91st Division objectives short of the Gothic Line, in order to insure that they would be on a known line ready for a passage of lines. Finally, the II Corps commander could have delayed the attack one day.

## 2. Enemy Courses of Action:

- a. Hold Gothic Line to the last man.
- b. Reinforce the Gothic line with reserve forces of the 4th Parachute Division.
- c. Withdraw from the Gothic Line.

3. The first two courses of action are feasible. But from the outset the numbers were not on the side of the Germans. It was a matter of time and time is what beat the Germans.

#### IV THE FIGHT

##### A. Disposition of Forces:

Early on 13 September, the German force had established its main line of defense of the Gothic Line along the Arno River, about eight miles north of Florence. After chasing the enemy through successive withdrawals, the Fifth U.S. Army was now poised to enter the critical phase of its planned offensive to reach the Po Valley. The II Corps was to be the main effort and had directed the 85th Division up on its right flank on the previous night to conduct the main attack in the II Corps zone.<sup>3</sup>

The 85th Division was deployed directly in front of Monte Altuzzo. The 91st Division, in the center of the II Corps zone, was facing Monte Calvi, and the 34th Division, on the left, was opposite Monte Frassino. The 85th Division, assigned a narrow zone east of Highway 6524, was deployed with the 338th Infantry Regiment on the left, the 339th Infantry Regiment on the right, and the 337th Infantry Regiment in reserve. The 338th Infantry, with a major portion of the II Corps objective in its zone, was deployed with two battalions abreast, 2d Battalion on the left and 1st Battalion on the right.<sup>4</sup>

The commander of the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry Regiment recalls that the division was brought up on trucks the night of 11-12 September to an assembly area in the vicinity of Tagliero. At about noon on 12 September, they received word that they would pass through the 91st Division in zone and continue the attack at dawn on 13 September.<sup>5</sup>

The Germans were not well prepared for the II Corps attack. In

August, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring had five divisions in the central sector north of Florence. The 4th Parachute Division on Highway 65 had been flanked on the west by the 29th Panzer Grenadier and the 26th Panzer Divisions and on the east by the 356th and 715th Grenadier Divisions. By 10 September three of the five divisions had been moved to the Adriatic Coast. The 4th Parachute and the 715th Grenadier Divisions were forced to extend their already long fronts. The 4th Parachute Division alone was responsible for most of the II Corps attack zone. The division was spread thin with no available reserves. All three of its regiments were on line: the 10th Parachute Regiment in the Monte Frassinio area, the 11th Parachute Regiment in the Monte Calvi area, and the 12th Parachute Regiment in the Monte Altuzzo area.<sup>6</sup> Additional problems arose from the fact that the boundary between the German Fourteenth and Tenth Armies, also the boundary between 4th Parachute and 715th Grenadier Divisions, left a divided command in the zone of the II Corps attack.<sup>7</sup> Recent movements of the units involved in the action were highlighted by an extremely skillful withdrawal from the line by II Corps into their assembly areas south of Florence.<sup>8</sup> Other than the redeployment of three of its five divisions, recent German movements had been characterized by successive withdrawals in the face of Fifth Army pressure, with little resistance offered. Combat power was easily on the side of the Americans, although the 4th Parachute Division received 600 replacements the day before the attack. In the course of the attack on the II Group

Pass sector of the Gothic Line, which represented less than one-third of the II Corps zone, Major General Geoffrey Keyes massed approximately 50 percent of his committed infantry strength and an equal portion of his pool of tanks, tank destroyers, and chemical units, giving him an estimated superiority of three-to-one over the defending Germans.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to normal division artillery, each of the attacking divisions received direct support from one Corps field artillery group. Support for the 85th Division also included the three 105-mm howitzer battalions of the 88th Division. For long-range counterbattery fire and particularly for the work of knocking out the strongly reinforced enemy bunkers and pillboxes, the 423d Field Artillery Group, consisting of two battalions (less one section) of 249-mm howitzers, three sections of 8-inch guns, and two battalions of 155-mm guns, provided general support along the whole Corps front. As soon as the engineers opened up Highways 45 and 4521 the long-range artillery moved into positions around the village of Vaglia on 11 September while the bulk of medium range corps artillery was concentrated closer to the Sieve River. Air strips for the artillery observation planes also were located in the Sieve Valley. By 12 September the corps and division artillery units had moved into firing positions and the work of softening up the enemy defenses was well under way.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the shortage of front-line troops and reserves, the mission of the 4th Parachute Division was to hold its portion of the Gothic Line as long as its limited resources would permit.

The mission of the Fifth U.S. Army was to breach the Gothic Line



and capture the Po Valley. The II Corps mission was to drive in the covering forces in front of the Gothic Line with the specific objective of seizing control of Highway 6524, the main supply route and only road in the area, and opening the Il Giogo Pass. The 91st Division was to secure Monte Monticelli to prevent interdiction along Highway 6524. A supporting attack on the left flank was assigned to the 34th Division. The mission of the 85th Division was to pass through the 91st Division, secure Monte Altuzzo, and seize Monte Verruca and Highway 6524 to the west.<sup>11</sup>

Within the 85th Division, attacking with two regiments abreast, the mission of the 338th Infantry Regiment was to secure Monte Verruca on the east. The 338th Infantry Regiment was to pass through the 363d Infantry Regiment, 91st Division and secure Monte Altuzzo and Highway 6524 to the west. The 2d Battalion was given the mission to seize Highway 6524 between Monte Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo. The 1st Battalion was to seize and secure Monte Altuzzo.<sup>12</sup>

#### B. Opening Moves:

At 1200 hours on 12 September 1944, the soldiers of the 338th Infantry Regiment, 85th Infantry Division started a twelve mile night forced march, under full pack, to arrive at forward assembly areas for a 0600 attack on 13 September 1944.

The II Corps plan called for the 338th Infantry to be the main effort in the attack to secure the critical Il Giogo Pass. The 363d Infantry, 91st Infantry Division was to attack toward Monte Altuzzo until stopped by the enemy. At that time, the 338th

Infantry was to pass through and continue the attack north to the Po Valley.

The Corps plan was inadequate because it failed to provide clear instructions. There were no lines of departure, no contact points, and most important, no passage points for the forward passage of lines. The plan was further confused by a misunderstanding of the 91st Division regarding passage of the 85th. This confusion was possibly caused by lack of clarity in the Corps plan.

The 338th Infantry attacked at 0600, 13 September 1944, with the 2d Battalion, commanded by Lt Col Cole, on the left along highway 6524 to take point 770 enroute to Giogo Pass. The 1st Battalion on the right, under Lt Col Jackson, was to make the main attack to secure Monte Altuzzo (Hill 926). In reserve was the 3d Battalion, under Maj. Lysle E. Kelley, with the mission to follow the 1st Battalion and, on order, pass through the 1st Battalion and continue the attack northeast to objectives two miles beyond the Il Giogo Pass.

The men of the 1st Battalion arrived just before midnight on the 12th. They dug in quickly and tried to get some sleep before the morning attack. At 0430, Company A, 1st Battalion, 338 Infantry was awakened for a K ration breakfast and prepared for the 0600 attack. They still did not know the line of departure or the location of the 363d Infantry, 91st Division, through whom they were to pass.

The 0600 attack was spearheaded by the 2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry. The platoon was moved out single file

in more of a reconnaissance than an attack formation. At 0800, the platoon came under fire from enemy positions on Hill 782. The action took approximately one hour with the 2d Platoon taking four wounded.

During the action, antillery support was requested and denied because the location of Company L, 363d Infantry was unknown.

The 2d Platoon resumed its advance and immediately came under attack by 120-mm mortars. The platoon changed direction to use a more covered route. Communications with the company headquarters was lost at this point. It was partially restored at 1000. They continued to move until approximately 1100 when they paused to eat a K ration lunch.

After lunch they continued the "attack". They closed to within approximately five hundred yards of Hill 926 when they came under intense rifle and machine gun fire from three directions. At 1345, after moving the platoon back out of direct danger, the platoon leader requested antillery support. This time, seven hours and fifty minutes into the battle, it was finally approved. The antillery fired was not, for the most part, fired in close support, but rather in the enemy's rear area. This was also true of the close air support which arrived at this time. The only supporting weapons which fired in close support of the infantry were the tank and tank destroyer units which placed direct fire upon several of the bunkers blocking the 2d Platoon's advance.

At 1730 the platoon again moved out. After advancing fifty to one hundred yards, more bunkers and more Germans were encountered. The platoon successfully defeated the first of

these, but as night was rapidly approaching and no orders had been received, the three platoon leaders, in the absence of the company commander who didn't show up until 2230, decided to withdraw slightly and dig in for the night. When the company commander finally arrived, he expressed disappointment that they had not advanced farther. Yet, throughout the day when communications were lacking, he never ventured forward to take charge of the situation.

One platoon was committed to the cautious "attack" that was the II Corps main effort. By the end of the day on 13 September 1944, the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry had sustained about twenty casualties, located some of the enemy positions, and failed to take its objective.

The attacks of 14 September 1944 were planned to proceed as on the 13th except that Company B was not to follow Company A. It was to attack up the western ridge in coordination with an attack by Company A up the eastern ridge. The two-pronged attack was to kick off once Company B was abreast of Company A, with the coordination to take place by radio. There was to be no artillery preparation; however, artillery was to be on call from H-Hour minus 10 minutes. Once again the artillery was to place harassing fire behind the enemy to disrupt enemy reinforcement and resupply.

Company A was still dug in just short of Hill 762 on the eastern ridge. During the early hours of the 14th, the commander attempted to talk to battalion and Company A without success. New batteries for the radio failed to cure the problem. Wine was

attempted, but was knocked out by enemy mortar and artillery fire almost as soon as it was strung.

The company commander, Captain Robert A. King, decided to kick off the attack as planned even without communications. At 0500, 14 September, Company A moved out with two platoons abreast up the slope of Hill 782. As it was very dark, both platoons were in close column. Twice during early movement the platoons saw small enemy patrols along the skyline about twenty-five yards away. Both times they withdrew slightly to choose a new route, saying that they were anxious to avoid a firefight.

A few yards farther up the hill the platoons ran into some low strung barbed wire. As they were passing through the wire, they were challenged by a German sentry. The platoons hit the ground, and in the ensuing firefight, the Germans replied with all types of small arms, hand grenades and mortars. Because of the intense enemy fire, the steepness of the terrain, which limited the return fire, and the lack of communications for the calling of artillery support, the platoons withdrew to the start positions. Company A remained there throughout the rest of the day, still out of communications with battalion.

At 2130, 13 September, Company B moved out to prepare for a dawn attack up the western ridge of Monte Altuzzo. The company commander, Captain Maurice E. Peabody, had not asked for guides from Company A because he thought "...oh, I'm an old hunter - I can't miss." Several hours later, he and the entire company were lost somewhere on the southern slopes of Monte Altuzzo. Sometime after midnight, the company commander called for two smoke rounds

on the peak of Monte Altuzzo. They were fired, but the company could only faintly hear their impact and could see nothing.

In spite of the fact that Company A was out of communications and Company B lost, the battalion S-3 reported to regiment, and regiment in turn reported to division, that the 1st Battalion controlled Hill 926 with Company A on the left and Company B on the right. Not only did they not control Hill 926, but Company A was on the right and Company B was lost somewhere on the left.

Daylight was fast approaching when the Company B commander finally selected the correct ridge and started his men up it. They soon encountered barbed wire and as they were passing through they were engaged with small arms, machine guns and hand grenades. During the short firefight a German soldier surrendered. He told the Americans that the ridge ahead was mined on the left and right, but was clear in the center. This information proved to be true and saved the company considerable time moving up the ridge.

The 2d Platoon, followed by the 3rd Platoon, moved rapidly up the ridge fighting pockets of scattered German resistance until it reached a point overlooking Highway 6524. At that point a lone German tank was spotted on the highway and fired on twice by the bazooka man of the company without success. The tank withdrew.

As the 2d Platoon reached an open ridge, later called Peabody ridge, the Germans counterattacked with approximately forty soldiers. The Germans were very accurate with their hand grenades however, they were concussion type grenades and caused little damage. The combined firepower of the 2d and 3d Platoons

finally repulsed the counterattack. Both sides had sustained several casualties. As a result of the intense exchange, ammunition was running low. More was requested from battalion. The platoon attempted to move forward again and was soon met with the second German counterattack. This attack was also successfully defeated. The platoon was now so low on ammunition that those that were still alive were taking the ammunition from the dead.

The third German counterattack came shortly after noon. This was a smaller attack which was soon repulsed. Morale in the forward platoons was fading rapidly as a result of the repeated counterattacks, lack of ammunition and rising number of wounded and dead. Approximately ten walking wounded stripped to the waist, unarmed and carrying a white flag, were allowed by the Germans to walk down the hill and out of the fight.

The fourth and strongest counterattack was then launched by the Germans. The platoons started to withdraw without orders. About fifteen men withdrew. Nobody knew how many remained and were captured. Another fifteen men were seen to throw down their weapons, construct a white flag of toilet paper, and surrender. Some of the company's better soldiers were angered by this and wanted to kill those that were surrendering. A sergeant on the scene would not allow them to fire.

About 1650, the artillery fired large amounts of unobserved fire along the ridge between Company B and the peak of Monte Aluzzo. A short time later, the company began to withdraw, leaving most of their wounded on the hill, by order of Capt Peabody. Shortly

after 1900, the company had safely withdrawn and sent litter-bearers back to rescue the wounded.

This was a heroic fight mostly lead by the NCO's. The officers above platoon level failed to become involved in the fighting even when communications had broken down to the point where the leadership was needed forward.

On a personal note, one participant in this phase of the battle was interviewed by telephone in preparation of this analysis.

Sgt. James E. Stokesbury, who was a recon NCO in the 338th's Antitank Company, was involved in a portion of the action on Peabody Ridge. He says "we were told that 2d Battalion's 5 Company was having a rough time taking Altuzzo. I was told to go up the ridge and see if it would be possible to get some 57 mm guns up to them. Upon arriving at Company B's position, I immediately got pinned down as they were taking heavy fire. I was able to return to regimental headquarters and reported that it was not feasible to move 57 mm's with prime movers up that terrain. The big question at the headquarters was "where is Company B?" The last anyone had heard they were on the crest and needed ammo, food and reinforcements. But no one knew for sure where they were. Since I had just been there, I was asked to lead a detail back up. I returned up the hill, guiding about two platoons of infantry with food and ammunition. When I got there, things were fairly quiet. Staff Sergeant George D. Keathley seemed to be in charge. He said that I had done my job and could go back down and get some rest. By that time I was exhausted and decided to stay and get some sleep right there. This was a big



mistake, because the Germans soon counterattacked. I recall two or three attacks, the last one being the worst. It came down to hand to hand fighting. I lost a mouthful of teeth in one encounter with a German after I ran out of ammo. At one stage in the fighting I was accompanying Sergeant Keathley, who was going from position to position, directing and encouraging the men. We were also picking up weapons and ammunitions. Keathley was killed and later got the Medal of Honor."

C. Major Phases of the Battle:

The next (fourth) assault against Monte Altuzzo on 15 September was to bring the farthest advance yet on the main ridge. The attack was led by two platoons abreast: the 2d Platoon of Company A, led by 2nd Lieutenant Harry R. Gresham, and the 1st Platoon of Company C, led by 1st Lieutenant William S. Corey. After the 1st Battalion commander gave the warning order for the attack, the Company A commander, Captain King, understood his mission to be the aggressive capture of Hill 926, while 1st Lieutenant Redding C. Souder, commander of Company C, felt his mission was merely a developing movement and did not believe his men were being called upon for an all-out effort to secure the objective. Both platoon leaders were to reflect the respective opinions of their commanders.

The infantry assault was preceded by an extensive artillery preparation designed to soften the entire mountain position. The reserve (3d Battalion, 338th Infantry) moved to Hill 924, from which it was to follow Companies A and C closely and pass through them after capture of Hill 926 (Map 1).

Lieutenant Gresham moved his men forward at 0830 from their position on the southwest finger of Hill 782, under cover of the preliminary artillery barrage which began at the same time. Supported by this artillery fire, the leading men of Companies A and C reached the peak of Hill 782 without difficulty, and the two platoon leaders (Gresham and Coney) joined forces at that point. Because the ridge line was too narrow for two platoons to move abreast, the two lieutenants decided that 2d Platoon of Company A would lead the way, single file, followed by 1st Platoon of Company C.

A smoke screen was established by 0930 from the supporting fire of the 329th Field Artillery Battalion which severely limited German observation. After moving under this smoke screen about seventy-five yards beyond Hill 782 to the next rise on the ridge line (Knob 1), the 2d Platoon, Company A was hit by enemy fire for the first time. After neutralizing this German machine gun nest, Lieutenant Gresham passed another squad forward toward the bound, a rock formation on the next rise on the ridge line (Knob 2). Enemy resistance increased as the assaulting elements had finally hit the east anchor of the German main line of resistance, which extended northwest around the upper end of the bowl to the peak of the western ridge. Enemy frontal fire and flanking fire from the west ridge prompted Lieutenant Gresham to propose a flanking movement for Lieutenant Coney's platoon, to which the latter agreed. During the the subsequent frontal and flanking assaults (which were characterized by close combat with small arms and grenade exchanges), the Germans mounted a

counterattack that was successfully repulsed.

During this phase of the attack, the 1st Platoon of Company C (on the southwest slope of Knob 2) was hit by shellfire. Fired from either artillery or a direct-fire weapon such as a tank or tank destroyer, the shell killed six men, including the squad leader of the 2d Squad, and wounded two others. Whatever the weapon, everybody agreed that it was American, not German. Although only a single round had struck Lieutenant Corey's platoon, the resulting confusion and the belief that it was friendly fire had a demoralizing effect upon those who survived. This demoralizing effect was evidenced by the hasty, ill-coordinated and somewhat embarrassing withdrawal of the 1st Platoon, which abandoned its position and fell back to the saddle between Knob 1 and Knob 2, thirty-five yards to the rear of Company A's 2d Platoon. (Some elements of Company C's 1st Platoon had in fact withdrawn as far back as the southwestern slope of Hill 782).

This unexpected development left Lieutenant Gresham's platoon somewhat isolated and vulnerable to a German counterattack, which was attempted on the platoon's left rear flank from the western slope of Knob 2 which had just been abandoned by Corey's platoon. After some close combat with this counterattacking force, the 2d Platoon drove the Germans back up the ridge.

The supporting platoons of Company A and Company C remained aloof from the battle, occupying concealed positions behind the peak of Hill 782 (see Map 14). The narrow, exposed route of advanced west of the main ridge line and the sheer drop-off on the eastern slope left no room for the deployment of more men. They could

not provide supporting fire without taking the chance of hitting the assault troops.

To literally add insult to injury, a cry passed up to Lieutenant Corey and his platoon (which had already abandoned its forward positions) to withdraw. Making no effort to check the message, Lieutenant Corey assumed it was authentic and promptly complied, much to the subsequent chagrin of his company commander, Lieutenant Souder. This of course left Lieutenant Gresham's 2d Platoon in a completely vulnerable position on Knob 2, and he had no choice but to withdraw his platoon as well, which was done in a well-organized and orderly fashion. These actions were subsequently ratified by both company commanders, as well as Lt Col Jackson.

This phase of the battle for Monte Altuzzo was more than just another entry on a growing list of tactical failures, because the cumulative effect of these apparently ineffectual efforts was starting to take its toll. Although the supporting attacks on both flanks of this main effort were equally disappointing, the enemy situation was gradually reaching the breaking point. Enemy casualties were steadily mounting and his resistance eroding.

Supporting artillery, mortar, and tank destroyer fire could justifiably claim primary credit for this state of affairs.

During the night of 15-16 September, the enemy committed some of his last reserves to the Monte Altuzzo sector.

The next phase of the battle would result in seizure of the main Fifth Army objective and penetration of the Gothic Line. During the evening of 15-16 September, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 368th

Infantry, were hard-pressed to repulse five enemy counterattacks. The assistant 85th Division commander, Brigadier General Lee S. Genow, decided that the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry would continue the main effort to seize Hill 926, and the 3rd Battalion would pass through the 1st before dawn on 17 September and seize Knob 3 north of Monte Altuzzo's crest. The 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, was to attack up highway 6524 to protect the left flank of the main effort.

Artillery preparation for this phase of the battle consisted of effective counterbattery fire and isolation of the enemy forces on the objective from reinforcement and resupply. Close air support and air interdiction missions also contributed to the effort. Company C, 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Souder, was designated by Lt Col Jackson to make the principal effort, followed by Captain King's Company A. Neither unit had more than two-thirds of its normal strength.

Company C's 3rd Platoon, led by 2nd Lieutenant Albert J. Krasman, a former platoon sergeant and combat veteran, was to spearhead the attack. It began on the morning of 16 September by pushing up the southwestern slope of Hill 782 and relieving a squad of the 1st Platoon at its outpost positions. Before the 3rd Platoon could begin the attack from these outposts it came under enemy fire, but jumped off a few minutes later at 1630. In the brief fire fight that resulted in the capture of Hill 782, two enemy soldiers were killed, six captured, and one American soldier was wounded. The next rise on the ridgeline to be secured was Knob 1 (see Map 2). This was essentially uneventful except for the

harassing fire from American supporting weapons - artillery, tanks, or tank destroyers - which fell so close to the advancing 3d Platoon that Lieutenant Krasman held up for more than an hour to avoid a repetition of the previous day's debacle. By this time darkness prevented the enemy from seeing the advancing men and from placing fire on them. Accordingly, the leading men of Company C advanced to the main German positions on Knob 2 without being discovered. Three soldiers, Private First Class Carl Schwantke, Private Alfred D. Lightner, and Staff Sergeant Walter M. Strosnider, seized three positions on Knob 2, captured eleven Germans, killed several more, and had driven the rest from the MLR. It was now 0300, 17 September, and the next rise on the ridge line was the crest of Hill 926.

The strongest resistance to the 3d Platoon's advance to the crest of Monte Altuzzo was the heavy underbrush, which made progress difficult and slow. After reaching the top of the peak, word came up to the leading men to withdraw and dig in on the southern slope of the hill. Although the source of this directive was uncertain, it was subsequently ratified by Lt Col Jackson, who wanted the southern end of Hill 926 held until the 3d Battalion passed through.

While Company C, reinforced by two squads from Company A, had been advancing to occupy the crest of Monte Altuzzo (Hill 925), the 1st Platoon of Company A had moved from Hill 792 to the mountain's western ridge. The platoon advanced up the western ridge to within fifty yards of its peak and dug in to wait until dawn before proceeding further.

Meanwhile, the 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, which was to pass through the 1st Battalion before dawn, was not in a position to do so. In fact, it had waited at Hill 782 until notified of the 1st Battalion's success before it began its advance up the slopes of Monte Altuzzo at 0315. By daylight on the 17th of September, the 3d Battalion was strung out on the main (eastern) ridge line subject to enemy fire from bypassed German elements.

Although the German defenders of Monte Altuzzo were told to hold their positions at all costs, the situation was getting more hopeless for them by the hour. Inexperienced, ill trained, and demoralized replacements in woefully small numbers were all that could be spared for the Il Giogo Pass area. Heavy American artillery fire, supported by Allied air attacks, was continuing to build a cumulative casualty toll that weakened and demoralized what was already a defeated opponent.

The final phase of the battle of Monte Altuzzo consisted of several German counterattacks and the subsequent mop-up operations after the seizure of Hill 926. One of the reasons the 1st Battalion's final approach to the crest of Hill 926 seemed so uneventful was the fact that, under the cloak of darkness, it had achieved complete surprise. Two zigzag trenches flanked the left and right sides of the crest and were connected to heavy bunkers behind the peak. After brief fire fights required to clear both bunkers, a total of twenty-four Germans surrendered. When interrogated they advised of an impending counterattack, and their leaders' resolve to hold Monte Altuzzo at all costs. The 1st Battalion then prepared to meet the expected enemy assault.

The predicted enemy counterattack struck soon after the 1st Battalion had consolidated its position (see Map 3). Supported by 50-mm mortars and long-range machine gun fire, a platoon or more of Germans advanced to within thirty yards of Company C's position before being driven off. A second counterattack of similar strength was mounted soon afterwards with the same result.

Meanwhile, on the western ridge, the 1st Platoon of Company A was directed by Captain King to occupy the peak. After a minor skirmish required to put an enemy machine gun out of action, the western peak of Monte Altuzzo was taken. The 1st Platoon was now to hold its objective and fire upon the enemy who were still behind the 1st Battalion around the upper slopes of the bowl between the two ridges. Fifteen to twenty Germans were picked off during the day attempting to withdraw on an escape route (path) leading north towards Giogo Pass (see Map 3).

Company K of the 3d Battalion eventually reached the 1st Battalion's position on the crest of Hill 926 and launched an attack north toward Knob 3 but, because of stiff resistance and the prospect of two platoons being cut off, it withdrew. The Germans then mounted their third counterattack, which proved their strongest effort yet to recapture Hill 926. Intense fighting and close combat distinguished this effort, which was finally repulsed by a combination of artillery, mortar, and small arms fire.

The 3d Battalion now took the fight to the routed enemy, secured the last remaining part of Monte Altuzzo, and continued its



advance to the town of Barco, north of the Il Giogo Pass. Monte Altuzzo was finally captured and the Gothic line breached by the morning of 18 September. Objectives on both flanks had been seized by the 337th and 339th Infantry Regiments, and the strongly fortified Futa Pass was completely outflanked. The Po Valley was now within the Allies' grasp.

#### D. Key Events.

It is difficult to identify those turning points in the battle for Monte Altuzzo. The very nature of the battle itself makes it difficult to recognize the specific key turning points in the battle. The battle itself was one where small units, and at times individuals, fought for a yard of terrain, and at times, because of frequent withdrawals, were forced to fight for the same yard two and even three times. It is difficult to determine what was most important in the battle for Monte Altuzzo. Was it the courageous, individual fighting of the soldiers of the 85th Division, or was it the inadequacies of the German defenses that finally led to the breakthrough of the Gothic line at Monte Altuzzo by the 338th Infantry? Whatever the reason, the following discussion includes events that inhibited the success of the 338th Infantry in achieving victory in Monte Altuzzo more quickly than it actually did.

September 12th was the date when the first setback of the 338th Infantry, actually the 85th Division, occurred. The design of the attack was for the 91st Division to initially kick off the attack on 12 September. In fact, while the 34th Division was to

be fighting on the left, the 91st Division was to attack in the center to keep pressure throughout the battle on the enemy. In turn, the 85th Division was to take over the attack once the 91st Division was east of Highway 6524 and, eventually, the 85th Division was to take over and seize Monte Altuzzo and the Il Giogo Pass. Unfortunately, because of the confused concept of operation, and the inability of the 91st Division units to read the map or understand the terrain, the battle was not successful on 12 September. Specifically, the 363d Infantry of the 91st Division, was supposed to attack and seize Monte Altuzzo and capture Monticelli. With respect to the 85th Division and eventually the 338th and Monte Altuzzo, it was to be Company L of the 363d Infantry Battalion that was supposed to lead the attack ahead of the 85th Division in zone. In essence, Company L was to attack Monte Altuzzo along Highway 6524 and eventually the 338th Infantry of the 85th Division was to take over the attack from Company L. It was the 338th Infantry that was supposed to take over the attack at 0630 to continue the advance along the line established by the 91st Division. The key aspect of this particular battle on 12 September was that the concept of operation was so confused. Company L, 363d Infantry, became lost and actually never was able to adequately position itself, consequently artillery fire could not be called on the mountain. So, any kind of fire support that would have prepared the 338th Infantry for eventually attack and taking over the battle from Company L was thwarted. Throughout the day of 12 September and even into 13 September terrible communications and inaccurate or

confused reporting regarding Company L of the 363d Infantry made it virtually impossible for the 338th to continue the attack as planned in the original concept of operation. What resulted from this confusion was that the 91st Division's attack on 12 September and the 85th's follow-up attack on that same date was actually stalled. In fact, the 91st Division and the 85th Division actually committed a total of six battalions against the same terrain features but, were still unable to make significant headway. As indicated above, the attack stalled and a partial withdrawal was necessary. The 85th Division's attempt to take over the attack east of Highway 6524 was unsuccessful because the 91st Division's units were in its sector and their actual location was undetermined. Artillery support could not be used and other offensive actions were inhibited because units of the 91st Division could not be located. Specifically, the reasons that the 338th Infantry could not assume the mission from the 91st Division was that Company L, 363d Infantry could not be located, and it continued to give confusing and inaccurate reports of the battle on the 12th and 13th of September. The final outcome of this battle was that the II Corps initial attack against the Gothic Line was a failure.

What was the cause of the failure? The concept of operations was confusing at best. Obviously there were specific terrain features, specific aspects of the mission that were very clear. Unfortunately, no definitive boundaries or control measures were used that would stop confusion during the battle. In addition, communications, poor reporting, and an inability to accurately

determine unit locations during the battle spelled certain failure for the entire mission. The most important thing in this battle was that command and control actually complicated the operation and eventually caused it to fail. In fact if there is one trend in the entire battle for Monte Altuzzo, and the breakthrough of the Gothic Line, it was that commanders did not function in front with their units and were unable to see the battlefield, which is an essential element for any offensive operation.

The reaction of the enemy to the first event, on 12 September, was obviously one of uncertainty as to the location of the main effort. Predictably, the enemy opposed the attack, but was really not in a posture to launch a counterattack. They were still at this time uncertain that the main effort was Monte Altuzzo. In fact it is doubtful that they understood the confusion that they were facing between the 91st Division and the 85th Division.

With respect to the commanders' reaction to this key event, it was clear that command and control was ineffective at best. In fact, all other actions regarding the unit were positive. The strength of the 338th Infantry was high, the morale and confidence was strong, and there was a certain vigor and determination to be successful in the mission. Unfortunately, the inability to find the battlefield and the inability to properly communicate made it almost impossible for the commander to modify actions on the battlefield. The commander was not up front and the junior commanders could not effectively communicate

with their leaders, which spelled doom for the attack concept. As one studies the battle, it is clear that down at the unit level the failure to communicate between elements inhibited any support that could have been given to either the 91st or 85th Infantry Divisions. Time and again reports were sent back regarding Company L's location that were inaccurate, thus fire support could not be provided. In addition, because of the confusion between the 91st and 85th Infantry Divisions, the first Battalion of the 338th was not able to commit as many units as they would have liked because they felt it would endanger units of the 363d Infantry, specifically Company L. Lt Col Jackson, of the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry was forced to slow down and eventually withdraw his units on the battlefield because he had an impossible mission. His battalion was tasked with moving through a unit which they had not located and whose success against Monte Altuzzo was unknown.

Resources were wasted and men's lives risked because of the inability of the commanders to properly plan the operation. Platoon leaders had to proceed with caution because they had no idea what units were on the battlefield - who was on their left, who was on their right. In fact, throughout the day on 13 September, the 1st Battalion of the 338th Infantry could only commit one company to advance towards Monte Altuzzo because they had no idea where Company L, 363d Infantry was with respect to the attack. At best, commanders at all levels could only boast of one thing - that they had found the enemy. The commanders did not anticipate the complications and confusion that transpired on

the 12th and 13th of September and had no backup plan to control the situation.

The second turning point in the battle for Monte Altuzzo occurred after the confusion of the 12th and 13th was rectified. A new plan was undertaken. The 91st Division was to attack to the west of Highway 3524 while the 85th Division was to attack on the right flank of the same highway. Two regiments of the 95th Division were to attack abreast with the 338th Infantry to make its main effort against Monte Altuzzo. The 3d Regiment of the 95th Division was to remain in reserve. Basically the plan was simple. It called for one battalion of the regiment to conduct the main attack against Monte Altuzzo. This turned out to be the 1st Battalion under Lt Col Jackson. Company A of the 1st Battalion was to attack on the western part of the Monte Altuzzo Ridge, while Company B attacked to the east. Both of the companies were supposed to link up and conduct a coordinated attack against the main Monte Altuzzo Ridge, thus taking the objective. The link-up between the two companies never transpired. In actuality, the two companies kicked off their attack but Company B got disoriented and instead of attacking and linking up with Company A on its left, Company A actually turned out to be on its right. This spelled certain trouble for Company B in that its flank was exposed and it lost a tremendous amount of its force. In fact, Company B moved out without having conducted a proper reconnaissance of the terrain even though they had been warned of the problems of the previous day in reading and understanding the terrain. The company mission of Company A

was very clear. It was to guard the right flank of Company B. Company B, after supposedly making contact with Company A, was to advance up the eastern slope of the Monte Altuzzo Ridge until Hill 926 was occupied. Because of terrible communications, and the fact that Company B kicked off its attack in the wrong direction and became disoriented on the terrain, the whole concept of the operation fell through. What transpired on that day was that Company B instead of attacking up the eastern slope of the Monte Altuzzo Ridge towards Hill 782, actually attacked to the west of the ridge and was subjected to four separate counterattacks by the Germans. This devastated the entire company, thwarted the attack by the 1st Battalion, and for the third consecutive day prevented the 338th Infantry from achieving the objective of Monte Altuzzo.

The entire battle was called the Battle for Peabody Ridge named for Captain Peabody of Company B. The unit fought hard for the little gains that they made. Most of the unit was killed, wounded or captured. Although Company B, 338th Infantry did make significant headway during the first day, it was subject to considerable counterattacks by the enemy and eventually had to withdraw, giving up most of the terrain gained during the course of the day. It did develop the situation and was able to find the main defensive line of the enemy, but the costs were tremendous. Instead of the coordinated attack that Lt Col Jackson had anticipated, two separate and distinct attacks on two different parts of the mountain occurred. Consequently, Company B's flank was continuously exposed to counterattacks by the enemy.

This company of 170 men suffered some 96 casualties (24 killed, 53 wounded and 19 captured or missing in action).

The Battle of Peabody Ridge was an event which turned out to be a failure in capturing Monte Altuzzo. In fact, because the 332nd had the main effort in the 85th Division's attack, it marked the third consecutive day that the II Corps had failed to reach the enemy's main defensive line - the Gothic Line. In terms of results, although the 1st Battalion was able to develop the enemy's position, at least one company of the 1st Battalion became combat ineffective. The causes again included inadequate or non-existent communications, terrible command and control, the inability of units to read the terrain properly, the inability of commanders to use maps and control measures, lack of reconnaissance and a whole host of other basic tactical measures that were not used by either Company A or Company B.

In terms of the reaction of the opposing forces, the enemy was able to take advantage of a major failure on the part of the 1st Battalion. In fact, they predictably attacked again and again, on four separate occasions, the flank of Company B and inflicted heavy casualties. Their counterattacks were able to prevent the seizure of Hill 926 on Monte Altuzzo.

In terms of commander's reaction, Lt Col Jackson unfortunately trusted that his unit commanders had conducted a coordinated assault when in fact they hadn't. Captain Peabody did not read the terrain properly and his mistake caused his company to suffer significant casualties. A lot of young soldiers lost their lives, were killed or captured during the debacle on the third



day of the Battle for Monte Altuzzo. The men fought hard, but the reaction of the commanders was slow, and consequently, the entire concept of the operation failed. The enemy was able to dislodge Company B from the gains that it had made during the course of the day, and this again caused the 1st Battalion, in fact the whole 338th Infantry, to regroup and reassess the whole situation which gave the enemy another day.

The third turning point of the battle occurred on the 15th of September. After having suffered tremendous casualties on the 13th and 14th, Lt Col Jackson, 1st Battalion Commander was determined to make a successful attack against Monte Altuzzo. He had convinced the regimental commander, Colonel William H. Mikkelsen, that the 1st Battalion could take the objective. He had emphasized that he still had Companies A and C; that these two companies were in good condition and that he was prepared to make the attack. Again, the concept of the operation was relatively simple. Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion would attack abreast to seize Monte Altuzzo. Once Hill 926 had been taken, the 3d Battalion of the regiment was to pass through the 1st Battalion and continue the attack to the north. The 1st Battalion was then to drop into reserve.

There was some operations order confusion. The two commanders, Captain King, the Company A commander, and Lieutenant Souder, the Company C commander, had different views concerning the concept of operation. Captain King felt that the attack was to be bold, to move forward with vigor to take the objective, while Lieutenant Souder got the impression that they were to attack

cautiously up the hill. This caused delay in the operation and the speed in which it was conducted. In any event, this again spells out the problem with command and control and the inability of the commanders to effectively understand what was required in the mission.

What transpired as the battle continued in the fight for Hill 926 was representative of the things that had happened in the preceding days. Company A was attacking on the left, while Company C was attacking on the right. They made significant advances during the day and had made up for a lot of lost ground with respect to the turning points of the previous days. After Company A and Company C attacked abreast, and captured Hill 782, they continued the attack north to take Knob 1. At this time, Lieutenant Gresham of Company A continued to attack towards Knob 2, while Lieutenant Corey of Company C was to guard the flank of Company A to the west. Unfortunately the third turning point of the Battle of Monte Altuzzo occurred. Misplaced friendly artillery fire inflicted heavy casualties upon Company C, 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, which literally devastated their morale. They were unable to hold their skirmish line to the left of Company A. Company C, having suffered tremendous casualties from the friendly shell fire, began to withdraw. Their withdrawal in turn caused other units on the line to withdraw quickly, and resulted in panic. This panic withdrawal by Company C and units to the rear of Company C actually caused Company A, which had made significant gains, into a panicked withdrawal which rippled throughout the front line and caused the battalion to

give up its most significant gains to that date. The results are clear. The members of Company C and others in the units of the 1st Battalion were demoralized and, for the third consecutive day, units of the 338th Infantry became their own worst enemy. Although this was a negative event, it was clear that at this point in the battle the 338th was making significant gains and headways in terrain and had begun to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy. The unfortunately misplaced fires demonstrated what happens when leadership is not forward and controlling the battle. The result was a serious setback which delayed the breakthrough of the Gothic Line. If there is a lesson to be learned in this key event, it is that without leadership forward to see the battlefield, chaos can result from a single incident, and a single incident in one unit can have an affect on units throughout the line. When the second platoon of Company C (which had lost no people) began to withdraw from the front, even though they had not seen any action, it caused other units along the line to literally force a withdrawal. The positive leadership which had been shown by Lieutenant Gresham of Company A was turned around because of lack of leadership in Company C. In essence the fourth attack against Monte Altuzzo on the 15th of September brought about the furthest advance against Monte Altuzzo, but was again a setback. The 1st Battalion had found the enemy, but they failed to knock out his fortified positions. The major factor was the friendly antilley fires which inflicted heavy casualties on Company C's 1st platoon and demoralized that unit and others.

As a side note, it was clear that not only did the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry fail to capture the crest of Monte Altuzzo, but other units along the crest belonging to the 85th Division also failed in their attacks against the defenses along the rest of the line.

The reaction of the opposing forces was unclear. The enemy was unaware that friendly artillery fire had stalled and caused a withdrawal of the 1st Battalion. For the first time the enemy started to sustain heavy casualties and they gave ground. They did not conduct a counterattack even in the face of the withdrawal of the 1st Battalion. This is significant in that it demonstrated the first crack in the armor of the enemy. In addition, it was clear after the 15th of September that the enemy was beginning to feel the brunt of the battle and was unable to shift its forces against the main effort attacking Monte Altuzzo.

In essence, even though this day was a setback for the 1st Battalion, it was the beginning of the end for the enemy and would soon spell success for the 338th Infantry. On September 16th, the 338th Infantry was able to attack to the crest of Monte Altuzzo and achieve its objective. This is not a significant event, but the plan and the success on the 16th of September was significant. The Assistant Division Commander, General Gendow, decided that he wanted to stick with the 338th in achieving success and he continued to place the 1st Battalion as the main effort. This indicated quite a bit of confidence in Lt Col Jackson. In fact, it was on the 16th and 17th of September 1944

that the actual capture of Monte Altuzzo occurred. This was significant, but far more significant than this event was what transpired after the initial capture of the crest of Monte Altuzzo. By the end of the day on the 17th of September, the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, was on its objective. They had captured the crest of Monte Altuzzo. The 3d Battalion, as part of the concept of operations, was deployed behind the 1st Battalion, but was still subject to enemy fire from those German units which had been bypassed at the top of the Altuzzo Bowl in the west and also in the east along Monte Alrussco. In the final analysis, Lt Col Jackson's 1st Battalion with approximately 100 men had seized the Fifth Army's objective and had made the first penetration of the Gothic Line.

The enemy reaction was clear. By the end of the 17th of September, Lt Col Jackson reported to the regimental commander that the enemy was withdrawing and that his troops had gone successfully against the resistance and were occupying the German positions.

The satisfaction of success was to give way to German counterattacks which occurred late on 17 September 1944. This once again spells the key aspect in the battle for Monte Altuzzo. At this point, it must be recognized that the 1st Battalion had fought gamely to achieve positions on the crest of Monte Altuzzo, but they were then confronted by the enemy. German bunkers were placing effective fire on not only Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion but also the 3d Battalion, which was arrayed behind the 1st Battalion's positions. In fact, if anything characterizes

the breakthrough at Monte Altuzzo, it is the valiant and courageous way that individual soldiers of the 1st Battalion cleared the bunkers on the crest of Monte Altuzzo and withstood counterattacks as they did so. In fact, it was members of Company A and C, in clearing bunkers to the west and eastern ridge of Monte Altuzzo that found out that counterattacks would be forthcoming by German units. They found out information concerning the counterattacks from interrogating Germans who had surrendered as soldiers of the 1st Battalion cleared bunkers.

The first counterattacks were made south of Knob 3 on Hill 926. Not only were Germans counterattacking friendly flanks, but the 1st Battalion units, particularly those of Company C, were receiving effective enemy fire in the rear from German units bypassed during the seizure of Monte Altuzzo. In any event, the first counterattack by the enemy was thwarted by Company C and it was subsequent to this counterattack that individual soldiers began to courageously clear the trenches and zig-zag bunkers of the enemy. In fact, as one reads the battle the NCO's and the individual soldiers took a large part of clearing enemy bunkers on the western peak of Monte Altuzzo. By the middle of the morning on 17 September the first platoon of Company A had taken its objective completely, withstanding only one minor skirmish from the enemy.

In addition to individual initiative on the part of soldiers of the 1st Battalion, it was clear that the mortar and artillery fires of the 338th Infantry were also effective against the enemy. As part of the concept of the operation the 3d Battalion,

annexed behind the 1st Battalion, was supposed to pass through the 1st Battalion and continue the attack past Hill 926 and on to Knob 3. Unfortunately, the 3d Battalion, under the command of Major Kelley, was very slow in kicking off its attack. In fact, they were being pinned down on the flanks by German machine gun fire and it was only after the prodding of General Genow and Colonel Mikkelsen that the 3d Battalion began to make any movement at all towards Knob 3. By this time, Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion had already put down a second aggressive counterattack and had begun to clear more trenches and take significant enemy prisoners.

After Major Kelley had determined that the enemy was withdrawing in the 339th Infantry's sector on their right flank, he decided to move. He directed mortar fire against the enemy as units from the 3d Battalion moved against Knob 3. Company K of the 3d Battalion was subjected to a rather severe counterattack and was forced to withdraw soon after initiating its kickoff against Knob 3. With the assistance of Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion, and some fairly accurate fire support from mortars and artillery, the 338th Infantry was able to fight back this final counterattack by German forces. In actuality it was the artillery, mortars, and small arms fires from the 1st Battalion that caused the Germans to abandon their third and final counterattack.

By the 18th of September, the 3d Battalion was poised for a mop-up operation because the enemy had either withdrawn, been killed, or captured by units of the 1st Battalion. If any event

could be said to be a turning point it would be the individual determination of the soldier of the 1st Battalion that turned the battle. It must also be stated that the lack of discipline and training of the German soldiers, and the nature and the quickness of the enemy to surrender, eventually made the breakthrough of Monte Altuzzo possible.

During the course of the battle command and control was terrible and the commanders did not function where they could see the battlefield. A combination of the inadequacies of the enemy and the determination of individual soldiers of the 1st Battalion enabled the breakthrough of the Gothic Line to be realized. It took five days to take Monte Altuzzo and the 338th Infantry suffered a total 290 casualties with 252 of those casualties in the 1st Battalion. It can be said without hesitation that the 338th Infantry, primarily the 1st Battalion, was responsible for the success of the II Corps in breaking through the Gothic Line.

#### E. Outcome

The attack on Monte Altuzzo was a clear tactical victory for the U.S. Army. The 338th Infantry seized its objective, Monte Altuzzo. This facilitated the seizure of the Corps objective, II Glogo Pass, by securing a flank of the Pass. Though this was the first breach of the Gothic Line in the II Corps area, it was followed by the 339th Infantry securing Monte Vennuca by noon of 17 September and the 337th Infantry securing Monte Photone during the afternoon of 17 September.

The high ground on the west side of Glogo Pass, Monticelli, was



secured by the 91st Division on 18 September. These actions enabled II Corps to turn the break-through into an exploitation and bypass the strongly fortified Futa Pass.<sup>13</sup>

The principle reason for the successful achievement of the objective was supporting fires; artillery, tanks, tank destroyers, chemical mortars and tactical air force support.

The 85th Division had eleven artillery battalions and a chemical battalion (4.2" mortar) in support. Four artillery battalions and the chemical battalion were under division control and the remaining seven artillery battalions were under II Corps Artillery control. The artillery and mortar fired almost continually,<sup>14</sup> with the goals of neutralizing the defensive positions and harassing and interdicting supply and reinforcement. The fires against the positions were very effective as shown by the large number of enemy dead found on the upper slopes of Monte Altuzzo. According to the II Corps Report of Operations, fires directed against supply and reinforcement were also effective:

PWs stated that their forward units had been without food and water for several days, that their ammunition was running low due to our disruption of their supply lines and communications by artillery and air. The captured Paratroopers displayed their customary arrogance despite these hardships, but PWs of other units evidenced very low morale, especially men from those formations which had been decimated by artillery and air attacks on their way to the line.<sup>15</sup>

The 752nd Tank Division (Medium) and the 905th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled) were attached to the 85th Division. These units were used to attack pillboxes, targets of opportunity

and to provide long range harassing fire in addition to the artillery and mortars. Tankers claimed to have knocked out seven bunkers alone on 17 September, but that is probably exaggerated. The nature of the bunkers and the ranges involved make that unlikely, but they did provide an additional means of putting "steel on the target," and thus reduced enemy effectiveness and inflicted casualties.

Tactical air support, as mentioned before, contributed significantly to the attack on the bunker line and the interdiction of supply and reinforcement. On 13 and 14 September, the 239th and 244th Royal Air Force (RAF) flew missions against enemy artillery, vehicles, supply/ammo depots, and troop concentrations. The results were good.<sup>16</sup> On 15 September the weather precluded use of air support, but on 16 September the 239th Wing and 7th SAAF Wing were again able to support the battle. The 338th Infantry had been told that close air support would be available on 16 September from 1130 to 1330 and from 1430 to 1830.

The 338th Infantry submitted mission requests, but only limited strafing and the dropping of four bombs materialized. The 239th Wing and 7th SAAF Wing did bomb enemy bivouac and defended areas north of the pass on 16 September.<sup>17</sup> The air support was not responsive to the ground commander, but operating independently (primarily in an interdiction role), contributed significantly to the eventual achievement of the objective.

The Germans lost the battle as much as the U.S. won the battle. The lack of artillery and air support, lack of sufficient

reserves, and the use of ineffective grenades all significantly affected the outcome of the battle. These deficiencies, in addition to the inability to resupply (already discussed) made it extremely difficult for the Germans to conduct an effective defense, even though the terrain greatly favored the defense.

The artillery defense of the Gothic Line was shown by photographs to consist of many dug-in emplacements, well scattered and in small groups, behind the defensive ridge... Several steel-beamed and reinforced concrete emplacements in more forward areas....were later identified as containing field pieces or AT weapons. Such positions were active until adjustment of 240mm resulted in one or more direct hits. The many camouflaged dugouts made it difficult to determine which ones contained guns.

In addition to prepared positions for artillery pieces, there were alternate positions, notably for heavy caliber, which were not dug in. At such positions, there were elaborate protective dugouts for personnel which in some instances were cut into solid rock.

There was no period when the enemy artillery disposition was stable.... Photographic locations of occupied positions were given to Air OPs for precision adjustment of counterbattery fire. The procedure of shooting from vertical photographs again proved extremely effective. Results observed were excellent (hits in pits, fires, and explosives) and this seemed to discourage the enemy's digging of new positions. Since in the majority of instances adjusted coordinates failed to disclose new positions to photographic interpreters, it became increasingly evident that the enemy was relying upon frequent movement into positions cleverly camouflaged under heavy foliage rather than upon more stabilized, dug-in positions. In these tactics the enemy was favored by deeply cut ravines and high hills with steep reverse slopes. Detection of positions in such terrain by artillery cubs was generally not productive since it was necessary for them to fly at a very high altitude.<sup>18</sup>

With one outstanding exception - the failure of the enemy to employ long range artillery for counterbattery fire - the tactics and disposition of the enemy artillery behind this line showed no change from that which had been observed in the past. Even though our Corps Arty positions were confined to the narrow roads leading north to the SIEVE RIVER VALLEY (7791 to 9087), in which the divisional

elements were scattered, the counterbattery fire received was negligible - this despite the fact that the enemy could see the smoke of many of our weapons from his OPs on the high ground. The enemy had - as possible counterbattery weapons - one 210mm gun, possibly 4 210mm howitzers, at least 7 170mm guns, and a battery of 105mm guns. These were used most frequently on front line elements and forward road nets. Harassing of movement in the rear areas was carried out sporadically and with small number of rounds. The surprising and unprecedented lack of counterbattery fire on our guns cannot be attributed to a shortage of ammunition, and certainly not to poor visibility. Interrogation of a PW - forward observer of a 170mm battery - produced a likely explanation of the enemy's firing tactics. PW stated that it was useless for them to fire against the vastly superior number of Allied artillery pieces since such fire always drew very heavy retaliatory fire at a time when the Germans could not afford to lose any artillery and neutralization or destruction of Allied artillery secured no appreciable effect. Under such conditions, the PW stated, more damage could be done by directing artillery fire into the more forward lines and installations."<sup>19</sup>

From 11 September until 22 September, the 85th Division reported less than four-hundred-fifty rounds per day even fired at them.

The lack of effective artillery fire allowed the 338th Infantry to move up the open ridge lines over several days and nights without being attrited by indirect fire. If the Germans had been able to place effective indirect fire on the attacking units, the attack may have been slowed or even stopped due to unacceptable casualties.

The Germans also lacked aircraft to provide close air support and to fly interdiction missions against U.S. supply and reinforcements. During the month of September 1944, the 71st Anti-aircraft Artillery Brigade, which was supporting II Corps, fired no AAA engagements. General Kesselring stated that the lack of air support was a prime reason for the inability to defend the Gothic Line.<sup>20</sup>

The Germans had few replacements and reserves. The effects of the U.S. artillery were being felt. The defenders were being attrited. Small units were being committed piecemeal as replacements became available. The quality of the replacements was a problem. A Lithuanian Labor Battalion was committed. They had little motivation to fight and readily surrendered. The German replacements were poorly trained and many had never even fired a round of ball ammunition. As the replacements came forward many were killed or wounded by U.S. harassing fires. Thus, those that arrived already were demoralized.

The piecemeal commitment of the reserves would initially appear to be a violation of the principle of war of mass. The many small local German counterattacks were unsuccessful due to insufficient soldiers in the attack. But when the quality of the replacements is considered, along with the firepower of the U.S., the Germans probably could not have successfully massed to counterattack and regain lost terrain.

A problem at the tactical level was the German concussion grenade. Several of the individual engagements between small units and men were resolved in favor of the U.S. due to the ineffective concussion grenade. In several instances, well placed grenades did not even wound individuals close by.

Hitler was making the strategic decisions in the theater. According to General Kesselring, Hitler couldn't decide on where or when to fight in Italy and thus proper preparations or actions were not taken that could have resulted in success.<sup>21</sup> When

the battle of the Gothic Line was to take place, Hitler gave instructions to hold at all costs. General Kesselring however felt that "continuance of the resistance south of the Po at a time when the overall situation, the local tactical situation, the condition of the troops engaged there, the supply situation and the existence of prepared positions in depth definitely called for the employment of delaying tactics was a crucial mistake."<sup>22</sup> Thus the Germans acted within the intent of the commander, however, the intent/mission was incorrect for the situation and resulted in failure.

The mission of the U.S. commander was achieved but not as intended. Lt. General Mark Clark, commander of Fifth Army, wanted to rapidly breach the Gothic Line and exploit into the Po Valley. His intent, however, was not properly conveyed in the II Corps and 85th Division orders. General Clark visited the 1st and 2d Battalion commanders of the 338th Infantry on 12 September and stated "you had better get on your hiking shoes. I'm going to throw you a long forward pass into the Po Valley, and I want you to go get it."<sup>23</sup> This conveys nothing to a battalion commander making an attack to seize an objective a few kilometers to the front. The same unit will not conduct the attack and the breakthrough. The words are notable but useless. The guidance would have been more effective if he had emphasized the importance of quickly accomplishing the battalions' objectives. The end result was a piecemeal attack with insufficient planning and without proper coordination between the infantry, artillery and air support.

Finally General Clark became impatient with II Corps' failure to seize the pass and directed that the 85th Division commit the 337th Infantry to envelope the pass by seizing Monte Rotone. Major General Geoffrey Keys, II Corps commander, did order the attack, but kept the main attack up Highway 6524.<sup>24</sup> This was not the emphasis of the 338th Infantry however. During the entire battle the emphasis was on Monte Altuzzo and not on the highway. Thus, as one goes down the chain of command, one finds repeatedly that subordinates did not follow the higher commander's intent.

Little is known of the evacuation and treatment of German casualties, but it can be assumed that they were effectively evacuated as only dead were found as the Americans advanced. The procedures used by the Americans are known. In general, each infantry platoon had an aid man to provide immediate treatment. The second level of treatment was provided at the battalion aid station. During the battle, ambulatory wounded evacuated themselves to the aid station. Soldiers unable to accomplish this were treated in place and awaited litter bearers to be sent from the aid station. In several instances, wounded soldiers were left on the battlefield as their units withdrew and had to await the litter bearers to evacuate them. The mental anguish that resulted from this procedure is best shown by the actions of Private James S. Donnis from Company C, 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry. He was wounded in the legs and stomach, but when told he was to be left behind to await litter bearers as his platoon withdrew, he ran all the way to the company area and then

collapsed.

U. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION:

A. Immediate Significance: The successful attack of the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry Regiment, in seizing the heights of Monte Altuzzo proved to be the undoing of the much vaunted Gothic Line. The 1st Battalion's success allowed the regiment to secure its objective on Monte Altuzzo and along Highway 6524. As German forces began their withdrawal, the regiment to the right (the 339th) and the left (the 363rd, 91st Division) were in turn successful. By the close of 17 September the 85th Division's success brought about a general collapse of enemy resistance all along its front, leaving the 85th Division in possession of the high ground along the great divide between the Sieve and Santerno Valley. This front extended nearly four miles from Monte Altuzzo to beyond Monte Pratone.

It remained for the 91st Division to secure Monte Monticelli on 18 September to finish clearing Highway 6524. This action, along with the 81st Division's success, gave II Corps control of a seven mile stretch of the Gothic Line on either side of Il Giogo Pass. It forced the Germans to extricate what they could of their defeated and broken forces by withdrawing them north of the Santerno River.

Withdrawing German forces were vigorously pursued by II Corps,



which swept north into the Santerno Valley. This advance rendered the main German defenses at the Futa Pass untenable and completed the undermining of the entire Gothic Line.

B. Long Term: Although the success of II Corps in breaching the Gothic Line at Monte Altuzzo set the stage for the subsequent advance into the Po Valley by 5th US Army and the rest of 15th Army Group (8th British Army); both Allied Armies were by then exhausted. The enemy, terrain, and worsening winter weather had depleted manpower and resources. By mid-January 1945 the Allied drive had halted for the winter, having made only slight inroads into the strategically important communications zone of the Po Valley.

C. Lessons Learned:

1. Events with major tactical or strategic consequence often depend on the actions of very few men. The attack on Monte Altuzzo was executed by one infantry battalion utilizing two companies in the assault with a force never numbering more than 350 men at any one time. This force conducted the principal attack for the 262,000 man 5th US Army. Its success resulted from individual, squad, and platoon actions which were often conducted in complete confusion and pressed home only due to the courageous and determined action of individuals and small unit leaders. Such was the case when three men from the 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 338 Infantry seized Knob 2 thus

allowing the 3rd Platoon to reach the summit of hill 926. These three men Sergeant Strosnider and Privates Schwanthe and Lighter, worked their way up to Knob 2 and surprised the defenders. Using hand grenades, rifle fire, and by calling for the Germans to surrender, these three soldiers seized the three prepared positions on Knob 2. They killed and wounded several Germans, captured 11, and drove the rest of the defenders from the main line of resistance. This three man action was typical of the close fighting throughout the assault on Monte Altuzzo. The ultimate success of the ten Division strong 5th Army was built on many such actions.

2. Conducting a passage of lines when in contact should be avoided if at all possible. The II Corps plan which called for the 85th Division to pass through the 91st Division at 0600 on the morning of 13 September resulted in considerable confusion, and prevented the 85th Division from conducting a coordinated attack on the German main line of resistance. Col Mieleelsen, commander of the 338th Infantry Regiment, and his battalion commander were unable to ascertain the location or status of Company L, 363d Infantry, 91st Division prior to and even during their initial attack on Monte Altuzzo. This lack of knowledge concerning Company L caused confusion which hampered friendly fire support and prevented Col Mieleelsen and Ltc Jackson, 1st Battalion Commander, from making sense of the situation. This confusion, which cost the 338th Infantry a day to resolve, could have been avoided. If the 85th Division had been allowed to pass

through the 91st Division before heavy contact was made with the enemy, much better control over the initial stages of the attack would have been possible.

3. Adequate ground reconnaissance is critical. When the Commander of the 338 Infantry Regiment issued his attack order to his battalion commanders, the officers of the regiment had known for several days that they could be conducting the division's main attack against Monte Altuzzo. They had conducted a thorough map study of the area but none had seen the ground despite the fact that the division had been in reserve. Both Ltc Jackson of the 1st Battalion and Ltc Cole of the 2nd Battalion went forward in the late afternoon of 12 September to reconnoiter and select assembly areas. The lateness of their start combined with the confusion in the status of the 3rd Battalion, 363 Infantry, 91st Division resulted in both selecting assembly areas for their units without having had an opportunity to determine their lines of departure for the 0600 attack the next morning. Also they departed without selecting routes forward, without knowing the enemy situation to their front, and without knowing the location, strength, or intentions of the friendly elements of the 363rd Infantry to their front. This confusion was reflected in the disjointed attack of the regiment the next morning. Adequate prior reconnaissance would have avoided many of these problems and would have greatly simplified the already complicated maneuver of passing one unit through another while in contact with the enemy.

4. Indirect fire is very important in sealing of the battle area and preventing enemy reinforcements and resupply. Much of the antillery firing in support of the assault on Monte Altuzzo was not capable of harming the enemy troops sheltered in the extensive and well prepared positions on the montesin. This antillery support was invaluable, however, in preventing enemy movement in and around those positions; and in preventing reinforcements and resupply, particularly ammunition for the hard pressed 12th Parachute Regiment. For example, the 12th Parachute suffered throughout the battle from a shortage of fragmentation grenades. Many US troops escaped serious injury due to the relative ineffectiveness of the concussion grenades used by the Germans. Toward the end of the fighting other ammunition shortages began to influence the action. As was the case with resupply, indirect fires significantly effected the enemy's ability to reinforce his positions. As early as the 14th of September a Lithuanian labor battalion was ordered forward to replenish the ranks of the 12th Parachute Regiment. As a direct result of US supporting antillery fire the bulk of this battalion did not arrive until the night of 16-17 September. By then it had taken such a pounding that its individual members were ineffective.

## FOOTNOTES

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4. Cole, The Attack on the Gothic Line, p. 6.
5. Cole, The Attack on the Gothic Line, p. 6.
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7. Forsythe, Breaking the Gothic Line, p. 54.
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11. Mathews, Three Battles: Annaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt, p. 103-107.
12. Mathews, Three Battles: Annaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt, p. 107-110.
13. Mathews, Three Battles: Annaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt, p. 239.
14. Annex 5 (Artillery) To the II Corps Report of Operations 1-30 Sept., p. 4.
15. II Corps Report of Operations 1-30 Sept., p.2
16. Mathews, Three Battles: Annaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt, p. 128.
17. Mathews, Three Battles: Annaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt, p. 207.
18. Annex 5 (Artillery) to the II Corps Report of Operations 1-30 Sept., p.3.
19. Annex 5 (Artillery) to the II Corps Report of Operations 1-30 Sept., p.4.
20. Annex 5 (Antiaircraft) to the II Corps Report of Operations 1-30 Sept., p.2.
21. Albert Kesselring, General Field Marshall, Concluding Remarks on the Mediterranean Campaign, Translated by W. Meyer, (Historical Division European Command, 1948), p.24.
22. Kesselring, Concluding Remarks on the Mediterranean Campaign, p. 39.
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ANNEX A  
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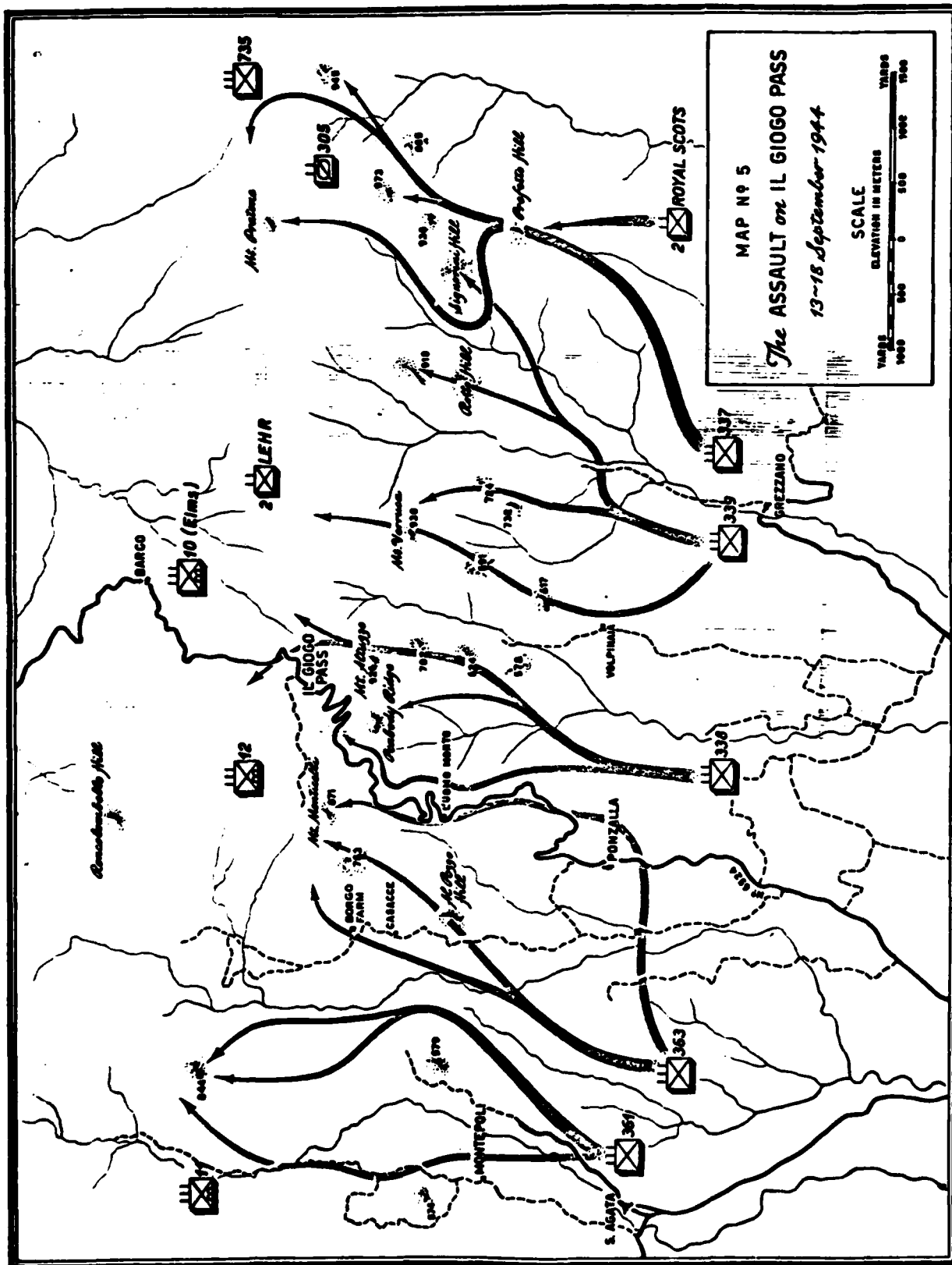
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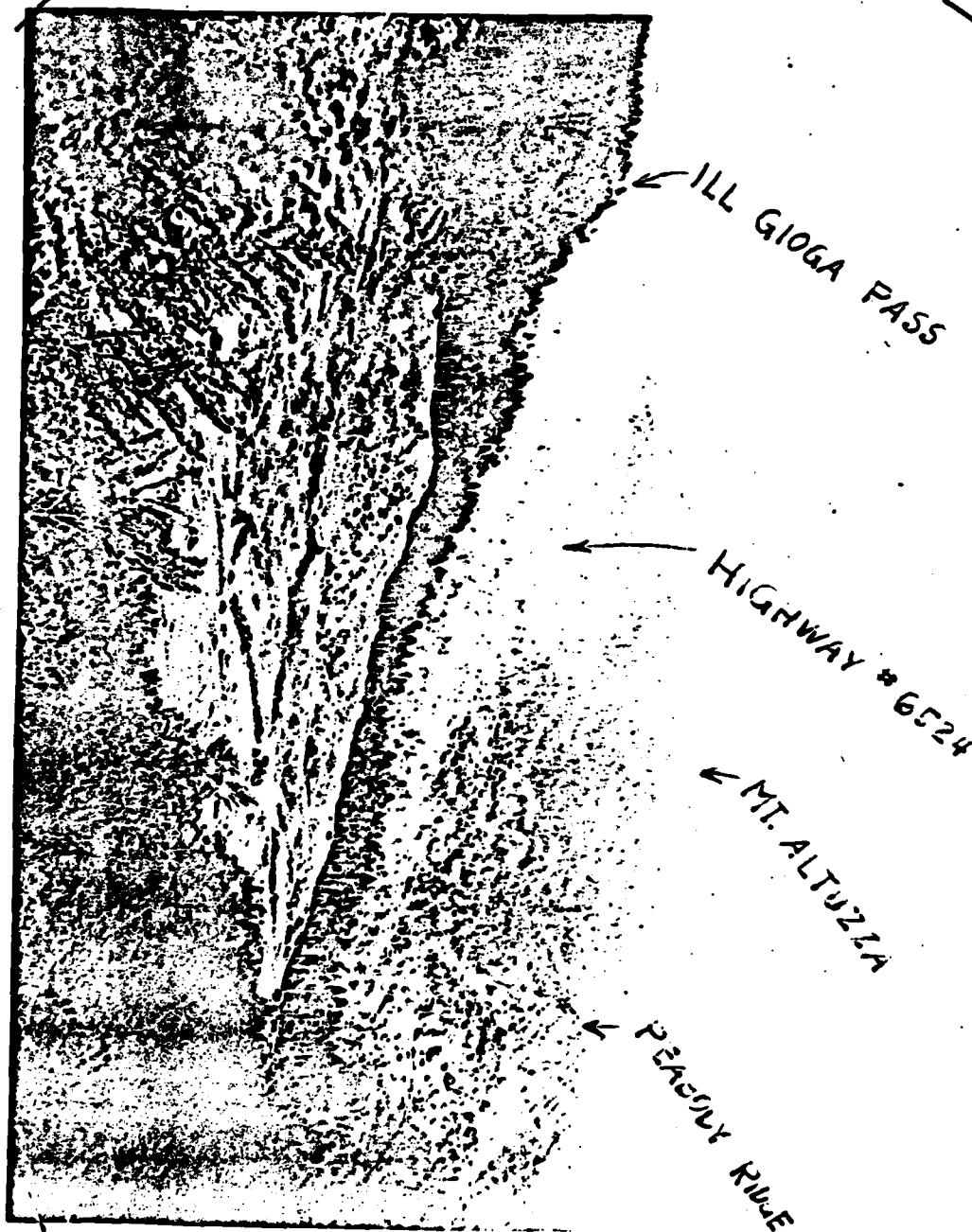
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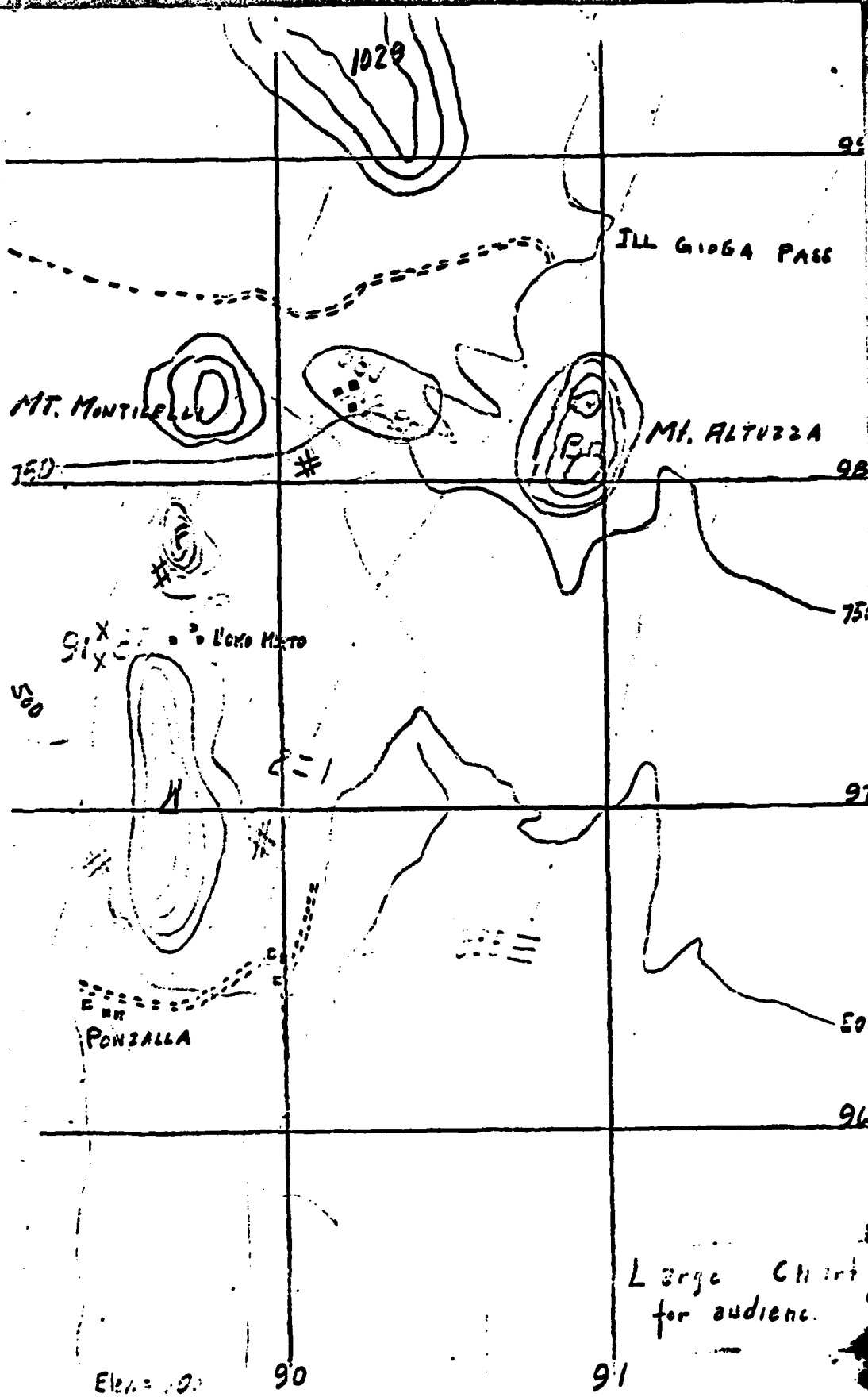
ANNEX B  
MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS







View of Mount Altuzza and Ill Gioiga Pass taken from between Mount Monticelli and Hill 1029 looking in an easterly direction



APPENDIX 2 TO ANNEX B (MONTE ALTUZZO) 338TH  
OBJECTIVES AS DRAWN BY LT COL COLE IN 1947



*German positions were designed to take full advantage of the rugged terrain*



*Troops of the 338th Infantry climbing a narrow trail up Mount Verruca*

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