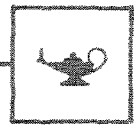
Leavenworth Papers

No. 11



Rangers: Selected Combat Operations in World War II

by Dr. Michael J. King

Combat Studies Institute
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900

June 1985

FOREWORD

Operation Urgent Fury, conducted in October 1983, focused international attention on the U.S. Army Rangers. This tough, highly mobile force performed an airborne-airland assault into Grenada on short notice and quickly seized objectives while sustaining only limited casualties. The performance of the Rangers in Grenada is indicative of the role that skilled forces can play in a nation's military strategy and exemplifies the ideal use of highly trained "elite" forces.

The U.S. Army Ranger has a proud heritage dating from Rogers' Rangers to the present, but at no time was the Rangers' legacy more evident than during the heyday of World War II. Conceived under the guidance of then Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, the Rangers were selectively recruited and trained for operations such as raids, infiltrations, and specialized combat. In reality, their utilization was somewhat more varied, thus providing one of the themes for this *Leavenworth Paper*.

The five Ranger operations recounted in this paper depict the Rangers in a variety of combat roles. Each operation provided unique challenges to the Ranger Force, and each produced different results. Created for one purpose, often used and misused for others, the Ranger organization fluctuated throughout the war. The longer the Ranger Force remained in a theater of operations, the heavier it became and the more likely it was to be employed in a conventional role. The Ranger leadership constantly struggled with organizational problems in its attempts to balance the need for additional firepower and combat power with the need to retain its identity as a light, mobile, flexible strike force.

The evolutional process depicted in this paper illustrates the difficulties encountered by military units that are given inappropriate missions for their force capability. When the Rangers were utilized in their designed roles in appropriate missions and within organizational constraints, they achieved outstanding successes. When these organizational constraints were ignored and Rangers were used in a conventional role, disaster resulted as at Cisterna when the Rangers were unable to counter the German armor threat.

In *Rangers: Selected Combat Operations in World War II,* Dr. Michael J. King presents a multi-faceted work that blends battle narrative, operational lessons, and doctrinal considerations into a paper that provides a useful historical perspective into Ranger operations. The relevance of these historical case studies to current and future elite force operations is evident. Force designers, doctrine writers, and commanders will greatly profit from the valuable information contained in this *Leavenworth Paper.* One needs only to study these lessons and apply them.

ROBERT W. RISCASSI
Lieutenant General, USA
Commandant

Director
COL Louis D. F. Frasché

Professor of Combined Arms Warfare
Dr. Roger J. Spiller

John F. Morrison Professor of Military History
Dr. Bruce W. Menning

Curriculum Supervisor
LTC Michael T. Chase

Research Committee
LTC Gary L. Bounds, Chief
LTC Gary H. Wade
LTC Charles E. Heller
MAJ(P) Robert D. Ramsey III
MAJ Scott R. McMichael
MAJ Andrew N. Morris
CPT Thomas P. Odom
Dr. Robert H. Berlin
Dr. Gary J. Bjorge
Dr. George W. Gawrych
Dr. Thomas M. Huber
Dr. Samuel J. Lewis
Dr. William G. Robertson

Teaching Committee
LTC John A. Hixson, Chief
LTC David R. Durr
LTC Kenneth R. Pierce
LTC Roy R. Stephenson
LTC George L. Tupa
MAJ Roger Cirillo
MAJ Gary B. Griffin
MAJ Claude R. Sasso
SFC Robert R. Cordell
Dr. Robert F. Baumann
Dr. Jerold E. Brown
Dr. Christopher R. Gabel
Dr. Joseph T. Glatthaar

Military History Education Committee
LTC Michael E. Hall, Chief
MAJ Frederick A. Eiserman
MAJ George J. Mordica II
MAJ Don M. Prewitt, ARNG
Dr. Jack J. Gifford

Historical Services Committee
Dr. Lawrence A. Yates, Chief
Elizabeth R. Snoke, Librarian
Marilyn A. Edwards, Editor
Carolyn M. Brendsel, Editor
Donald L. Gilmore, Editor

Staff
MSG Danny G. Carlson
SSG Patricia E. Clowers
Martha A. Van Sandt
Carolyn D. Conway
Clara L. Rhoades
Sharon E. Torres

Leavenworth Papers are published by the Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027—6900. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Department of Defense or any element thereof. *Leavenworth Papers* are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

Leavenworth Papers US ISSN 0195 3451

Leavenworth Papers

No. 11



Rangers: Selected Combat Operations in World War II

by Dr. Michael J. King

Combat Studies Institute
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900

June 1985

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

King, Michael J. (Michael Julius) 1941—
Rangers: selected combat operations in World War II.

(Leavenworth papers; no. 11)
"June 1985."
Bibliography: p.
1. World War, 1939—1945—Commando operations—United States. 2. World War, 1939—1945—Regimental histories—United States. 3. World War, 1939—1945—Campaigns. I. Title. II. Series.
D794.5.K56 1985 940.54'12'73 85-15691

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402

Contents

Illustrations v
Introduction 1

Chapter
1. Origin of the Rangers 5
2. Djebel el Ank 13
3. Porto Empedocle 23
4. Cisterna 29
5. Zerf 43
6. Cabanatuan 55
7. Conclusion 73

Notes 77
Bibliography 85

Illustrations

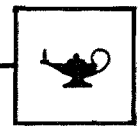
Maps

1. Djebel el Ank Operation, March 1943 18
2. Porto Empedocle Operation: Route Followed by 3d Ranger Battalion, July 1943 25
3. Cisterna Operation, January 1944 36
4. Zerf Operation, February 1945 49
5. Cabanatuan Operation: Routes to and from the Objective, January 1945 59
6. Cabanatuan Operation: Actions at the Objective, January 1945 67

Figures

1. Organization of the 1st Ranger Battalion at Carrickfergus, June 1942 9
2. Final Organization of Ranger Force, 1943 32

Introduction



This *Leavenworth Paper* is a critical reconstruction of World War II Ranger operations conducted at or near Djebel el Ank, Tunisia; Porto Empedocle, Sicily; Cisterna, Italy; Zerf, Germany; and Cabanatuan in the Philippines. It is not intended to be a comprehensive account of World War II Ranger operations, for such a study would have to include numerous minor actions that are too poorly documented to be studied to advantage. It is, however, representative for it examines several types of operations conducted against the troops of three enemy nations in a variety of physical and tactical environments. As such, it draws a wide range of lessons useful to combat leaders who may have to conduct such operations or be on guard against them in the future. Some of the most central lessons are summarized here to prepare the readers for the narratives that follow.

Many factors determined the outcomes of the operations featured in this *Leavenworth Paper,* and of these there are four that are important enough to merit special emphasis. These are surprise, the quality of opposing forces, the success of friendly forces with which the Rangers were cooperating, and popular support.

Of the four factors, surprise was paramount. The Rangers won one-sided victories at Djebel el Ank, Porto Empedocle, and Cabanatuan by taking unalert enemies by surprise. They failed to surprise their enemy at Cisterna and were defeated.

Whether the Rangers gained surprise or not was strongly influenced by the quality of opposing forces. This quality was not so much the sum of the abilities of individual Rangers measured against the sum of enemy skills as it was the relative cohesion and morale of the forces engaged. Individual soldiers in a unit may be of superb quality, but if they lack organizational and moral cohesion, they will not fight to the best of their abilities. Significantly, the Ranger victories at Djebel el Ank, Porto Empedocle, and Cabanatuan were won over enemies who had lost most of their tactical integrity.

When the Rangers lost cohesion, they too became less effective. The Rangers' loss of cohesion was less tactical than moral, however, and came about through the assignment of new men as replacements for recent

casualties. These new men had not been with the Rangers when they were first activated, had not gone through training with the original Rangers, and were not as thoroughly integrated into the Rangers as those men who had been with them from the beginning. It is, therefore, not surprising that both the 5th Ranger Battalion's victory at Zerf, which was the costliest successful Ranger operation addressed in this paper, and the 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions' defeat at Cisterna involved Ranger units that had recently suffered heavy losses of seasoned troops. That those losses were incurred in conventional infantry operations is a fact of signal importance and one to which we shall return.

No less important than the Rangers' abilities and actions is the fact that none of the five operations were conducted in a tactical vacuum, and the Rangers' ultimate success depended upon the success of others. This was most clear at Djebel el Ank, Cisterna, and Zerf. In each of these operations, the Rangers infiltrated enemy lines in advance and in support of a main attack, and their success depended upon the main attack linking up with them. The main attacks succeeded at Djebel el Ank and Zerf, operations in which the Rangers were successful. The main attack failed at Cisterna, and the Rangers were surrounded and destroyed as a fighting force.

A final factor, popular support, may be crucial when an operation is conducted in a populated area. While the approach of a conventional battlefront may lead local civilians to flee, thus permitting operations to be conducted in a population vacuum, such is unlikely to be the case in an operation conducted deep behind enemy lines or in a low-intensity conflict where front lines do not exist. The action at Cabanatuan, in which Rangers liberated American and Allied prisoners from a Japanese POW compound in a populated area behind enemy lines, was one such case. Friendly Filipinos conducted reconnaissance, surveillance, and security missions in support of the Rangers; chose the routes to and from the objective; fought the Japanese in the objective area; provided transportation to friendly lines for the sick and wounded; and provided food and water for all. Had the local population been unfriendly toward the Americans, the mission would not have been feasible.

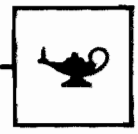
Although this *Leavenworth Paper* is mainly concerned with Ranger combat operations, it also traces the evolution of an elite fighting unit. The operations at Djebel el Ank, Porto Empedocle, and Cisterna were conducted by one or more battalions of William O. Darby's Ranger Force. Djebel el Ank was one of their earliest battles; they took Porto Empedocle about halfway through their career; and Cisterna was their final battle.

A complex theme, part of which was beyond Darby's control and part of which was encouraged by him, runs through the history of his Rangers. Originally intended to conduct amphibious landings and commando-style operations, the Rangers were nonetheless used as conventional infantry when the necessity or convenience of higher headquarters so dictated. Darby, deciding to give his lightly armed Rangers the firepower needed to

survive in the conventional combat they seemingly could not avoid, virtually transformed them into a light combined arms team. Ironically, it became increasingly likely that, as the Rangers grew to resemble a conventional unit, they would be used as such. With that use came the heavier casualties that, when replaced, diluted the effectiveness of the remaining Rangers and, in turn, weakened the cohesion and effectiveness of Ranger Force. While the histories of the 5th and 6th Ranger Battalions are not those of Darby's Rangers, the lessons drawn from their use and misuse are similar.

Origin of the Rangers

1



The Rangers of World War II had their genesis in the spring of 1942 when Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, sent Colonel Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., to London to arrange for American troops to take part in British commando raids against German-occupied Europe. The Americans selected to participate in the raids were to be drawn from a broad cross section of units and then returned to those same units after the raids, thus ensuring that, when American forces landed in Europe, they would have some combat-experienced men.[1]

The commandos had been organized to fit the limitations and characteristics of British landing craft and naval organization. For example, a commando platoon was equal to the number of men who could fit aboard an assault landing craft (ALC); a commando troop could fit aboard two ALCs; and a battalion-size unit called a *commando* could be carried by a flotilla.[2] Truscott reasoned that, because the American forces would be under British control and using British landing craft, they should be organized like the commandos. On 26 May, the day on which Truscott was promoted to brigadier general, he proposed to Marshall that an American unit be organized along commando lines on a provisional basis pending the War Department's completion of a table of organization and equipment (TOE). Authorization from the War Department arrived by cable two days later.[3]

Truscott drafted a letter of instructions directing Major General Russell P. Hartle, commanding general of United States Army Northern Ireland Forces (USANIF) and V Army Corps (Reinforced), to organize the new unit as soon as possible. This letter became the basis of a subject letter titled "Commando Organization," which was written by Major General James E. Chaney, commanding general of United States Army Forces British Isles (USAFBI), on 1 June and sent to Hartle. The letter both directed and gave guidance for the organization of an American "commando unit for training and demonstration purposes," which was to be "the first step in a program specifically directed by the Chief of Staff for giving actual battle experience to the maximum number of personnel of the American Army." The men joining the unit would be trained by the British and take part in combat operations under British control. After receiving training and exposure to

combat, as many men as possible would be returned to their original organizations and their places taken by other men.[4] The new unit was thus intended to be more of a school than a conventional fighting organization. It differed from other schools in that combat would be part of its curriculum.

Chaney's letter also established guidelines to be followed in selecting personnel. Only fully trained soldiers of the best type were to be sought, and officers and NCOs were to have superior leadership qualities with special emphasis placed upon initiative, sound judgment, and common sense. All men were to have good stamina, have natural athletic ability, and be without physical defects. No age limit was established, but it was pointed out that British commandos were an average of twenty-five years old. Men joining the new American unit were to be capable of the maximum exertion and endurance expected from a man of that age. Certain military and civilian skills, such as self-defense, marksmanship, scouting, mountaineering, seamanship, small boat handling, and demolition, were especially desirable. Men who were familiar with railway engines, power plants, and radio stations and who knew how to destroy them most effectively on raids were also to be sought.[5] The unit would be of battalion size and organized in Northern Ireland at a site to be chosen by Hartle. While in Northern Ireland, the unit would be attached to the Special Services Brigade (British) for training and tactical control, but the United States 34th Infantry Division would be responsible for its administration and supplies. American equipment would be kept and American tactical doctrine and methods used as much as possible.[6]

Choosing an officer to organize the new battalion was one of Hartle's most immediate tasks. On the Sunday morning after he found out about the battalion, the general attended church services in Belfast with his aide-de-camp, Artillery Captain William Orlando Darby, and his chief of staff, Major General Edmond H. Leavey. While they were being driven into the city, Hartle spoke to Leavey about the importance of finding a good officer to put in command of the unit. Darby was an energetic individual who felt stifled in his assignment as aide-de-camp and had intimated his dissatisfaction to Leavey on more than one occasion. Leavey saw the Belfast conversation as an opportunity to help Darby get transferred to a tactical unit and immediately suggested Darby for the job. When Hartle asked Darby what he thought of Leavey's suggestion, Darby responded affirmatively, and the assignment was thus made.[7] Promotion to major soon followed, and after being a major for ten weeks, Darby was promoted to lieutenant colonel.

A name for the unit remained to be found. While in Washington, Truscott had discussed with Major General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was then chief of the Operations Division, War Department General Staff, the possibility of organizing American units similar to the commandos. Eisenhower told him that, if such units were organized, they should be named something other than "commandos" because that name was so



Colonel William O. Darby (1911—45). This photograph was taken while Darby was home on leave at Ft. Smith, Arkansas, shortly before his death in Italy. He was posthumously promoted to brigadier general.

strongly identified with the British. Truscott chose "Rangers," a name that had been carried by a number of American units before, during, and after the War of Independence. The new unit was thus designated the 1st Ranger Battalion.[8]

On 7 June 1942, Hartle sent a letter to major USANIF units, informing them of the forthcoming organization of the 1st Ranger Battalion and restating and elaborating on the substance of Chaney's earlier communication. Among other things, physical and mental standards were defined more precisely. Vision had to be twenty-twenty without eyeglasses, hearing normal, and blood pressure within limits normal for a man of twenty-five. Men with cardiac defects, slow reaction time, removable dentures, night blindness, or evidence of psychological disorders were disqualified.[9]

Hartle's letter stressed the importance of having all USANIF units gain combat-experienced personnel by sending some of their men to serve in the battalion. Each major unit or command was required to furnish a specified number of men of each rank, private through captain; division and separate unit commanders were directed to establish boards of officers to interview all volunteers and selected personnel to determine their suitability. Pending final acceptance by Darby, those men who were chosen would be attached to the 1st Ranger Battalion.[10]

The 1st Ranger Battalion began to form almost immediately after issuance of Hartle's letter, and on 8 June, Darby began to interview his first officer volunteers. These men came from diverse military backgrounds. In a group of twenty-nine officers assigned to the battalion on 10 June, for example, there were eleven infantrymen, five coastal artillerymen, four field artillerymen, three combat engineers, two cavalrymen, and one officer each from the Medical Corps, Signal Corps, Quartermaster Corps, and Ordnance.

The selection of enlisted men began at Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland, on 11 June and continued for ten days. These men were interviewed by boards composed of Darby's new officers. The quality of the men accepted was extremely high, although the physical standards originally established were sometimes relaxed if a board believed that a man's shortcomings would not interfere with his performance. The rejected men returned to their parent organizations. By 15 June, 104 of the 575 volunteers who had come to Carrickfergus thus far were sent back to their units as unacceptable, and Darby found it necessary to raise additional volunteers by sending six boards of officers on recruiting tours.[11]

The 1st Ranger Battalion was officially activated on 19 June, and three days later, the 488 enlisted men who had been selected were assigned to it.[12] These men had backgrounds as diverse as the officers, having come from thirty-four units ranging from infantry regiments to quartermaster detachments. The training that they would receive from the British would be essential for the unit, especially for those men with technical backgrounds who lacked combat skills.

Training began while recruiting and interviewing were in their final stages, but until 28 June, the battalion spent most of its time drawing equipment and organizing in accordance with the TOE and instructions that had accompanied Chaney's and Hartle's letters. The battalion was formed into a headquarters and headquarters company and six line companies. Each line company was organized into two platoons, and each platoon was organized into two assault sections and a 60-mm mortar section.[13] (See Figure 1.)

On 28 June, the battalion began moving from Carrickfergus to the Commando Depot at Achnacarry, Scotland, to take part in a commando-administered training program that would last until 31 July. This training strengthened the Rangers physically, conditioned them to think and act quickly, and accustomed them to face the possibility of bodily injury. Speed marches, cliff climbing, obstacle courses, and tactical problems were emphasized. In the latter, commandos simulated enemy fire by throwing grenades and firing small arms near the Rangers.[14] Such rigorous and realistic training had its costs. By 17 July, one Ranger had drowned, two had received bullet wounds, and one had been wounded by a grenade fragment.[15]

In mid-July, Colonel Charles A. Vaughan, commandant of the Commando Depot, recommended to Darby that two changes be made in the Rangers' organization to reduce the amount and weight of equipment the

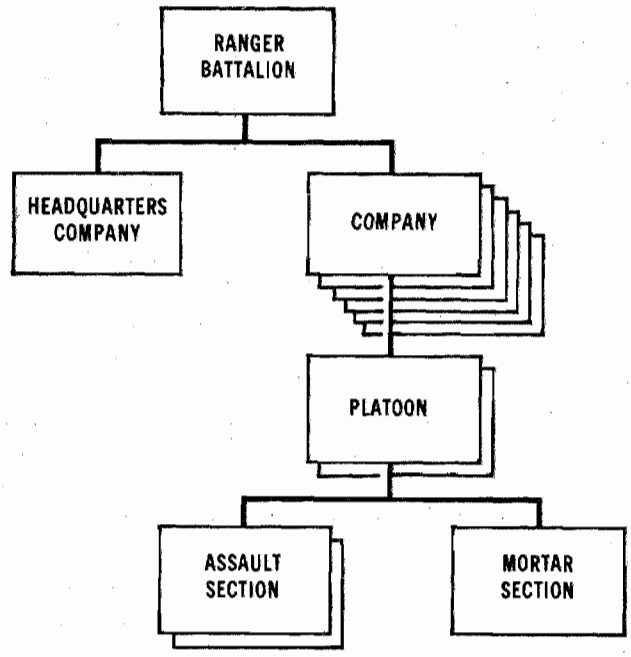


Figure 1. Organization of the 1st Ranger Battalion at Carrickfergus, June 1942

platoons and sections had to carry. First, he recommended that the mortars be taken from the platoons and placed under control of the company commanders in their headquarters. Second, he recommended that the M1919A4 .30-caliber machine guns, one of which was then in each assault section, be placed in a pool at battalion headquarters and that the sections be equipped instead with either the lighter Bren guns or Browning automatic rifles (BARs).[16] Darby followed Vaughan's recommendations, and by 17 July, the mortars had been centralized in the company headquarters, and the machine guns had been replaced with BARs.[17]

Darby and his Rangers continued to train at Achnacarry until 1 August, when most of the battalion moved to the vicinity of Argyle for a month of training with the Royal Navy. While that training was taking place, some Rangers were sent into combat with the British in fulfillment of the purpose for which they had originally been organized. Beginning on 1 August, six officers and forty-five enlisted men were attached to Numbers 3 and 4 Commandos and the Canadian 2d Division for the raid on Dieppe. That ill-fated landing was made on 19 August and cost the Rangers two officers and four enlisted men killed and four enlisted men captured.[18]

Because of the expanding scope of the war, Dieppe was the only operation in which the Rangers fought as students of the British. With the coming Allied landings in French North Africa, American troops would be

fighting in large numbers against the Germans, and the British-led operations the Rangers were to take part in for training purposes were no longer necessary. Although the original purpose for bringing the Rangers into being would soon no longer exist, they were not deactivated. Instead, they would serve as an American version of the British commandos.

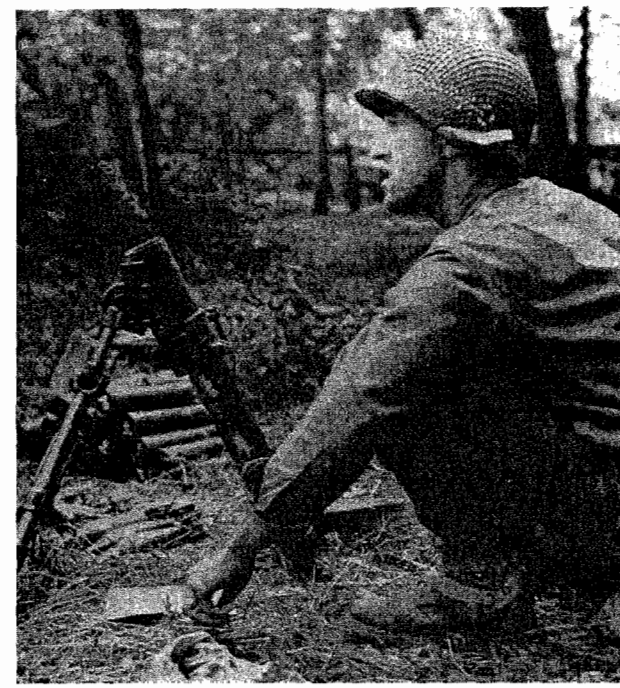
On 3 September, the Rangers moved to Dundee where they took part in a three-week training program that stressed attacks on coastal defenses, pillboxes, and antiaircraft positions with emphasis on planning, control, and individual initiative. This program, like the one that had just been completed, involved the use of live ammunition, and one Ranger was killed and one wounded by the accidental explosion of a land mine.[19]

On 24 September, the battalion moved to the vicinity of Glasgow where it became assigned to II Corps and attached to the 1st Infantry Division in preparation for Torch, the Allied landing in French North Africa. Four days later, the 1st Ranger Battalion took the form it would keep throughout the fighting in North Africa, except for minor changes.

The battalion, which was now authorized 26 officers and 452 enlisted men, remained composed of a headquarters and headquarters company and six line companies. Headquarters and headquarters company was authorized eight officers and seventy-four enlisted men. Each line company was authorized three officers and sixty-three enlisted men and was composed of a



Soldier being trained. Rangers underwent strenuous training such as depicted in this photo of hand-to-hand fighting.



Preparing to fire a 60-mm mortar M-2. The 60-mm mortar M-2 was a light, indirect-fire weapon frequently used by Rangers.

company headquarters, which included a command section, two mortar sections, and two platoons. The company command section was authorized a company commander, a first sergeant, one messenger/orderly armed with a submachine gun, and one clerk. Each of the two mortar sections had one 60-mm mortar and was authorized one mortar sergeant, one gunner, one assistant gunner, and two ammunition bearers.

Each platoon was authorized one officer and twenty-five enlisted men and was composed of a platoon headquarters and two sections. The platoon headquarters was authorized a platoon leader, a platoon sergeant, one messenger armed with a submachine gun, and one sniper/grenadier armed with a Springfield 1903 rifle.

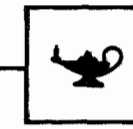
Each section was authorized a section leader, an assistant section leader, two scouts, one BAR-man, one assistant BAR-man, and five riflemen. All men in a section were armed with M-1 rifles except one of the scouts, who carried a submachine gun, and the BAR-man.

Each section had, in addition, one .30-caliber M1919A4 machine gun that was held in a pool at battalion headquarters. Protection against armor was to be provided by six British .55-caliber antitank rifles that were also held in the battalion pool.[20] These were soon replaced with bazookas.

While the Rangers' light armament enhanced their mobility, it greatly limited their firepower. Their firepower would be increased before they entered combat, however, and it would continue to be increased through most of their existence. In the process, the Rangers' very nature would change.

Djebel el Ank

2



From Arzew to Djebel el Ank

The 1st Ranger Battalion went into action as a unit for the first time on 8 November 1942, when it landed in French North Africa while participating in Operation Torch. The Rangers made a surprise night landing in and north of Arzew, Algeria, neutralized its main coastal defenses, and captured its docks. Due largely to rigorous training and thorough planning, they accomplished their mission with the loss of only one Ranger life.[1]

Before and after Arzew, however, the Rangers began to evolve from a lightly armed unit organized to conduct special operations into a more heavily armed force organized for conventional combat. This was the result of two tendencies that reinforced one another throughout the existence of Darby's Rangers. The first tendency was the adoption of heavier weapons than were specified in the Rangers' original TOE because of the occasional need for more firepower. The second tendency was the use of the Rangers in conventional operations when necessary or expedient. Ironically, the more the Rangers were used as conventional infantry, the more firepower they needed; and the more firepower they got, the more likely it became that the headquarters that controlled them would use them conventionally. Darby accommodated this evolution. He had been commissioned into the field artillery when he graduated from West Point in 1933 and had served only with artillery units until he became Hartle's aide-de-camp in January 1942. After he took command of the 1st Ranger Battalion, he retained such a strong appreciation of artillery that the battalion executive officer, Major Herman Dammer, would later say that Darby had "a fetish for firepower."[2]

The transition began during the planning for Torch, when Darby temporarily replaced the battalion's 60-mm mortars with 81-mm tubes because he believed the latter would be more effective against the fortified positions that guarded Arzew. It proved to be a wise decision, as the French defenders of Batterie Superieur, one of Arzew's major forts, resisted, and it was necessary for the Rangers to use the mortars against it.[3]

Although the Rangers accomplished their mission quickly and smoothly, troops advancing inland did not have the advantage of surprise and encountered more determined French resistance. Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen, commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division, to which the

Rangers were attached, called upon the battalion to assist in conventional operations. During 9 and 10 November, Company E and elements of the 16th Infantry captured the town of LaMacta, and on 10 November, Company C helped Combat Team (CT) 18 take St. Cloud. Three Rangers were killed in the fight for the latter town.[4]

The use of the Rangers in conventional infantry operations only fourteen and one-half hours after they had set foot in North Africa bothered some of the men. "What was the purpose in organizing and training Rangers for Commando-type operations if they are going to be frittered away in mass battles?" thought Ranger James Altieri.[5] Dammer, however, sensed "no resentment" by Darby over the LaMacta and St. Cloud battles. He seemed to believe that there had been a job to do and that the Rangers had done it.[6]

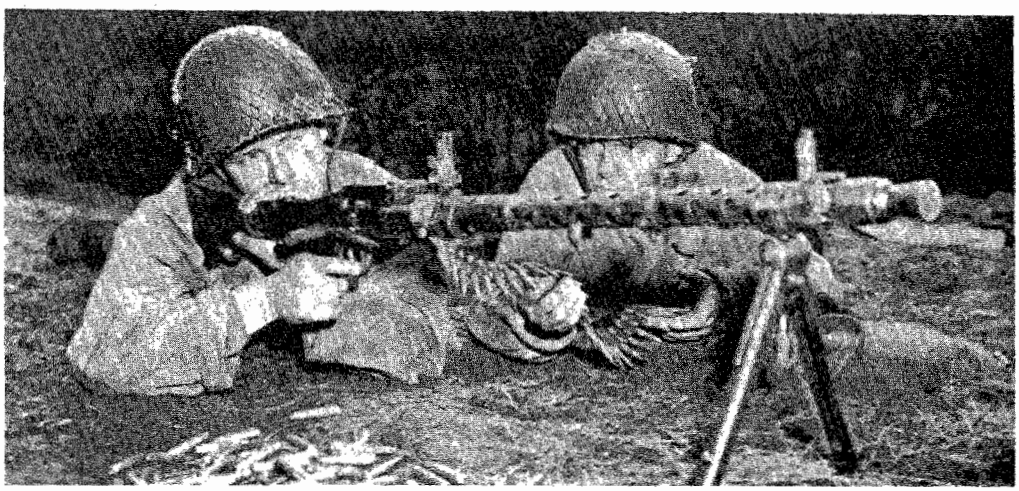
The Rangers were not used in combat for almost three months following Arzew but trained near the city and were then assigned to the Fifth Army Invasion Training Center (ITC) as demonstration and experimental troops. Many men transferred out of the battalion during this period, believing that the war was passing them by, and Darby found it necessary to recruit new volunteers. On 31 January 1943, 7 officer and 101 enlisted replacements reported for duty and were formed into a seventh company that Darby had established for training purposes.[7]

No longer attached to the British, the Rangers now had to train themselves. Quite naturally, many of the training techniques introduced by the British were kept by Darby, and speed marching, cliff climbing, rappelling, and night amphibious landings continued to be integral parts of the Rangers' regimen.[8]

Darby strongly emphasized the buddy system, or working in pairs. The men chose their own buddies from within their own platoons and then ate, performed details, and trained as a team. In what was called the "Bullet and Bayonet" course, the men negotiated obstacles and reacted to surprise targets in buddy teams. Each team going through the course advanced using fire and maneuver and fire and movement. Another course, called "Me and My Pal," was similar in concept but served as a street-fighting exercise.[9]

As in Northern Ireland and Scotland, realism was achieved through the use of live ammunition. Men simulating the enemy used captured German and Italian weapons so the new Rangers would learn to distinguish between the sounds of American and enemy guns. Thus, if a training problem required the taking of a machine-gun nest, a captured enemy machine gun would be set up to fire live ammunition in a fixed direction.[10]

After the new men completed their initial hardening, most training was done at night. When tactical problems were conducted during darkness, Rangers simulating the enemy added to the realism by using flares. The Rangers also experimented with techniques of controlling tactical formations at night. Darby favored moving the battalion to an objective in column for



Firing German weapons. Rangers were required to be familiar with many weapons, to include those of the enemy. American soldiers are shown firing a German standard dual-purpose machine gun (7.92-mm. M. G. 34).

ease of control. Once the objective was reached and the companies went abreast in preparation for the assault, dim, shielded, colored lights were used to maintain formation. Each company used a different colored light. When a company reached a predetermined location, it would signal its position to the rear. Company commanders would signal with uninterrupted beams, while platoon leaders would signal with dots and dashes. Darby, who would temporarily be to the rear where he could see the lights, could then be certain that his men were where they were supposed to be when beginning an assault.[11]

The 1st Ranger Battalion took part in several major actions during February and March of 1943. On 11 February, Darby led Companies A, E, F, and a headquarters element on a night raid against Italian frontline positions near Station de Sened in central Tunisia. The attacking Rangers, carrying out a mission appropriate to their training and organization, killed or wounded an estimated seventy-five Italians, destroyed one antitank gun and five machine guns, and captured eleven members of the 10th Bersaglieri Regiment at the cost of one of their own men killed and twenty wounded.[12]

The 1st Ranger Battalion withdrew with II Corps prior to the battle of Kasserine Pass (19—22 February) and remained in defensive positions south of Bou Chebka until 1 March. From 16 February through 1 March, the Rangers were involved in several clashes in which they killed six Italians, captured eight Italians and eight Germans, and destroyed three wheeled vehicles and captured another three. One Ranger was killed or captured while on patrol during this period.[13]

With the end of the Axis' February offensive, the Allies began to prepare for the next phase of the Tunisian campaign. Montgomery's Eighth

Army would attack northward along Tunisia's east coast, while II Corps and the British First Army would threaten the enemy from the west and draw his reserves away toward the west.

By mid-March, Eighth Army had driven the Axis forces westward until the latter took up defensive positions along the Mareth Line. The line was about twenty-five miles long and extended northeast from the vicinity of Cheguimu in the Matmata Hills toward the Wadi Zigzauo, and along the wadi to the Gulf of Gabes. Eighth Army was to begin an attack on the line during the night of 16 March. The II Corps, over which Patton had recently assumed command, would play a supporting role in the attack.

Operation Wop, as II Corps' role was named, called for the corps to capture and hold Gafsa, which would then serve as a logistical base for Eighth Army. After taking Gafsa, II Corps would conduct operations toward Maknassy to threaten Axis lines of communication and supply. This plan would require the 9th and 34th Infantry Divisions to defend the approaches to Rohia, Sbeitla, Kasserine, and Bou Chebka while the 1st Infantry Division took Gafsa. The 1st Armored Division (Reinforced) would then advance on Maknassy.[14]

On the evening of 13 March, the 1st Ranger Battalion, which had been in corps reserve, was attached to the 1st Infantry Division. At 1000 on 17 March, CTs 16 and 18 attacked Gafsa with the Rangers, found the town lightly defended, and quickly captured it. No Rangers were killed or wounded in the attack.[15]

Djebel el Ank

The ease with which Gafsa fell revealed that the enemy had almost completely withdrawn from the area. Allied intelligence reported that about two thousand Axis troops were at El Guettar and that they were also organized in strength at Djebel el Ank. Although Patton did not intend to continue the attack toward El Guettar immediately, it was necessary to reestablish contact with the enemy and maintain the initiative.[16]

On 17 March, Major General Allen of the 1st Infantry Division sent Darby a memo ordering him to move the Rangers toward El Guettar after dark; reestablish contact with the enemy; determine enemy strength, dispositions, and unit designation; and maintain his unit in the area. Allen considered Darby's mission crucial because the requested information was essential to planning an attack on El Guettar. Darby was directed to act aggressively but cautioned not to commit the Rangers to any action from which they could not disengage.[17]

Darby received Allen's memo at 0200 the following morning and immediately began moving his men through Gafsa toward El Guettar. In spite of intelligence reports that there were Italians in the area, the Rangers found El Guettar undefended, occupied it, and extended their search for the enemy farther to the east. By means of patrols and surveillance, they found troops of the Italian Centauro Division astride the Gafsa-Gabes road at

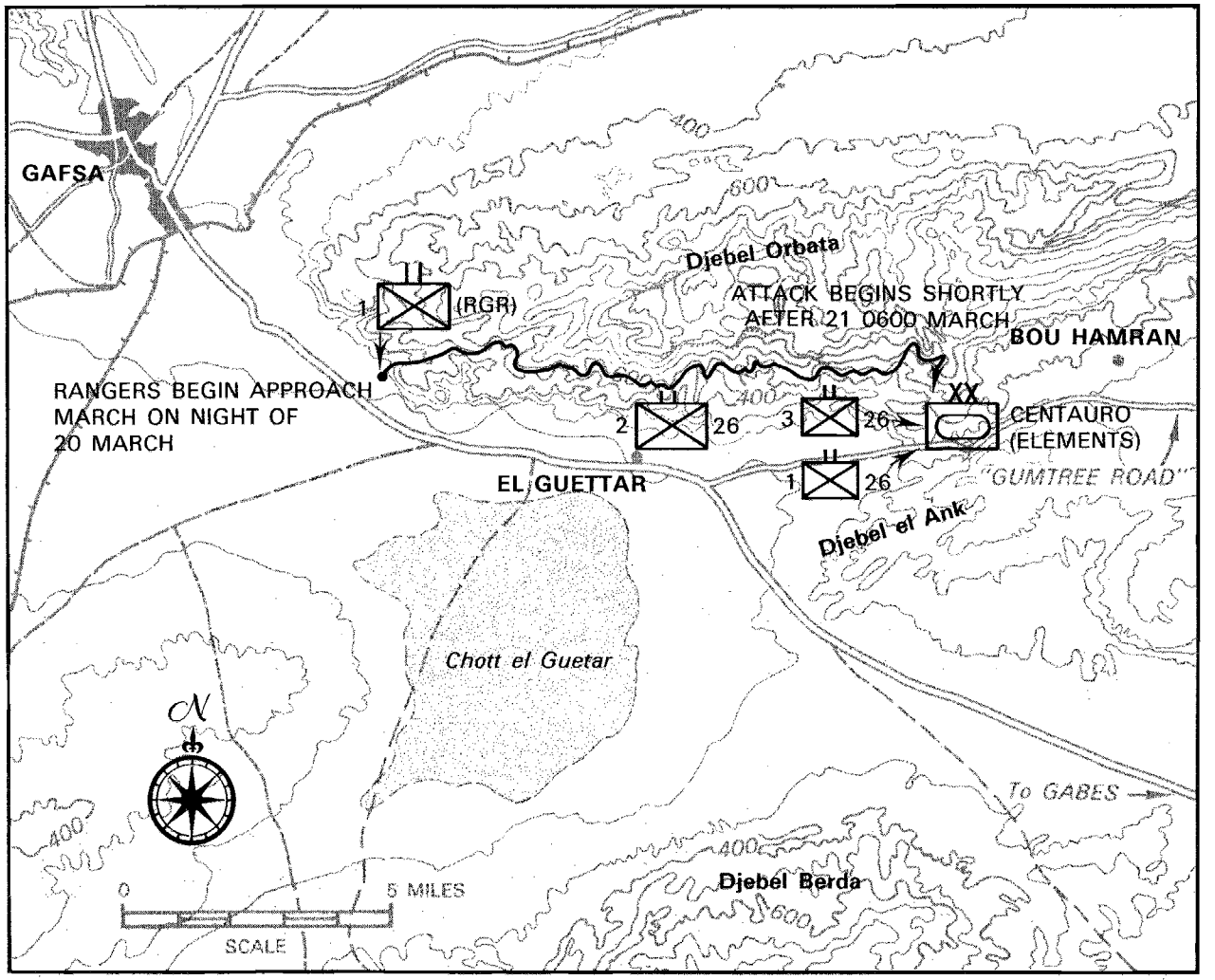
Djebel el Ank Pass.[18] This was about four miles east of El Guettar and three miles west of Bou Hamran. It was to be the site of the Rangers' first real battle since the Station de Sened raid.

With the capture of Gafsa and El Guettar, II Corps' attack entered a second phase. At 1630 on 20 March, the 1st Infantry Division received a warning order from corps to prepare to attack along the Gafsa-Gabes road and to take the high ground east of El Guettar about eighteen miles southeast of Gafsa.[19] The Gafsa-Gabes road split into two branches less than a mile east of El Guettar. The southern branch was a continuation of the main road and led into Gabes. The northern branch, dubbed Gumtree Road, passed through Djebel el Ank Pass and south of Bou Hamran to Mahares on the sea. The plan developed by division required the 18th Infantry to attack along the south branch of the Gafsa-Gabes road and for the Rangers and the 26th Infantry to attack along the north branch. The 16th Infantry would be held in division reserve.[20]

Djebel el Ank Pass opened to the west like a funnel with rocky heights on both sides, and the Italians had barred its entrance with mines, barbed wire, and roadblocks and had covered its approaches with automatic weapons and antitank guns. An unsupported frontal attack on the pass would risk heavy casualties and a high likelihood of failure, but a frontal attack combined with a surprise Ranger attack from the rear would be more likely to succeed with fewer losses. The plan thus developed required the Rangers to infiltrate enemy lines and attack the Italians defending the pass from behind. With the start of the Ranger attack, the 26th Infantry would make a frontal attack into the pass and, after securing it, continue on to Bou Hamran.[21]

The Rangers, as ordered, remained in the Djebel el Ank area after locating the enemy and conducted reconnaissance patrols against the Italian positions. Darby made a personal daylight reconnaissance against the north wall of the pass, and Lieutenant Walter Wojcik led two night patrols into the mountains behind the enemy. The Italians knew that Americans were to their front and brought the Rangers under artillery fire on 18 and 19 March but did not realize that the Rangers were operating to their rear. During these reconnaissances, the Rangers mapped a tortuous ten-mile-long route among fissures, cliffs, and saddles to an unguarded rocky plateau that overlooked the Italian positions from behind.[22] The Italians, believing themselves safe in their naturally strong position, had not established effective local security. (See Map 1.)

At 1800 on 20 March, the 1st Infantry Division received the order from II Corps to attack along the Gafsa-Gabes road and seize the high ground east of El Guettar.[23] The 26th Infantry held a meeting of unit commanders at 2105 to issue the regimental order. The regiment would attack Djebel el Ank Pass along the axis of Gumtree Road with the 3d Battalion on the left, the 1st Battalion on the right and astride the road, and the 2d Battalion in reserve at El Guettar. The 3d Battalion would attack the north



Map 1. Djebel el Ank Operation, March 1943

wall after the Rangers struck it from behind. Bou Hamran, the first objective beyond the pass, was to be attacked only on division order.[24]

On the night of 20 March, Darby led the 1st Ranger Battalion and an attached 4.2-inch mortar company along the previously reconnoitered route to the plateau behind the Italians. There, with their faces blackened with camouflage, the Rangers awaited the dawn.[25] The mortar company, impeded by the weight of its weapons and the ruggedness of the terrain, had fallen behind and was still en route to the plateau.[26]

Shortly after 0600, as first light brightened the sky to the east, waiting troops of the 26th Infantry heard the sound of battle burst forth suddenly from the north wall of the pass.[27] The Rangers had taken the unsuspecting Italians completely by surprise.

With machine-gun and rifle fire, a Ranger support element sent the Italians on the south side of the pass scurrying for cover, while the rest of the Ranger battalion swarmed down on the stunned defenders of the north wall. With the sound of a bugle, the assault element jumped from rock to rock shouting Indian war cries and formed into skirmish lines to close with the Italians. They rushed forward firing their weapons, throwing grenades, and bayoneting as Darby repeatedly shouted, "Give them some steel!"[28]

The first twenty minutes of the battle all but broke enemy resistance on the north wall. Dead Italians sprawled next to their unfired weapons while many of the living frantically waved white flags from their dugouts and trenches. The Rangers gathered prisoners while their mortars fired on those Italians who were still fighting from the other side of the road. By 0830, the Rangers held the most important positions on the pass, and the attached 4.2-inch mortars, which had only recently arrived, were adding their fire to the bombardment of the south wall.[29]

With the north side of the pass cleared, Darby sent one company to silence the several machine guns that could still fire on the entrance of the pass from the south wall. The attacking Rangers descended to the floor of the pass using a spur for cover and concealment, dashed across an open area to the base of the south wall, and slowly fought their way up the ridge in a rough skirmish line. The south side of the pass thus fell into Ranger hands. Casualties were limited during this final mop-up thanks to the Rangers' Italian-speaking British chaplain, Father Albert E. Basil, who talked an Italian officer into surrendering his men.[30]

While the Rangers were overrunning the heights, the 26th Infantry began moving into the pass. Because of the natural strength of the Italian position, the infantry could advance only slowly. A wadi cut across the mouth of the pass, and even with Rangers to guide them and with no opposition, each company took forty-five minutes to cross it.[31]

At 1120, the division G3 felt confident enough of the situation to direct Darby and the 26th Infantry to clean up what little resistance remained in the pass and take the high ground beyond Bou Hamran.[32] Although Darby

would only claim taking about two hundred Italian prisoners in his after-action report, the Rangers and infantry together took more than a thousand prisoners by 1215.[33] The need for the Rangers passed as American forces continued their attack to the east, and the battalion was returned to its bivouac and division reserve at El Guettar at 1610.[34]

The taking of Djebel el Ank Pass was conducted in the successful tradition of Arzew and the raid at Station de Sened. Ranger losses in the operation amounted to only one officer wounded.[35]

Commentary

At Djebel el Ank Pass, the lst Ranger Battalion, well-led, well-trained, and knowing where the Italians were and how best to attack them, gained a one-sided victory over an enemy who chose the battlefield and enjoyed the advantages of knowing the terrain.

There were several factors in addition to Darby's personal magnetism and leadership that contributed to the Rangers' success in the battle. The first of these was their superb state of training. Although a large number of men had been transferred out of the battalion while it was assigned to Fifth Army ITC, the majority had been with the unit since its inception and early training under the British. They not only possessed the knowledge and ability which that training gave them as individuals but also the cohesion to use that training effectively as a team. In terms of training, the Rangers were at their peak in North Africa.

The conduct of reconnaissance patrols to the pass was a second factor contributing to the Rangers' success. By means of these patrols, Darby and Wojcik mapped out a route to the objective, determined how long it would take to travel the route, placed the objective under surveillance, and found a secure place from which to launch the attack. Consequently, they were able to gain complete surprise and immediate fire superiority over the Italians, neutralizing any advantage the Italians may have enjoyed by occupying highly defensible terrain.

The relatively poor quality of the enemy troops, as demonstrated by their indifferent attention to security, was a third factor that made Ranger success likely. Although the Italians had not yet begun to show the extreme symptoms of demoralization they would in Sicily, it was generally true that they were a less formidable foe than the Germans.

Subsequent Developments

The taking of Djebel el Ank Pass was the last use of the 1st Ranger Battalion in an authentic Ranger operation in North Africa. Ironically, the gains made in that action were given up within forty-eight hours when the Germans launched a counterattack that culminated in the battle of El Guettar. The Rangers were once again called upon to fight as conventional infantry in an emergency and lost three killed and eighteen wounded in defensive actions near Djebel Berda during 23—27 March.[36] That was one more than had been killed, and almost as many as had been wounded, in

the Ranger-style operations at Arzew, Station de Sened, and Djebel el Ank combined. For the actions at Gafsa, Djebel el Ank, and El Guettar, the 1st Ranger Battalion was awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation.

The Rangers remained in North Africa until early July when they took part in the invasion of Sicily. During that time, they underwent two major changes in force structure. These changes, which were brought about as a result of Darby's wishes, were their expansion into a force of three battalions and the attachment of a 4.2-inch mortar battalion.

On 14 April, Darby wrote Eisenhower a recommendation that 52 officer and 1,000 enlisted volunteers be made available for the formation of two additional Ranger battalions in time for the invasion of Sicily.[37] Darby's recommendations were approved and forwarded to Marshall, and on 19 April, Marshall's authorization to activate the 3d and 4th Ranger Battalions arrived at Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ). However, the authorization contained the suggestion that after the need for the battalions had passed, their personnel might be returned to their former organizations. It was, therefore, likely that the Ranger battalions would be provisional rather than permanent. This was, in large part, a result of a manpower shortage that would remain critical until summer.[38] The three battalions would be called Ranger Force.

On 22 April, Headquarters, North African Theater of Operations, authorized Darby to visit any or all replacement depots in the theater to recruit volunteers for the Rangers. Darby could accept anyone he found suitable and have the volunteers assigned to the Rangers on the condition that his battalions did not exceed their authorized strengths. On 17 May, Headquarters, Atlantic Base Section, announced that qualified enlisted volunteers were being sought. The volunteers had to be white, at least five feet six inches tall, of normal weight, in excellent physical condition, and not over thirty-five years old. They also had to have character ratings of excellent and no records of trial by court-martial. Although previous infantry training was desirable, volunteers did not have to be infantrymen. Except for technicians, volunteers were not to be higher in grade than private first class.[39] This final stipulation was to ensure that enlisted leadership positions would be controlled by seasoned men who had trained with the Rangers in the British Isles and served with them in combat.

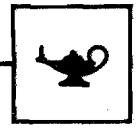
Darby used the original 1st Ranger Battalion as cadre for Ranger Force. He made Major Herman W. Dammer, who had been his executive officer, commanding officer of the 3d Ranger Battalion and gave him Companies A and B to help build the new unit. Captain Roy A. Murray, Jr., the former commander of Company F, became commanding officer of the 4th Ranger Battalion and was given Companies E and F. Darby retained command of the 1st Ranger Battalion, which kept Companies C and D.[40] Darby's continued command of the 1st Ranger Battalion was necessary because Ranger Force had not been authorized a headquarters due to its provisional nature. Instead, the 3d and 4th Ranger Battalions were simply attached to the 1st. Darby remained a battalion commander, but his duties approximated those

of a regimental commander, inasmuch as he was responsible for organizing, training, and controlling three battalions. He asked the War Department to authorize a headquarters for Ranger Force, but on 29 April, he was notified without further comment that his request had been disapproved.[41]

The creation of Ranger Force led to a change in organizational structure that went far beyond a mere increase in the number of Ranger battalions. This was the virtually permanent attachment of the 4.2-inch mortar battalion, which was a direct consequence of Darby's artillery background. Just prior to his assignment as Hartle's aide, Darby had been a battery commander with the 99th Field Artillery (Pack) at Fort Hoyle, Maryland. While there, he had taken part in a comparison firing of his unit's 75-mm pack howitzers and the 4.2-inch mortar and had been favorably impressed with the latter because of its greater range and bursting radius. In mid-May 1943, Darby accidentally met Lieutenant Colonel Ken Cunin on the streets of Oran. Cunin was a 1934 graduate of West Point and had been a friend of Darby's since the two had served together in the 82d Field Artillery at Fort Bliss, Texas, in the mid-1930s. He was now commanding officer of the 83d Chemical Battalion, a 4.2-inch mortar unit. When Cunin told Darby that several chemical battalions were scheduled to land in Sicily, Darby requested and got Cunin's battalion attached to Ranger Force.[42] This arrangement would bind the two units for most of the rest of the Rangers' existence. The evolution, which had begun before Arzew when Darby temporarily replaced his 60-mm mortars with 81-mm tubes continued, gradually transforming the Rangers from a light, commando-like strike force into a more heavily and conventionally armed unit.

3

Porto Empedocle



From Gela and Licata to Porto Empedocle

The plan for the invasion of Sicily called for landings on the southeastern corner of the island by two armies. Montgomery's Eighth Army would land along the east coast from the vicinity of Syracuse south to Cap Passero, while Patton's Seventh Army would land along a seventy-mile stretch of coast extending from Licata eastward to the right bank of the Irminio River. American forces were intended to play a role secondary to the British, and Seventh Army's initial mission was to protect Eighth Army's left while the latter drove northward to Messina, the main objective in Sicily.

The Rangers were among the units tasked to spearhead the American landings. Seventh Army was divided into two task forces, which, excluding reserves, were organized around Major General Omar Bradley's II Corps and Major General Lucian K. Truscott Jr.'s 3d Infantry Division (Reinforced). Darby's 1st and 4th Ranger Battalions (Reinforced), which were designated Force X and attached to II Corps for the invasion, made an opposed landing at Gela on 10 July 1943. Lieutenant Walter Wojcik, who had contributed greatly to the victory at Djebel el Ank Pass, was killed at Gela while crossing the beach. Force X captured the town, defended it successfully against an Axis counterattack, and took part in the subsequent drive inland under II Corps and Major General Hugh Gaffey's 2d Armored Division. The 3d Ranger Battalion, which was under Dammer's command and attached to the 3d Infantry Division (Reinforced), made an opposed landing about fifteen miles to the west at Licata and took part in Truscott's drive inland.

As the beachheads expanded, Patton decided to capture the 14,000-inhabitant city of Porto Empedocle in order to gain a port nearer to the advancing front than Licata. He could not, however, openly launch an all-out offensive in the direction of Porto Empedocle because of the subordinate role that had been assigned to the Americans. He thus decided to seize the city through the subterfuge of calling his advance a "reconnaissance in force" and limiting participation in it to Truscott's command.

The Drive on Porto Empedocle

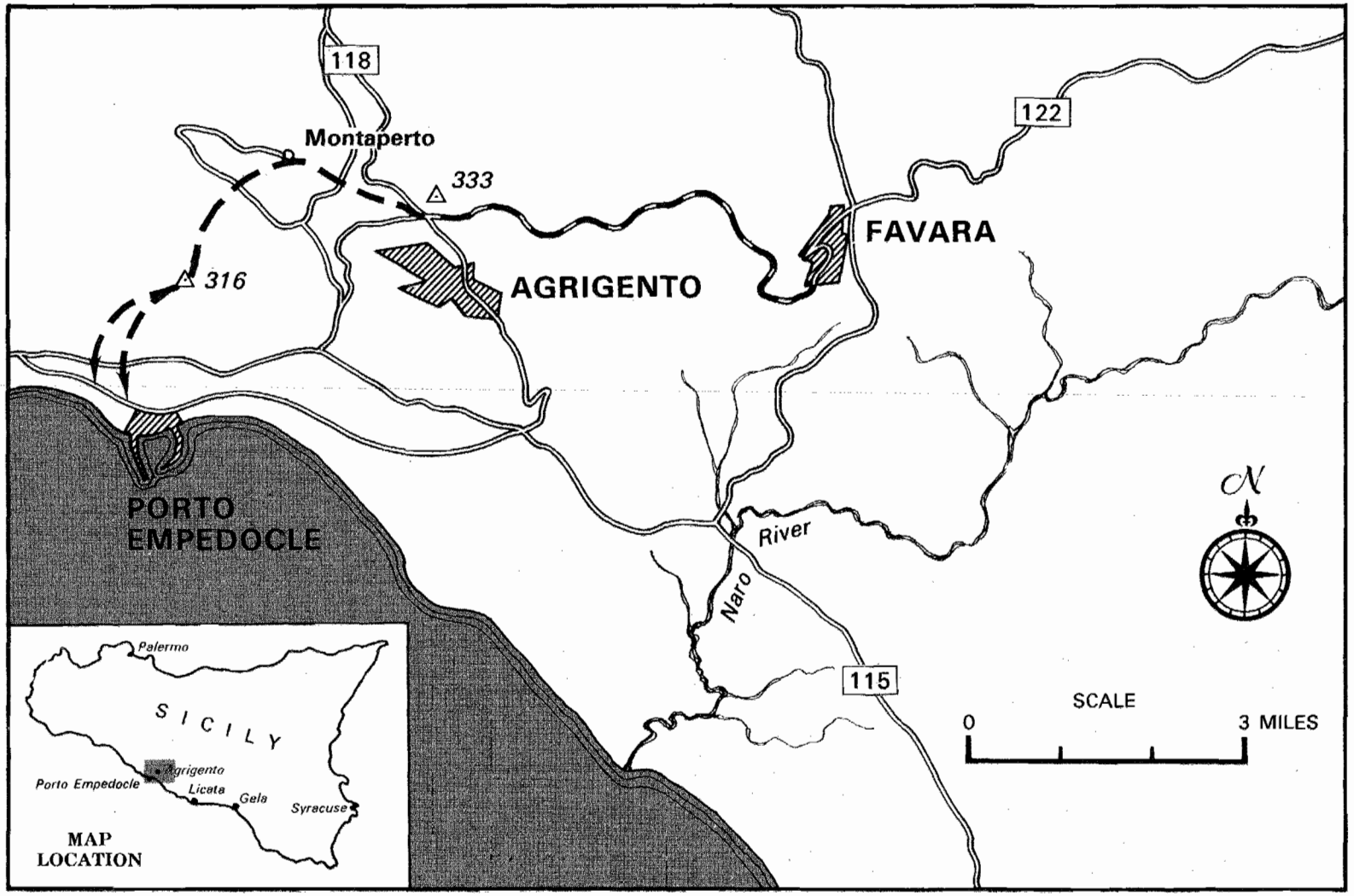
The most direct route from Licata to Porto Empedocle lay along the coastal road, Highway 115. Truscott decided against concentrating his attack along the highway because considerable enemy artillery had been reported in the vicinity of Agrigento. Agrigento, a city of 34,000, sat on high ground overlooking Highway 115 and was the most important road center on Sicily's south coast. Porto Empedocle was three miles to its southwest.

According to 3d Infantry Division plans, two battalions of the 7th Infantry would take Favara while the rest of the regiment advanced along the north side of Highway 115 to high ground east of the Naro River. The 3d Ranger Battalion would then pass through Favara to carry Patton's "reconnaissance in force" behind Agrigento to Porto Empedocle.[1] The Rangers' part in the advance would not call for a stealthy penetration of a thickly defended enemy front but would require them to go forward of friendly lines and accomplish their mission in an area where the enemy operated freely. This type of operation would not be unique to the 3d Ranger Battalion, but it would be one of the few the Rangers would conduct in Sicily that would be appropriate to their original purpose and training.

By daylight on 15 July, the 2d Battalion, 7th Infantry, was in Favara and the regiment (-) was on high ground overlooking the Naro. Agrigento was the next major objective and would have to be isolated against reinforcement before its capture. The 2d Battalion, 7th Infantry, would take Hill 333, which commanded the northern approaches to the town. The 3d Ranger Battalion, which had become attached to the 7th Infantry at 1730, would move westward from Favara to Montaperto, which stood on high ground slightly more than a mile northwest of Agrigento. With Agrigento thus cut off from the north and west, the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, would cross the Naro from the east and capture the city.

The Rangers passed through friendly front lines at 1900 and advanced by foot along the Favara-Agrigento road (Highway 122).[2] The first leg of the march was relatively uneventful; they were brought under artillery fire three miles beyond Favara and were later taken under machine-gun fire, but neither was accurate and the battalion continued forward unscathed. At about midnight, the Rangers ran into their first opposition, an Italian roadblock at the junction of Highways 122 and 118. The Americans attacked at 0030 and, after a sharp skirmish, took the position and some emplacements on neighboring high ground by 0130. They also captured 165 Italians, which were too many for the Rangers to take with them, so the prisoners were marched back to Favara and turned over to the 7th Infantry.[3] There were no Ranger casualties in the action. (See Map 2.)

The battalion got a few hours of sleep on the high ground near the road junction before dawn and resumed its march toward Montaperto at 0600. To advance on the town, the Rangers had to come down from where they had spent the night, cross a mile-wide valley through which Highway



Map 2. Porto Empedocle Operation: Route Followed by 3d Ranger Battalion, July 1943

118 passed, and then climb the hill on which Montaperto stood. They were briefly taken under ineffective artillery fire during the advance but were soon rewarded with an opportunity to win another tactical success. When the Rangers were about 200 yards beyond Highway 118, they sighted an Italian motorized column of ten motorcycles and two troop-laden trucks heading down the road toward them on the way to Agrigento. The Rangers were on high ground once they had crossed the road, so they organized a hasty ambush where they were and opened fire when the column came abreast. The unsuspecting Italians were taken completely by surprise, many were killed, and forty were taken prisoner.[4] As at the roadblock the night before, the skirmish was one-sided, and no Rangers were killed or wounded.

The battalion continued on its way to Montaperto after the ambush and entered the town at about 0800. From their new hilltop position, the Rangers could look south into a valley that led to Porto Empedocle and the sea. While so doing, they saw four Italian artillery batteries. Dammer seized the opportunity and brought the unsuspecting Italians under fire with his 60-mm mortars and automatic weapons. A few of the artillerymen fled south toward the sea, but most put their hands up and docilely climbed the hill to their captors.[5]

The Rangers then moved on Porto Empedocle via Hill 316, which lay midway between Montaperto and the port. They encountered only weak resistance, took occasional sniper and machine-gun fire, and captured the command element of the Italian artillery in the valley. Lieutenant Raymond F. Campbell, the commanding officer of Company F, was killed in an assault on a machine-gun position during the advance. He was the only Ranger to die in the entire operation and the first man of his battalion to be killed in combat.[6]

Continuing their advance, the Rangers came to an almond grove slightly more than a mile north of Porto Empedocle and paused to rest and plan their attack. The ground north of Porto Empedocle was broken by a draw that ran out of the city along a north-south axis. The plan Dammer developed called for an attack along both sides of the draw. Dammer would lead three companies in an attack along the east side of the draw, while the remaining three companies attacked along the west side under his executive officer.[7]

While Dammer violated the principles of mass and unity of command by dividing his force, a two-pronged attack along two parallel avenues of approach had the advantage of falling on more than one point along the objective. If the enemy was strong where one prong fell, he might be weak where the second fell, and that weakness could be exploited.

The attack began at 1420, and the premise upon which the plan was based was proven valid. The three companies west of the draw were stopped by determined resistance coming from behind a walled cemetery and by Germans manning coastal defenses and antiaircraft positions, but Dammer's men continued to make headway. While one company covered

their rear and left flank, the other two companies in Dammer's element overcame mild resistance and fought their way into the city and to the port area. By 1600, the Rangers had overcome the enemy and had begun to establish a perimeter defense around the city.[8]

The 7th Infantry continued its advance toward Agrigento while the Rangers were operating against Porto Empedocle. Resistance was stiff enough to require the infantry to use all three battalions, but by late afternoon, the city was in American hands.[9] Patton's so-called reconnaissance in force thus came to a successful end.

Commentary

Except for the death in combat of one American officer, the day, which began with the early morning attack on the roadblock and ended with the taking of Porto Empedocle, had been little different from an extended training exercise. The march to the final objective had been interrupted by three encounters with the enemy that required Dammer to react, and he and the Rangers had reacted quickly and well. By the end of the day, the 3d Ranger Battalion had captured 675 Italians and 91 Germans, a number almost double the battalion's own authorized strength.[10]

The Rangers' success was largely attributable to the element of surprise. This was certainly true in the attacks on the Italian motorized column and artillery position. Surprise resulted less from the Rangers' stealth or slight knowledge of the enemy than from enemy weaknesses. The Italians were thinly spread and fragmented, and the gaps in their lines invited infiltration. In addition, the Italians were not fighting well. On the day after the capture of Porto Empedocle, the 3d Infantry Division G2 noted that the mass surrender of Italians when in combat and their voluntary surrender when not engaged indicated a lack of will to fight.[11] The Rangers would not be so fortunate in their next major operation examined in this paper—Cisterna di Littoria.

Subsequent Developments

The Sicilian campaign not only presented the Rangers with little opportunity to conduct the types of operations at which they excelled, it resulted in a permanent change in the Rangers' force structure. This change, which was a response to the Rangers' recent experience, was the permanent addition of a cannon company to Ranger Force.

Shortly after Darby and Force X had landed at Gela, the Germans and Italians counterattacked, and Italian tanks briefly penetrated the city. Darby played an active part in the defense. He personally destroyed one Italian tank with a borrowed antitank gun and was seen riding on the top of a second tank trying to open its hatch so he could grenade the crew.[12] The major lesson Darby drew from the Gela counterattack was that the light weapons of the Rangers made them much too vulnerable to enemy armor. He responded as a former artilleryman might, by creating a Ranger cannon company armed with four 75-mm guns mounted on half-tracks. The

new company was formed at Corleone at the end of the fighting in Sicily and was ready for use in Italy. As with the attachment of the chemical mortar battalion, however, the Rangers' additional firepower made it more likely that they would be used as conventional infantry in the future.

One other change that Darby hoped to make did not come about so easily. On 10 August, he wrote to Eisenhower in a second attempt to gain a permanent headquarters for the Rangers. Arguing that the Rangers' value and effectiveness had been well proven, he asked that a force headquarters be authorized and that the Rangers be assigned to a corps, army, or higher level of command. If, on the other hand, the War Department should decide that the Rangers were not to be a permanent organization, he requested that the three battalions be reformed into a reconnaissance regiment.[13]

Patton, who had recently presented Darby with a Distinguished Service Cross for the action at Gela, vigorously endorsed Darby's request two days later. Furthermore, he valued Darby and the Rangers highly enough to ask that the proposed Ranger regiment be permanently assigned to Seventh Army. Eisenhower did not share Patton's enthusiasm, however, and disapproved Darby's request without comment on 3 September.[14]

Cisterna

4



From Salerno to Anzio and Cisterna

The Rangers' experience in Italy fell into two phases. The first phase began with an amphibious landing at Maiori, near Salerno, on 9 September 1943, and included the subsequent seizure and defense of Chiunzi Pass, the drive on Naples, and prolonged fighting on the Winter Line. The second phase began with the amphibious landing at Anzio on 22 January 1944 and came to an abrupt end eight days later with a disastrous operation at Cisterna di Littoria, or Cisterna. In the latter action, all but 6 men of a 767-man Ranger force were killed or captured by the Germans.

The Rangers' defeat at Cisterna was due to several causes, but one of the factors that contributed to the battle's outcome preceded it by several months and is worth examining in detail at this point. This was the decline in the unit's combat skills resulting from the dilution of a well-trained, extremely cohesive unit by less well-trained replacements for those original members who had become casualties. Ironically, the Rangers suffered most of these casualties when the force was used as conventional infantry rather than as the special strike force that it was. These casualties began to mount immediately after Salerno.

Ranger Force was attached to the British X Corps for Avalanche, Fifth Army's landing near Salerno. The Rangers came ashore at Maiori, about twenty miles west of Salerno, before daylight on 9 September with the mission of taking the town, destroying nearby coastal defenses, seizing Chiunzi Pass, and preparing to operate against the rear of Germans who might attempt to hold up the Allied advance through neighboring Vietri Pass. The Rangers gained local surprise and had accomplished their objectives by midmorning.

Had the other Allied units been as successful, they would have quickly driven inland and on to the Plain of Naples. Unlike the Rangers, however, the main invasion force did not have the advantage of surprise when landing, and nightfall saw it fail to achieve most of its D-day objectives. Furthermore, once the beachhead was established, Fifth Army was slow to break out of it, and the Rangers' mission that had been expected to last no more than two days thus lasted more than two weeks. During that time,

the Rangers were subjected to successive German counterattacks and prolonged artillery fire. The X Corps, which controlled the invasion force landing west of Salerno, did not begin its drive to the Plain of Naples until 23 September and did not succeed in reaching it until five days later.

The 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions won Distinguished Unit Citations for their successes at Maiori and Chiunzi Pass but paid a very high price. In the two weeks preceding the drive on Naples, Ranger Force lost 28 killed, 9 missing, and about 66 wounded.[1] All but a few of these casualties, which numbered about 20 percent of the Rangers' authorized strength, were suffered during the conventional fighting that followed the seizure of Chiunzi Pass—the type of fighting the Rangers had neither been created nor organized to do.

A relatively uneventful drive on Naples followed and led to about a month and a half of conventional infantry combat on the Winter Line. The heavy losses that the Rangers had sustained at Chiunzi Pass were repeated in the new fighting, and during the week which ended on 27 November, Ranger Force suffered more than seventy killed and wounded.[2]

The regular use of the Rangers for conventional missions disturbed many of Darby's men. On 28 November, Major Roy A. Murray, commanding officer of the 4th Ranger Battalion, wrote to the chief, Army Ground Forces, in an effort to resolve certain related problems. Murray pointed out that the Rangers did not have a clear-cut directive that defined their purpose and were thus hampered in long-range planning. Although a directive establishing that the 1st Ranger Battalion was to be for training and demonstration purposes had been issued on 1 June 1942, it had been superseded by events, and no consistent written or unwritten policy had ever replaced it.

Murray saw three problems as plaguing the Rangers. The first and most pressing was the replacement of casualties. After losing well-trained men in combat, the battalions had to remain out of action for a month or more to receive replacements and train them to Ranger standards. Murray recommended that the problem be solved by having trained replacements sent to Ranger Force from the 2d and 5th Ranger Battalions that had recently been activated at Camp Forrest, Tennessee.

The second problem, which was closely linked to the first, concerned the advancement of junior Ranger officers and the retention and use of experienced Ranger officers rendered unfit for combat by wounds or other physical disabilities. Murray recommended that some of the junior Ranger officers be given command of new Ranger battalions and that the disabled Ranger officers be sent to the United States to train Ranger replacements. His plan would allow younger men to advance and would still make use of the older men's experience.

The third problem was the absence of a Ranger Force headquarters to handle the administration, intelligence, planning, assignment of missions

to the battalions, and, "most important," to decide if the missions were "proper" for the Rangers. Murray recommended that a headquarters be formed and given to Darby, "the senior Battalion Commander of Rangers."[3] The fact that Murray described Darby as being only the Rangers' senior battalion commander reflected the tenuousness of Darby's control over the battalions he had organized. No documents are present in the Rangers' files to indicate that Army Ground Forces responded to Murray's letter.

On 17 January, Ranger Force made a practice amphibious landing at Pozzuoli Bay to the immediate west of Naples. The landing was part of a 3d Infantry Division exercise and a rehearsal for Anzio. Although the operation was a good opportunity for the Rangers and the Navy to practice working together, it revealed a serious deterioration of the Rangers' fighting skills. The chief umpire was favorably impressed with the Rangers' enthusiasm and spirit but noted numerous violations of doctrinal principles and sound combat techniques. For example, the 1st Ranger Battalion became congested shortly after landing; several of its companies made excessive noise as they practiced stealth; at night, one-third of the men moved while flares were being fired—an action that would have made them more visible to an enemy; the unit established itself in an indefensible position; and it failed to send local security forward after moving inland. The 3d Ranger Battalion performed much better and was criticized only for having its landing craft too close together and moving in flare light at night. The 4th Ranger Battalion combined several potentially fatal errors. In addition to moving while in flare light at night and failing to establish communications with Force headquarters, it moved up a road in column without sending an advance guard forward and went through a seventy-five-yard-long defile without first reconnoitering it.[4] In actual combat, either of the latter two blunders could have resulted in the battalion walking into an ambush.

The number and gravity of the Rangers' errors demonstrated the decline in quality which had taken place since their formation and early training in the British Isles. The conventional fighting to which the Rangers had too often been committed had resulted in severe attrition among their best trained and most experienced men. As their places were taken by replacements who, however brave and highly motivated, had enjoyed nothing equal to the time and training that had been lavished on the early Rangers, the Rangers' original quality became diluted and their unit cohesion weakened.

There was, however, one positive development during the period immediately preceding the landing at Anzio. The Rangers and the units that had been attached to them for the landing were designated the 6615th Ranger Force (Provisional).[5] While there was no assurance that the unit would ever be more than temporary, for at least the time being a headquarters element was authorized that gave Darby a degree of control over the Rangers he had not previously enjoyed. (See Figure 2.) On 11 December, Darby was promoted to colonel.[6]

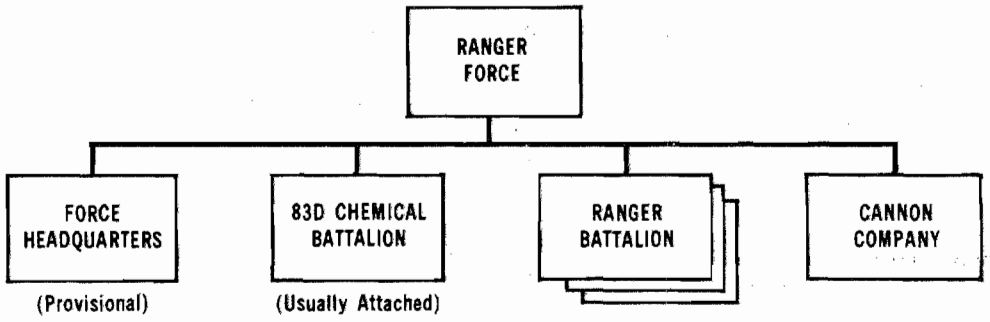


Figure 2. Final Organization of Ranger Force, 1943

Cisterna

The 6615th Ranger Force (Provisional) was to land at Anzio before dawn on 22 January with the mission of seizing the city's port facilities and protecting them against sabotage; destroying nearby gun batteries; clearing the beach area between Anzio and Nettuno, a neighboring town; establishing and securing a beachhead; and tying in with the British 1st Division on the left and the 3d Infantry Division on the right. Upon contacting the 3d Division, Ranger Force would become attached to it.[7] All Allied forces landing at Anzio were part of Major General John P. Lucas' VI Corps.

The landing was the smoothest in which the Rangers had taken part. They landed when and where they were supposed to and met only two Germans, both of whom they killed. The other sectors of the beachhead were established with equal ease, for there were only two undermanned German coast-watching battalions to oppose the twenty-seven-battalion Allied force. The Germans, who had come from the Winter Line for rest and rehabilitation, were quickly overrun, and by midnight VI Corps had landed about 36,000 men and 3,200 vehicles and had taken 227 prisoners at a cost of 13 killed, 97 wounded, and 44 missing.[8] The landing was an unqualified success.

During the next few days, VI Corps cautiously expanded its beachhead, which grew to be seven miles deep and sixteen miles long by 24 January. Lucas, however, hesitated to make a decisive thrust inland and thus gave the Germans time to gather strength. When Generaloberst Eberhard von Mackensen assumed command of the beachhead defenses on 25 January, he had elements of eight divisions deployed and elements of five more on the way. Furthermore, Mackensen's mission was not defensive; he was to counterattack as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the Rangers aided in VI Corps' slow advance. By the morning of 25 January, they were nine miles inland; they would drive forward an additional two and a half miles by the morning of the 27th.

On 28 January, Clark urged Lucas to act more aggressively, and on the following day, VI Corps responded by publishing a field order outlining

a major attack.[9] There was a serious need for maintaining the Allied advance at this time. The purpose of the Anzio landing had been to threaten the rear of the Germans holding the Winter Line, forcing them to withdraw northward. This could be accomplished most effectively by seizing Highways 6 and 7, which led to Rome from the southeast and passed on either side of the 900-meter-high Alban Hills inland from Anzio. By the end of January, however, VI Corps had failed to reach the highways. If the Allies failed to break the German line, which was then on flat to rolling terrain, the Germans might withdraw to the Alban Hills. They would not only be more difficult to dislodge there but would still be able to control Highways 6 and 7 from the heights. The VI Corps attack was intended to shatter the Germans before they pulled back to the more defensible and strategic high ground.

The 3d Infantry Division, which was still commanded by General Truscott, issued its own field order in anticipation of VI Corps' order on 28 January. According to the division order, Ranger Force would cross the line of departure at 0100 on 30 January, move rapidly to Cisterna, and seize and hold the town until relieved. The 7th Infantry would operate on the left of Ranger Force, and the 15th Infantry would operate on the right. After seizing Cisterna, the 3d Infantry Division would prepare to continue the advance to take high ground near Cori and Velletri.[10]

The mission was acceptable to Darby, who did not believe an attack that size could fail.[11] The Rangers were relieved from their positions on line by the British during the morning of 29 January, and the battalion commanders met with Darby at 1800 that evening to discuss Ranger Force's field order.

The Force order, which was signed by Dammer and issued at Darby's command, was simple and reasonable. The 1st Ranger Battalion would cross the line of departure, which was a road running generally parallel to and about three and a half miles south of Highway 7, and move to Cisterna under coverage of darkness by way of previously reconnoitered routes. The terrain between the line of departure and Cisterna was flat farmland with little cover other than drainage ditches and scattered farm buildings. Because the Rangers would be vulnerable in the open country, they were to use the drainage ditches for concealment when possible and avoid enemy contact before reaching their objective. Upon arriving at Cisterna, the battalion was to enter the town, destroy the enemy in it, occupy the ground to the immediate northwest, and prepare to repel enemy counterattacks. At daylight, the battalion was to send a patrol to the northwest to contact the 7th Infantry.

The 3d Ranger Battalion would cross the line of departure fifteen minutes after the 1st Ranger Battalion cleared it and follow the 1st Rangers to Cisterna. If the enemy interfered with the 1st Ranger Battalion, the 3d Rangers were to engage them, thus freeing the 1st Rangers to continue their attack on Cisterna. The 3d Ranger Battalion would assist in the capture of Cisterna if necessary, occupy the ground immediately northeast of

town, and prepare to repel enemy counterattacks. At daylight, it was to send a patrol to the northeast to contact the 15th Infantry.

The 4th Ranger Battalion, with an eight-man minesweeping party attached, would cross the line of departure at 0200 and advance on Cisterna astride the Conca-Isola Bella-Cisterna road, clearing the road of mines and enemy. At Cisterna, it would become part of Ranger Force's reserve. The Cannon Company and a platoon of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion would be prepared to move on Cisterna by way of the Conca-Isola Bella-Cisterna road and furnish antitank protection for Ranger Force once in Cisterna. The 83d Chemical Battalion would assemble on the Conca-Isola Bella-Cisterna road and would be prepared to move forward to positions from which it could give fire support to the advanced units.[12]

The 3d Infantry Division G2 was optimistic and suggested that Ranger Force would accomplish its mission without undue difficulty. While there was still a healthy respect for the ability of the higher German commanders and the quality of training and discipline found at battalion and company levels, it was noted that the enemy had not recently shown the same tenacity or élan that he had in the past. This was evident from the frequent surrender of small enemy groups and the enemy's lack of aggressive patrolling and was attributed in part to the integration of Poles and other politically unreliable non-Germans into German units. As early as October 1943, a VI Corps G2 report had claimed that the number of Wehrmacht deserters appeared to be in proportion to the increasing percentage of non-German replacements. The VI Corps records also indicate that, by the end of November 1943, a German-Polish buddy system had been put into effect in some Wehrmacht units, with Germans and Poles occupying alternate foxholes in defensive positions.[13] The intelligence annex to the division field order concluded, "It does not now seem probable that the enemy will soon deliver a major counterattack involving units of division size; on the other hand, the enemy will probably resort to delaying action coupled with small-scale counterattacks in an effort to grind us to a standstill, as on the Cassino line."[14]

In spite of division's assurances, Darby's headquarters believed that enemy resistance at Cisterna might be "considerable."[15] The Rangers' appraisal was the more perceptive of the two. Members of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division had recently been taken prisoner in the Cisterna area.[16] In the past, the presence of that division in an area had indicated that the Germans were reinforcing or preparing to counterattack, but that lesson was now lost on higher headquarters.

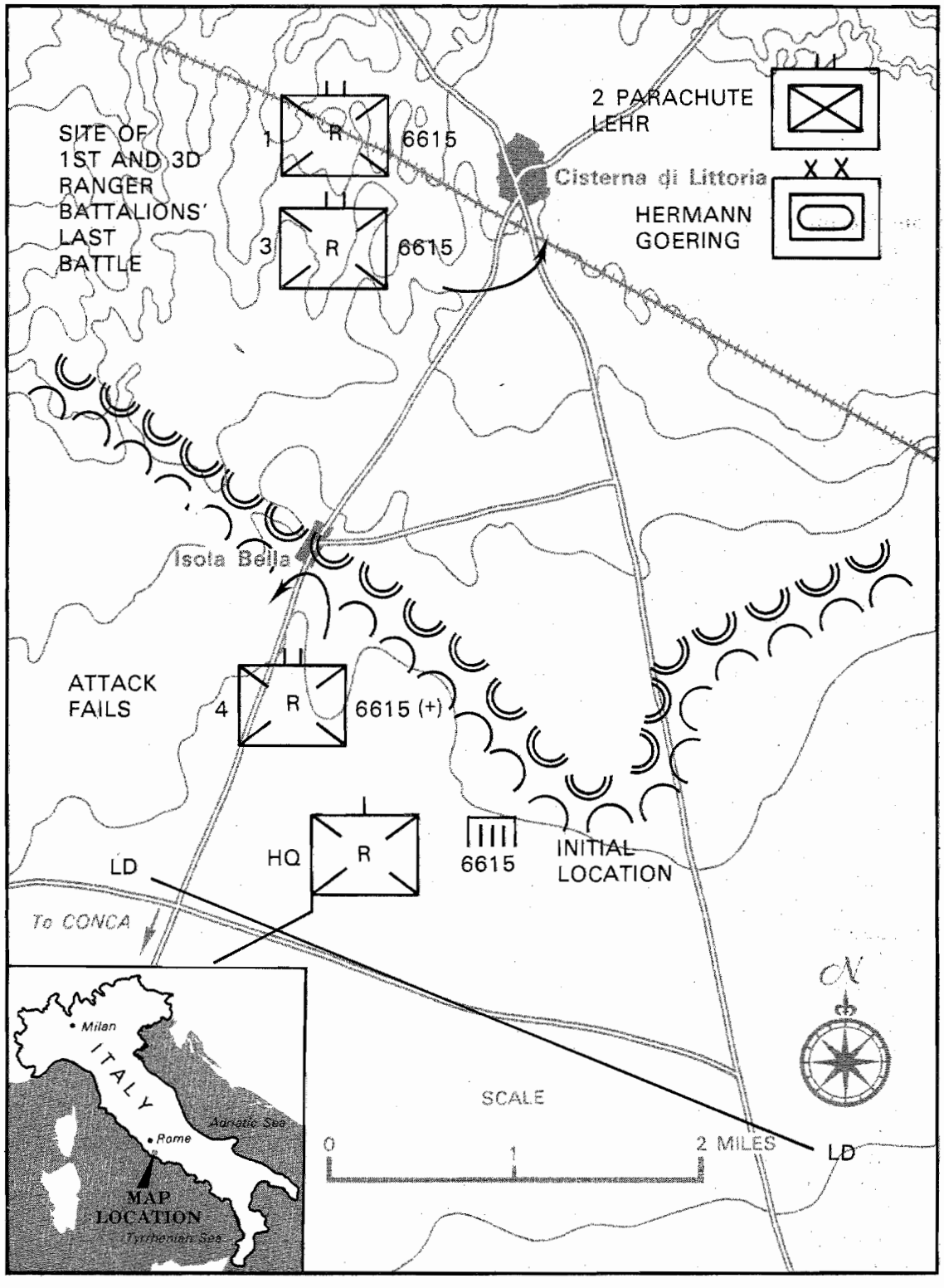
At 2315 on 30 January, Ranger Force began to move its command post forward from a location well behind the lines, and by 0215 the next morning, it had reached its new site, an isolated house near the line of departure and just to the right of the Conca-Isola Bella-Cisterna road.[17] Darby would direct the attack from the house and, as the battle progressed, from positions forward.

The 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions passed through the line of departure that night as planned and began to move toward Cisterna through a ditch that offered cover and concealment. At 0248, however, the first of several events took place that did not augur well for the mission. Four radio operators who were to have accompanied the 3d Ranger Battalion reported themselves lost to the Force command post. Darby, always conscious of the need for good communications, thought it "the god-damnedest thing" he had "ever heard of."[18] A second problem developed when the 3d Ranger Battalion lost contact with the 1st Rangers about halfway to the objective. Then, a half mile ahead, the 1st Ranger Battalion became split in two, with three companies continuing to advance and three remaining in place.[19] The dangers of conducting a night infiltration with so many relatively untrained and inexperienced men were becoming painfully evident.

Captain Charles Shunstrom took command of the 1st Ranger Battalion's three rear companies and sent a runner back to find the 3d Ranger Battalion. The runner returned with word that Major Alvah Miller, who had only recently been made the 3d Ranger Battalion commander, had been killed by a round from a German tank and that the battalion was moving forward to link up with the 1st Rangers. Although Miller's death demonstrated that the Germans were probably aware that something was afoot, there was no systematic attempt to stop the Rangers and no reason to believe that the Germans knew the scope or objective of the operation. On the contrary, the 1st Ranger Battalion appeared to be having continued success spearheading the operation. Although German patrols crossed in front and on both sides of the battalion, they did not appear to be aware of the Rangers' presence, and two groups of German sentries were surprised by the point and killed with knives. Lieutenant James G. Fowler, who led the point, personally killed two of the enemy. At about 0545, with the first light of day, the 1st Rangers passed close enough to an enemy artillery battery to hear the gunners' voices. They did not fire on the Germans but tried to radio Darby. They failed to make contact and continued to creep forward through some empty trenches until they reached a flat field on the southern edge of Cisterna.

The field was roughly triangular in shape, about a thousand yards long on each side, and surrounded and subdivided by roads and drainage ditches. The Rangers began running toward Cisterna in the hope of reaching it before the sun rose. When about six hundred yards outside the town, they passed through what seemed to be a German bivouac area and killed a large number of the surprised enemy with bayonets and knives. When they had run 400 yards farther and reached the edge of Cisterna, they were stopped by violent fire from the town. They returned fire from a position astride a road that paralleled an irrigation ditch. It did not provide much cover, but it was all the Rangers had. (See Map 3.)

The 3d Ranger Battalion and the three companies of the 1st Ranger Battalion that had been separated were able to get within 300 yards of the three lead companies before running into the Germans. After Ranger ba-



Map 3. Cisterna Operation, January 1944

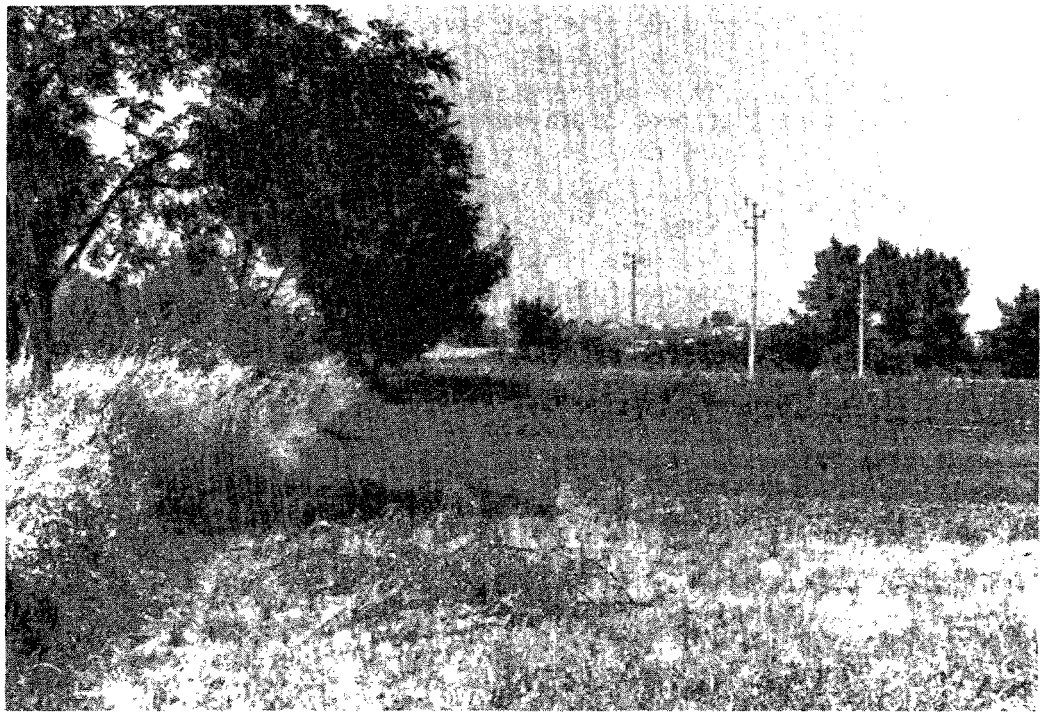
zookamen destroyed two tanks that had been blocking the way, Shunstrom went forward with a runner and two other men and made contact with Major Jack Dobson, who briefed him on the situation. Dobson, who was new to the Rangers, had been given command of the 1st Ranger Battalion by Darby shortly before Anzio.

The 4th Ranger Battalion began its attack up the Conca-Isola Bella-Cisterna road as scheduled but was stopped short of Isola Bella by fire from German tanks, self-propelled guns, automatic weapons, and small arms.[20] Cisterna was more strongly held than anyone had anticipated. Darby, who was gravely concerned about the virtually nonexistent communications he had with the two lead battalions and the difficult time the 4th Rangers were having, saw well the urgent need to break through the German roadblock. Indeed, the survival of the 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions depended on his doing so.

Although it was not fully realized at the time, the circumstances in which Darby found himself were the results of conscientious planning by the Germans and poor intelligence by the Americans. General Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the senior German commander in Italy, had correctly judged Lucas to be too cautious to move directly on the Alban Hills and had concentrated considerable strength in Cisterna in preparation for a counterattack that had been scheduled for 2 February. This counterattack continued to be unexpected by American intelligence, which had interpreted German intentions in the area to be "purely defensive."[21]

Kesselring, however, had correctly judged the probability of an American attack on Cisterna and took steps to blunt it. A German officer, who took part in the battle and was later captured, stated in his interrogation that Cisterna had been reinforced by elements of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division on the night of 29 January in anticipation of the attack.[22] Ironically, a young Pole named Stempkofski who had been serving in the Wehrmacht made a vain attempt to warn the Americans of the German preparations. He deserted to American troops and tried to tell them what was happening, but they evacuated him to the rear and his story was not known until after the battle when he was routinely interrogated at Fifth Army headquarters.[23] Also unknown to Darby was another fact—the Germans had detected the 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions as they moved northward about a mile south of the triangular field.[24]

The appearance of three German tanks to the 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions' rear while Dobson was briefing Shunstrom indicated to the Rangers that they were being surrounded. All three tanks were destroyed by rocket gunners, but automatic and small arms fire continued to tear through the Rangers, most of whom had gathered in an area about three hundred yards in diameter. German attempts to overrun the Rangers, and Ranger attempts to break out of the encirclement, were turned back with mutual ferocity. After two hours, the Rangers' ammunition began to run short, and three companies that were being held in reserve within the battalions' perimeter gave half their ammunition to the companies on line.[25]



Photograph taken by the author in 1977.

Looking northward toward Cisterna from the vicinity of Isola Bella. The shoulder of the Conca-Isola Bella-Cisterna road is to the immediate left, and the Alban Hills are faintly visible on the horizon. The 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions infiltrated toward their objective through the fields to the front and right and fought their last battle just short of Cisterna's houses, the rooftops of which are visible beyond the trees to the front. The virtual absence of concealment is evident in this photograph.

Meanwhile, the Germans grew in strength as the newly arrived 2d Parachute *Lehr* Battalion, which was regularly used to reinforce threatened sectors of the front, and armor, *Nebelwerfer,* flak wagons, and artillery firing at point-blank range brought their power to bear on the Rangers. The besieged Americans repeatedly called for help by radio, but what messages got through in spite of the Rangers' imperfect communications were sent in vain, because Darby and the rest of Ranger Force had been fought to a standstill south of Isola Bella.

Shortly after noon, enemy paratroopers supported by armored personnel carriers began marching about a dozen captured Rangers toward the center of the 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions' position in an attempt to force an American surrender. Ranger marksmen shot two German guards, but the Germans retaliated by bayoneting two of the prisoners and continued to march the rest forward. The same sequence was repeated a second time—two Germans were shot and two prisoners were bayoneted. This time, however, more Rangers surrendered. The Germans continued to march their captives, now numbering about eighty, toward the center of the Rangers'

position shouting that they would shoot the prisoners if the remaining Rangers did not surrender. For a third time, the surrounded Americans opened fire, but when several prisoners were accidentally killed along with one or two Germans, a few men "who were evidently new to combat got hysterical and started to leave their positions and surrender." They were ordered not to give up but continued to do so, and the piecemeal surrender continued. Even an attempt by the more determined Rangers "to stop" those who wished to surrender "by shooting them" failed.[26]

Calmer men disassembled their weapons and buried or scattered key parts before the Germans overran the area. Others destroyed radios after telling Darby what was happening. Robert Ehalt, sergeant major of the 1st Ranger Battalion, was the last man to speak to Darby by radio from Cisterna. He told him that the commander of the 1st Ranger Battalion had been wounded and the executive officer of the 3d Ranger Battalion killed. He himself had only five men left, and German tanks were closing in. "So long, Colonel," Ehalt concluded, "maybe when it's all over I'll see you again." Darby told Ehalt that he would never forget the surrounded men and would be with them till the end. Ehalt then destroyed his radio and continued to fight on for a while longer with the few men he had left before surrendering.[27]

Other painful dramas, much like Ehalt's, were played out in the triangular field as the heavily equipped Germans, using farmers' access roads for their armor, broke the Rangers into ever smaller groups and captured them or annihilated them in detail. By the end of the day, the 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions had ceased to exist. Only 6 of the 767 men who had infiltrated to Cisterna made their way back to friendly lines. All the others had been killed or captured.[28]

Commentary

While Darby was recovering from losing most of his command, his superiors were already beginning to avoid or obscure responsibility for the debacle. Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, commanding general of Fifth Army with overall responsibility for the landing at Anzio, had it entered in his diary that he was "distressed to find that the 3d (Infantry) Division had led with the Ranger force in its attack on Cisterna. This was a definite error in judgement for the Rangers do not have the support weapons to overcome the resistance indicated."[29] Out of fairness to Clark, he had not been involved in the detailed planning of the attack on Cisterna and did not know that the Rangers had been chosen to lead the way.[30] Indeed, he would have been violating the chain of command had he bypassed VI Corps' headquarters to tell a division commander how to plan an attack.

A report prepared by VI Corps' G1 professed that, had the attack on Cisterna succeeded, "it would have been a brilliant tactical move with far-reaching effects upon the operations in this area. Its failure was an incident of campaign contributed to by so many factors that it can be ascribed only to chance."[31] The G1 would have placed the blame more squarely if he had

laid it on poor intelligence. Although sufficient information had been collected to correctly determine the enemy's capabilities and probable course of action, they had been sorely misjudged.

Although poor intelligence was most important in determining the outcome of the battle, the Rangers contributed to their own end, though to an indefinite degree. While the Germans expected an attack on Cisterna, they had no definite knowledge of precisely when or where it would take place. This was learned during the infiltration phase, when the Germans discovered the Rangers' presence. In view of the difficulty the Rangers had practicing stealth while training at Pozzuoli Bay, their ability to successfully conduct an operation such as they attempted at Cisterna is open to question. That the Rangers surprised and overran bivouacking enemy just outside the objective was probably due to a breakdown in the Germans' communications and their consequent failure to inform all their troops that the Rangers were in the area.

However much or little it may have contributed to the outcome at Cisterna, the decline in the Rangers' combat skills was an unfortunate result of misusing the Rangers. From North Africa through Italy, the Rangers had been too frequently used as conventional infantry, and most of their casualties were suffered in those actions. As Ranger casualties were replaced with less well-trained men, Ranger Force's quality became diluted, the level of its combat skills declined, and unit cohesion weakened. This deterioration was evident throughout the battle.

Although Ranger Force failed to accomplish its mission at Cisterna, it contributed at suicidal cost to the eventual victory. The battle for Cisterna was sufficiently jarring to the Germans to force them to delay their plans two days. They did not launch their counterattack until 4 February (thus giving the Allies forty-eight extra hours to prepare) and then failed only by the narrowest of margins, reducing some American units to firing artillery over open sights and using clerks and cooks as riflemen. Had the attack on Cisterna not taken place and had the Germans been able to counterattack earlier, the outcome might have been different.

Subsequent Developments

Cisterna marked the beginning of the end of Ranger Force. The 4th Ranger Battalion helped turn back the German counterattack of 4 February, and on 19 February, those Rangers still surviving were temporarily attached to the Canadian-American 1st Special Service Force. Their experience was put to further good use in the spring when they were assigned to conduct a scouting and patrolling school for Fifth Army outside Civitavecchia, near Naples. Rangers of long standing were sent to Camp Butner, North Carolina, on 6 May and remained there until 24 October when the 1st, 3d, and 4th Ranger Battalions were inactivated. Those men who had joined the Rangers more recently and had not spent enough time overseas to justify being returned to the United States were absorbed into the 1st Special Service Force.

Darby briefly commanded the 179th Infantry during the German counterattack at Anzio and was assigned to the Operations Division of the War Department General Staff in Washington, D.C., in April 1944. While in Washington, Darby had a conversation with William Hutchinson that demonstrated, once again, his faith in firepower. He told Hutchinson that his experience with the 179th Infantry had impressed him with the might that could be brought against an enemy by a unit that was several times larger than Ranger Force and had direct access to the firepower of division artillery. With such an infantry unit trained in Ranger operations, Darby believed that he could do what he had done with the Rangers, but on a larger scale.[32]

Events, however, did not afford Darby the opportunity to test his theory. After spending a year in Washington, he became assistant division commander of the 10th Mountain Division then fighting in northern Italy. He was killed by a round from a German 88-mm gun in Torbole, Italy, on 30 April 1945, while visiting the front.

The timing of Darby's death was tragically ironic. The day before Darby was killed, Mussolini had been slain by Italian partisans in Milan and Generaloberst Heinrich Gottfried von Vietinghoff had agreed to surrender unconditionally all German forces in Italy effective at noon on 2 May. With further irony, on the day of Darby's death, his name appeared on a list of nominees for promotion to brigadier general being submitted to President Truman. On 2 May, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson recommended to the President that, in view of Darby's outstanding combat record, his name remain on the list and that he be promoted posthumously. Truman agreed and on 15 May 1945, slightly more than three months after his thirty-fourth birthday, Darby was promoted to brigadier general.[33] He was the only Army officer to be posthumously promoted to star rank during the war.

Zerf

5



General Background

The action fought by the 5th Ranger Battalion above Zerf, Germany, during 23—27 February 1945 was one of the most successful Ranger operations of World War II. Today, it is hardly remembered. Perhaps the pace of fighting at the time was too rapid and the scope of troop movements too grand to have permitted one undermanned light battalion to be singled out for recognition. Indeed, after-action reports of some American units directly involved in the operation ignore even the presence of the 5th Rangers in their areas. This fact not only provides an insight into the way in which Rangers were perceived by other units but may also explain why the events of those five days have all but passed from memory. Documentary references to the action are too meager and too widely spread to draw much attention. This has resulted in an unfortunate loss, for the story holds many lessons and deserves to be told.

The 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion was activated at Camp Forrest, Tennessee, on 1 September 1943.[1] It landed in Normandy on D-day and fought as conventional infantry during the reduction of Brest and elsewhere in France and in Germany. Like Darby's Ranger Force, the 5th Rangers suffered heavy losses of well-trained and experienced men in conventional combat. During the first five days of fighting in Normandy, it lost 23 killed, 89 wounded, and 2 missing. Fighting at Brest in September cost 24 killed, 111 wounded, and 2 missing. The first eighteen days of December cost an additional 18 killed, 106 wounded, and 5 missing.[2] In mid-February 1945, the badly weakened Rangers found themselves fighting as part of Major General Walton H. Walker's XX Corps, which was advancing on the Saar River south of Trier.

Zerf

On 22 February, XX Corps' 94th Infantry Division crossed the Saar in the Serrig and Taben areas and, during the following day, expanded its bridgeheads against light resistance by infantry, several local counterattacks, and artillery and mortar fire. Elements of the 10th Armored Division, which was also assigned to XX Corps, crossed at Ockfen during 22

and 23 February. In a move calculated to speed the expansion of the bridgeheads by encouraging a German withdrawal, Walker decided to have the 5th Ranger Battalion cut the main road leading from the German rear. As a result, the 5th Rangers and their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Richard P. Sullivan, would conduct one of their most important operations.

At 1200 on 23 February, the 5th Ranger Battalion was released from attachment to the 3d Cavalry Group, for which it had been conducting screening and reconnaissance missions, and attached to Major General Harry J. Malony's 94th Infantry Division. The Rangers' new mission required them to pass through the division bridgehead near Taben, infiltrate enemy lines, follow a generally northeasterly route for about three miles, and establish a blocking position across the Irsch-Zerf road.[3]

From Saarburg and the Saar, this road ran eastward across flat terrain for nearly two miles to Irsch. From Irsch, which lay at the intersection of four valleys, the road detoured south for nearly a mile, zigzagging up steep heights, and then turned eastward to continue its way to the Rangers' objective and beyond. This latter section of the road rose gradually for almost two and a quarter miles through open fields and was paralleled by slightly higher ground to the north and lower ground to the immediate south. After rising the nearly two and a quarter miles, the road debouched onto an almost treeless plateau and stretched eastward across open fields for slightly less than a mile until it disappeared over the horizon through a cleft in a wood line. From there, it went downhill for two miles to Zerf. The cleft in the wood line marked the site of the Rangers' planned blocking position.[4]

Except for the plateau that lay west of their objective, most of the Rangers' route would take them through the northern reaches of a forest known as the Waldgut Hundscheid. The forest, which stretched about nine miles from north to south, was marked by sharp hills and deep ravines. While the Waldgut Hundscheid offered a well-concealed avenue of approach, its apparent safety was illusory. In the manner characteristic of many German forests, it was crisscrossed by scores of trails that were seldom more than a few hundred yards apart. If enemy patrols were on the trails in any number, it would be difficult for the Rangers to reach their objective undetected.

The route the Rangers were to follow was peculiar in two regards. First, it required the battalion to penetrate the German defenses diagonally, rather than at a right angle, and then to move parallel to the battlefront once behind enemy lines. This resulted in a longer route than might appear necessary and, presumably, to a greater likelihood of discovery. Second, the Rangers were to go forward of friendly lines in the 94th Infantry Division's sector, but because their route would take them to the northeast, they would end up in front of Major General William H. H. Morris Jr.'s 10th Armored Division. Elements of that division would be responsible for relieving them.

In spite of the route's apparent peculiarities, it had a sound tactical basis. The German-held area east of Saarburg and the Saar was generally

well forested and was compartmentalized by steep hills and near-cliffs. The Saarburg-Zerf road was the best east-west road in the area. It was also a logical avenue of approach for an army entering Germany from Luxembourg and had been well-fortified with many well-sited pillboxes and bunkers, especially near Irsch. While it would be extremely difficult for the Rangers to penetrate such an obvious and densely fortified avenue of approach, they stood a better chance of infiltrating successfully through the less strongly defended Waldgut Hundscheid.

The 5th Ranger Battalion with Company B detached assembled in Weiten soon after it received its mission and drew extra machine-gun ammunition, antitank mines, and one K- and one D-ration per man. The Rangers then marched about two miles to Taben-Rodt, where Company B was located, and closed in on the town by 1815. German artillery fire, which had been causing the division difficulty throughout the day, was still falling on the town, and the Rangers suffered their first losses of the operation when two rounds landed on Company A and twenty-four men became casualties.

The battalion left for the river at 2000 and crossed it by footbridge near Taben under harassing artillery fire. No Rangers were hit during the crossing, and at 2230, the battalion assembled on the Hockerberg, a hill in the Waldgut Hundscheid, about a half mile northeast of the crossing site and still within American lines. There, it reformed and prepared to continue its march to the forward edge of the bridgehead. Several more men were wounded during the march when the Germans resumed their artillery fire.

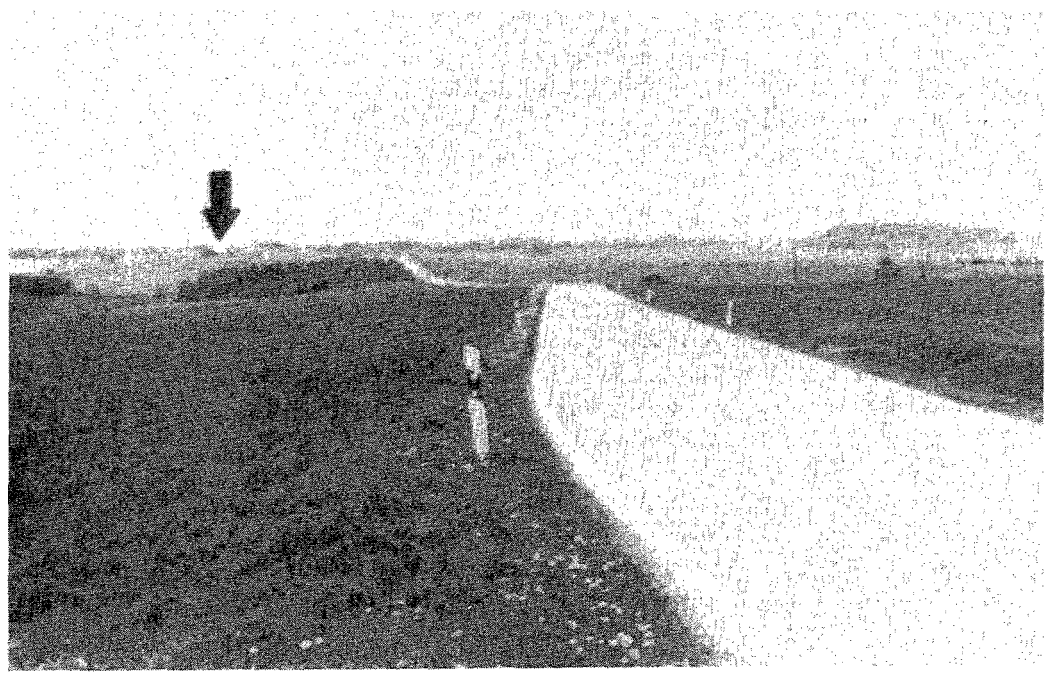
The battalion passed through American lines at 2345 and cautiously advanced toward its first checkpoint, an intersection of several trails in the forest about a mile and three quarters southwest of the objective. The leading companies received light rifle and machine-gun fire during the move in spite of the concealment provided by the night and the forest, and several more Rangers fell wounded. This was but the first of four minor clashes that would mark the infiltration phase of the operation. The fighting strength of the battalion was still further reduced at about 0145 on 24 February when two of Company B's platoons became separated. The battalion reached the checkpoint at 0630 and halted to wait for the two platoons to catch up.[5] Although battalion commander Sullivan could not have known it, the pause was a waste of valuable time. The two platoons would remain separated until the end of the operation and contribute nothing to its outcome.

A perimeter defense was established for security during the halt, and when a German patrol came upon the Rangers, a sharp firefight broke out and several enemy were captured. With their presence now definitely known to the Germans, the Rangers had to leave the area and sent a reconnaissance patrol to the northeast to find a safe way out. A presumably safe route was found by 0815, and the battalion immediately resumed its advance toward the objective, bringing its prisoners with it.

The Rangers took fire from small groups of Germans in spite of the earlier reconnaissance, and by 0930, they came within sight of the jagged

north edge of the Waldgut Hundscheid about a mile southwest of the objective. After a short conference, Sullivan ordered the Rangers to continue their move to the northeast. They had covered 500 more yards when Company D ran into strong resistance. Its commander, Captain George R. Miller, outflanked the Germans with one of his platoons and took several prisoners after a brief firefight. Two more Rangers, however, were wounded in the action.

The blocking position the Rangers were to occupy was in a narrow strip of woods that extended northward from the Waldgut Hundscheid and intersected with the Irsch-Zerf road. The point where the road passed through the woods was the previously described "cleft in the wood line" that marked the Rangers' objective. From where Miller's company had its firefight, it was possible to go all the way to the objective along a concealed route by marching east through the northern reaches of the Waldgut Hundscheid for one mile, and then heading due north for another mile. Sullivan decided to avoid the forested route and chose instead to head east under cover of darkness by crossing a half-mile-wide open area that lay slightly to the north. He had not had much luck avoiding Germans in the woods to this point, and the open route was shorter and would save time. It would also take him through a cluster of farmhouses and outbuildings that stood toward the middle of the open area, allowing him to clear them and better secure that part of his rear.



Photograph taken by the author in 1984.

View along the Irsch-Zerf road from the west, much as it appeared to Germans retreating toward Zerf. The cleft in the tree line (arrow), where the road passes through the woods, was the Rangers' objective.

Photograph taken by the author in 1984.



The Rangers' objective seen from the west. The Rangers established their blocking position in the woods to the south (right) of the road.

At dark, the battalion cautiously began to cross the open ground with Company A leading. In spite of the earlier clashes in the forest, the Germans had not yet responded systematically to the Rangers' presence, and many Germans did not know that they were there. Accordingly, a German artillery officer, a medical officer, and several enlisted men soon drove into the area in a medical staff car and were surprised and captured by Company A.

Continuing their advance across the open area, the Rangers checked the cluster of houses near its center and found them unocccupied. Most of the battalion had crossed and the final approach to the objective seemed to be going well when Company B, the last company to cross, came under machine-gun and rifle fire from the Kalfertshaus and a nearby pillbox. The Kalfertshaus, a medium-size farm dwelling, stood at the edge of the woods that led north to the objective and looked out toward the open area that the Rangers had crossed. A patrol that was sent to the building lost one killed. After the patrol rejoined the battalion, the Rangers outposted the houses in the open and, with the twenty-three prisoners they had taken thus far, prepared to spend the night just south of the objective.[6]

At 2340, while the Rangers were settling down for the night, XX Corps stepped up its drive eastward. Task Force (TF) Riley, an element of the 10th Armored Division's Combat Command (CC) B, passed through the 94th

Infantry Division, took Irsch, and began battling its way toward Zerf in the face of German infantry, *Panzerfäuste,* and antitank fire.[7]

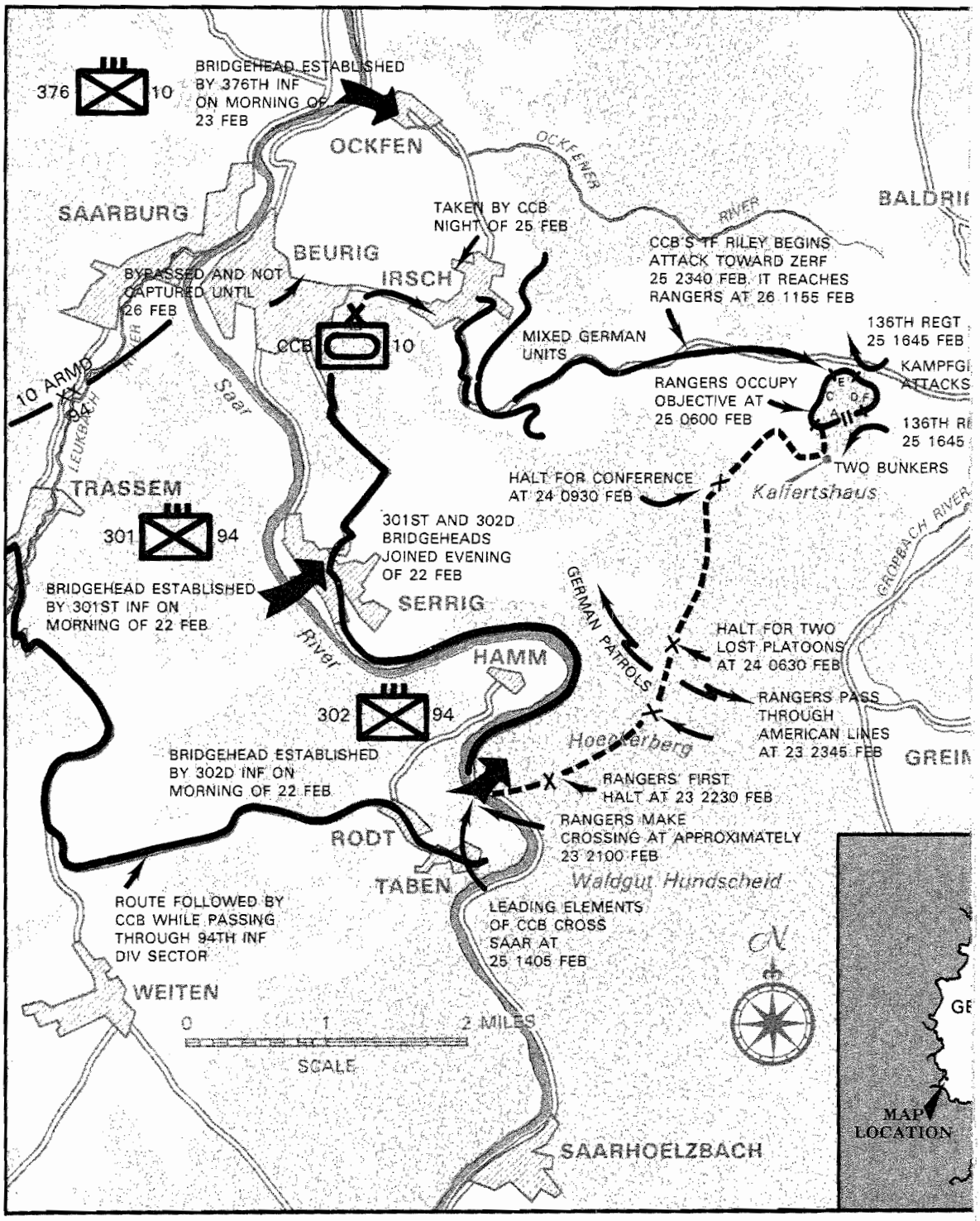
At 0600 on 25 February, the Rangers began their final push to clear the area of Germans and to take their objective. Encountering only light resistance, they captured several more prisoners and took two bunkers near the Kalfertshaus and some buildings several hundred yards farther to the north at the Waidmannslust. At 0830, Company E reached the battalion objective, and the Rangers had only to prepare and await the Germans.[8]

Possession of the site where the Rangers were about to establish themselves would prevent the Germans from using the Irsch-Zerf road, but it was a poor defensive position. The westward-facing wood line through which the road passed was about thirty yards behind the crest of a slight rise that paralleled the woods for most of its length, preventing troops using the trees as concealment from seeing more than thirty yards to their front. Furthermore, if the Germans chose to counterattack, they could use the woods immediately north and south of the blocking position as avenues of approach. The position could be defended most effectively toward the east. There the road descended toward Zerf through a wide, funnel-like draw that had open fields on both sides. If German vehicles came from Zerf, they would lack cover and concealment and have limited freedom of maneuver. Thus, the position was better suited for defense against Germans who were advancing from the east than those retreating from the west.

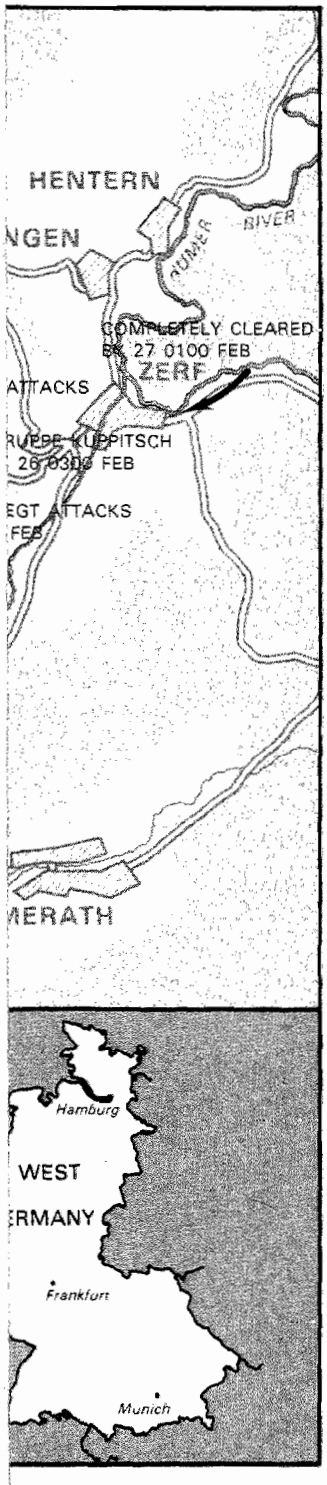
Sullivan made the best of the terrain and organized his battalion into a perimeter defense. Company E established itself on the north side of the perimeter and put antitank mines on the Irsch-Zerf road, which it then covered by fire. Companies D and F occupied the east side of the perimeter facing Zerf, and Company C took the west side. Company A set up on the south side near the Kalfertshaus to guard against Germans who might come out of the Waldgut Hundscheid. Company B, still missing its two lost platoons, guarded the prisoners in a barn near the center.

Given the crumbling state of their organization, many of the enemy were still unaware of the Rangers' location or intention. Thus, while preparing for German counterattacks, the Rangers had the opportunity to inflict casualties on unsuspecting enemy entering their area. Shortly after noon, Company E captured a tank destroyer on the road and destroyed it with rocket fire. A half-track was also knocked out when it lumbered onto one of Company E's antitank mines, and German walking-wounded who thought the road led to a secure rear were taken prisoner.[9] (See Map 4.)

The Germans did not react to the Rangers' presence in an organized way until about 1545, just fifteen minutes before TF Riley entered Zerf from the north.[10] They then brought the Rangers' position under artillery fire and attacked along the two routes that offered the greatest cover and concealment. Company A came under a severe artillery bombardment that was followed by an attack of about two hundred infantry who came through



Map 4. Zerf Operation, February 1945


HENTERN
NGEN
RUR R.
RIVER
COMPLETELY CLEARED
BY 27 0100 FEB
ZERF
ATTACKS
RUEBE KUPPITSCH
26 0300 FEB
EGT ATTACKS
FEB
MERATH
Hamburg
WEST
ERMANY
Frankfurt
Munich

the woods in the south from the direction of the Waldgut Hundscheid. Simultaneously, an estimated four hundred Germans attacked Company E from the northeast. Although the trees to the north and northeast were not as dense or extensive as those to the south, there was a slight rise on the north side of the road that gave the Germans cover and concealment during their approach to the Rangers' position. Both attacks failed, but the German pressure from the north made it necessary for a platoon from Company F to reinforce Company E. The commanding officer of Company B and sixteen men were then released from guarding prisoners and sent to fill the gap left by the Company F platoon.[11]

Eight enemy soldiers captured during the attack and interrogated by the Rangers were found to be from the 136th Regiment, 2d Mountain Division. The division had served in Poland, Norway, and Finland before being sent to the west in January 1945; later that month, it had suffered heavily in the Colmar Pocket, from which only 4,000 of its men had escaped. They had been ordered to continue attacking the Rangers "to the last man," but as most of them were Austrians and not wholly committed to the cause they were serving, many had preferred capture to death. Like many German units facing the Americans during the final few months of the war, the 136th Regiment was worn down and of less than the best quality.[12] By the end of the day, the Rangers held 135 prisoners.[13]

Although the Rangers were thus far successful in their mission, the firefights during infiltration and the defense of their position had forced them to expend much of their ammunition. An attempt was made to parachute ammunition to the Rangers at 1620, but German fire kept the resupply plane at 1,500 feet, and most of what it dropped fell outside the American perimeter.[14] If the operation lasted too long or was too hard fought, the Rangers could still lose.

The larger battle of which the Rangers' operation was a part was untidy and, on the German side, marked by great confusion. The XX Corps did not advance along a seamless front but with columns of armor and infantry shouldering their way forward through the Germans, who, singly and in groups, were forced to fight, flee, surrender, or die. TF Riley had already reached Zerf to the east, yet Germans continued to flee from the west. Sullivan's battalion added to the confusion and death of a retreating enemy by holding ground that controlled his route of withdrawal.

The Rangers improved their positions during the night while interdicting artillery fire fell on the Irsch-Zerf road, denying its use to the enemy. Darkness, however, gave no respite. At 0300 on 26 February, a German force that the Rangers estimated at four hundred attacked Company E, which still held the critical position facing the road.

The attackers were men of *Kampfgruppe* Kuppitsch. The *Kampfgruppe,* or provisional task force, was an improvised unit of three ninety-man companies that had recently been formed in Heidelberg under the command of

a Major Kuppitsch. It had no formal TOE and was composed of miscellaneous march companies, elements of convalescent companies, and new recruits. It was armed only with rifles and several machine guns.[15] The appearance of such ersatz units at the front was symptomatic of Germany's military exhaustion during the latter part of the war.

What *Kampfgruppe* Kuppitsch lacked in unit cohesion and training was compensated for by spirit and intense artillery and mortar support. Company E soon became hard pressed, and the Company A commander and twelve of his men had to rush to its aid. The Germans, accepting heavy losses, continued forward and drove the Rangers back 100 yards, retreating only when the Americans called artillery fire on their own overrun positions. About twenty-five Germans were taken prisoner during the fight, and fourteen Rangers were missing and believed captured.

Intense artillery fire fell on the Rangers during the rest of the night, but the morning of 26 February was quiet, and CCB, which was driving on Zerf from the west, reached the Rangers at 1155. Badly needed food, water, ammunition, and radio batteries were later brought to the battalion, and the wounded and seventy-five prisoners were evacuated. With the Rangers' most immediate needs met, CCB continued on its way to the east, leaving Sullivan's men on their objective. The Rangers remained in their blocking position throughout the night while harassing artillery fire fell among them.

The early hours of 27 February arrived with the dense ground fog common to many German mornings. At 0700, a group of about two hundred Germans who were apparently lost and could see no better than the Rangers noisily approached the Rangers' perimeter. The Rangers seized the opportunity to catch an unalert enemy in a hasty ambush and allowed the Germans to walk up to the American positions before opening fire. Many of the Germans were killed, cut down by sudden machine-gun fire. One hundred and forty-five of them, seeing no escape, threw down their weapons and surrendered.

The ambush in the fog was a rousing climax to a successful mission. The Rangers were given further reason to cheer at midday when they were joined by the two platoons that had been lost since the 24th. The two platoons had returned to American lines after they became separated, joined an armored unit, and fought alongside its tanks as conventional infantry during the drive on Zerf.

Occasional artillery fire fell on the reunited Rangers until midafternoon, inflicting the battle's final few casualties. At 1500, the 94th Infantry Division commander attached the battalion to the 501st Infantry, which was continuing the drive to the east.[16] Having successfully conducted the most authentic Ranger operation it would perform in the war, the 5th Ranger Battalion was sent to fight as conventional infantry. The pattern that had so often characterized the use of Darby's Rangers was holding true for Sullivan's Rangers as well.

Commentary

The 5th Ranger Battalion's mission above Zerf was appropriate to the Rangers' original purpose and was well conceived and successfully executed. However, the infiltration phase of the operation was less than perfect, as it was marked by the separation of two platoons and four skirmishes with the enemy. There are at least two reasons why these premature enemy contacts occurred.

First, the 5th Ranger Battalion, like Ranger Force prior to Cisterna, had suffered heavy losses earlier in conventional fighting. If the battalion's replacements were less well trained than its original members, as is likely, the average level of the battalion's combat skills would have declined as had that of Ranger Force at Pozzuoli Bay. Such a decline would have made it more difficult to conduct an infiltration without being detected and may explain the enemy's detection of the Rangers. The inevitable loss of unit cohesion that would result from the integration of replacements may explain the separation of two of Company B's platoons. During the Cisterna operation, the 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions, which had recently absorbed a large number of replacements, also temporarily lost contact with each other.

Second, the Rangers moved a long distance through an area where they had no detailed knowledge of enemy dispositions, and enemy patrols were active. Given this fact and the size of the American unit, the odds may have been against the Rangers being undetected no matter what the level of their combat skills.

Fortunately for the Rangers, the Germans near Zerf, like the Italians along the route to Porto Empedocle, were under American pressure and losing organizational cohesion. Consequently, contact with the Germans in one area of the front did not necessarily result in Germans elsewhere along the front being alerted to the Rangers' presence or mounting a coordinated effort against them. Furthermore, when the Germans did counterattack, they did not have the numbers or equipment that the Hermann Goering Division and 2d Parachute *Lehr* Battalion were able to mass against Ranger Force at Cisterna.

On the objective, the Rangers fought with diligence and stamina and skillfully used artillery fire to interdict German movement on the Irsch-Zerf road and to turn back German counterattacks. Although official records do not reveal the Rangers' plans for artillery support at Zerf, their unit files from defensive operations elsewhere contain an abundance of detailed overlays and fire plans that give evidence of a unit in which thorough tactical planning was routine. The timely and effective use of artillery support at Zerf was characteristic of the 5th Rangers.

At a cost of 90 Ranger casualties, the battalion had killed an estimated 299 enemy and taken 328 prisoners during the five days of the operation and contributed to the collapse of the enemy front west of Zerf.[17]

Subsequent Developments

The 5th Ranger Battalion performed conventional missions during the final two months of the war, seeing additional combat, guarding prisoners, and imposing military government in and near Bamberg, Erfurt, Jena, Gotha, and Weimar. The battalion was in Ried, Austria, when the Germans surrendered.

In eleven months of combat, the 5th Ranger Battalion had fought its way from Normandy to Austria, killed an estimated 1,572 enemy, and taken 4,541 prisoners. In doing so, it lost 115 killed, 552 wounded, 25 missing, and 2 known captured.[18]

Cabanatuan

6



General Background

The rescue of 511 American and Allied prisoners from a Japanese POW compound near Cabanatuan in the Philippines by elements of the 6th Ranger Battalion, reinforced by Alamo Scouts and Filipino guerrillas, was the most complex operation that Rangers conducted during World War II. It was also one of the most successful.

The 6th Ranger Battalion had its roots in the 98th Field Artillery Battalion. The 98th was activated at Ft. Lewis, Washington, in January 1941, and subsequently served in New Guinea. In April 1944, it was at Port Moresby as part of Sixth Army. Unknown to the 98th's men, events had already transpired that would lead to the unit's redesignation and reorganization.

In late 1943, Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, who had recently become commanding general of Sixth Army, created an elite force that he named the Alamo Scouts. The scouts were loosely patterned after the Navy's frogmen and conducted reconnaissance and other special missions behind enemy lines in teams usually composed of one officer and six enlisted men. They were extremely successful and within nine months won nineteen Silver Stars, eighteen Bronze Stars, and four Soldier's Medals without suffering any losses. Krueger was so favorably impressed with the scouts' effectiveness that he decided to create a bigger force to do on a large scale what the scouts had done on a small one. The new unit would be created from the 98th Field Artillery Battalion.[1]

Krueger selected Lieutenant Colonel Henry A. Mucci, an aggressive 1936 West Point graduate, to lead the soon-to-be-formed battalion. Mucci arrived in Port Moresby to assume command of the 98th in April 1944, and on 25 September, the unit was redesignated the 6th Ranger Infantry Battalion.[2] In the interim, Mucci put the men through a strenuous training program very similar to that which Darby's Rangers had undergone. He also encouraged all men who did not want to be Rangers to transfer to other units so the battalion would be manned exclusively by volunteers.[3]

The 6th Ranger Battalion was introduced to combat in the Philippines, where it successfully conducted several important operations. It landed on

the islands of Dinagat, Guiuan, and Homonhan on 17 October 1944, three days before the main American invasion, and destroyed radio facilities and other Japanese positions guarding the entrance to Leyte Gulf. Some minor security missions followed and on 10 January 1945, the day after Sixth Army landed on Luzon, the Rangers also landed, but only to spend most of the next two weeks as Krueger's headquarters guard.

Initial Japanese resistance on Luzon was relatively weak, and Sixth Army made very good headway during its drive eastward from Lingayen Gulf. Major General Oscar W. Griswold's XIV Corps, which included the 37th and 40th Infantry Divisions and formed Sixth Army's right, drove toward Tarlac, Clark Field, and San Fernando. Major General Innis P. Swift's I Corps, which included the 6th and 43d Infantry Divisions and formed Sixth Army's left, pushed northward into the mountains toward Baguio. After being reinforced by the 25th Infantry Division, I Corps continued to drive eastward through the Cabaruan Hills toward San Jose.

At about daybreak on 26 January, advance reconnaissance units of the 6th Infantry Division occupied Guimba and, within hours, established outposts nine miles farther to the east along the Licab River. They also took La Paz, farther to the south, thus establishing a solid front that was more than eighteen miles wide and had Licab at its center.

Cabanatuan

As Sixth Army entered central Luzon, Krueger began planning the liberation of American and Allied prisoners held in a compound at Pangatian, five miles east of Cabanatuan. Krueger had first learned of the existence of the camp when he landed on Lingayen Gulf and was met by a number of American officers who had remained in the Philippines since 1942 leading Filipino guerrillas against the Japanese. Army Major Robert Lapham, who had been conducting guerrilla operations in the northern part of Nueva Ecija province where the compound was located, was one of these officers. As Sixth Army entered Nueva Ecija province, Filipino runners constantly kept him informed of the situation at the camp.[4]

The compound would present an extremely difficult challenge to any prospective liberator. In addition to being behind enemy lines, it was in the mainstream of Japanese troop movements. Because of the rapid advance of American forces from the southwest, the Japanese were withdrawing toward the north and east along the Cabanatuan City-Baloc-San Jose and Cabanatuan City-Cabu-Rizal highways. They moved at night to avoid being seen by American aircraft and rested during the day in concealed areas and transit camps. The POW compound at Pangatian did double duty as a transit camp. Furthermore, Japanese tanks used the roads in the Pangatian area regularly, and there had been reports of dense Japanese troop concentrations in nearby Cabanatuan City and Cabu.[5]

The Japanese had already evacuated many of the prisoners, and Sixth Army headquarters feared that they might move the remainder to the northeast or kill them to prevent their liberation. If these possibilities were to be

averted, the Americans would first have to take the compound by surprise before their own main forces arrived in the area and then evacuate the prisoners to friendly lines before the Japanese could react. Krueger assigned this difficult mission to the 6th Ranger Battalion on the recommendation of his G2, Colonel Horton White.[6]

The force Mucci assembled for the operation consisted of himself; Company C, commanded by Captain Robert W. Prince; 2d Platoon, Company F, commanded by First Lieutenant John F. Murphy; two teams of Alamo Scouts; and four combat photographers from the 832d Signal Service Battalion. The Alamo Scouts would be an especially valuable asset, for both teams had worked together in freeing thirty-two Javanese civilians held by the Japanese at Moari, New Guinea, in October 1944. The mission had been a complete success; the prisoners were freed, the Japanese guards were annihilated, and no Scouts were lost. The total strength of Mucci's force was 8 officers and 120 enlisted men.[7]

Map and ground reconnaissance would be important during both the planning and execution phases of the operation. Mucci's men used aerial photographs in their planning, and every officer and enlisted man familiarized himself with the routes, rendezvous points, and the location of the objective. The Air Corps would provide air cover and send information gained during reconnaissance to Sixth Army. Army would then send the intelligence it developed to a forward base at Guimba, from which it would be relayed to the Rangers, who would carry an SCR 694 radio for the primary purpose of receiving it.[8]

The Alamo Scouts would also play a key role in the surveillance of the objective. Both scout teams would leave the Rangers' base camp at Calasiao on the afternoon of 27 January, march to a guerrilla headquarters at Guimba where they would be joined by native guides, and then go to Platero three miles north of the objective. They would contact local guerrillas there and keep the compound under surveillance to determine the number of Japanese troops, who the guards were, and what the guards' routines were. The scouts would then furnish that information to the Rangers when the latter arrived in the area.

The Rangers would move to Guimba, about seventy-five miles east of base camp, on 28 January and pick up an eighty-man guerrilla force and native guides at a nearby guerrilla camp. They would then march on a route chosen by local civilians and rendezvous with the Alamo Scouts and a second eighty-man guerrilla force at Balincarin, about five miles northeast of the objective, on 29 January. They would complete their plans there and, unless the situation had changed, conduct the operation that night.[9]

Following Mucci's instructions, the Rangers wore soft caps and fatigue uniforms with no insignias or badges of rank. Riflemen carried their choice of M-1 rifle or M-1 carbine; the weapons sections carried Browning automatic rifles, and most noncommissioned officers carried a Thompson submachine gun and a .45-caliber pistol. Mucci was armed with only a .45-caliber pistol, but most officers carried rifles in addition to their pistols.

Each medic was armed with a pistol and either a rifle or a carbine. Each man carried a trench knife and at least two bandoliers of ammunition and two hand or rifle grenades.[10]

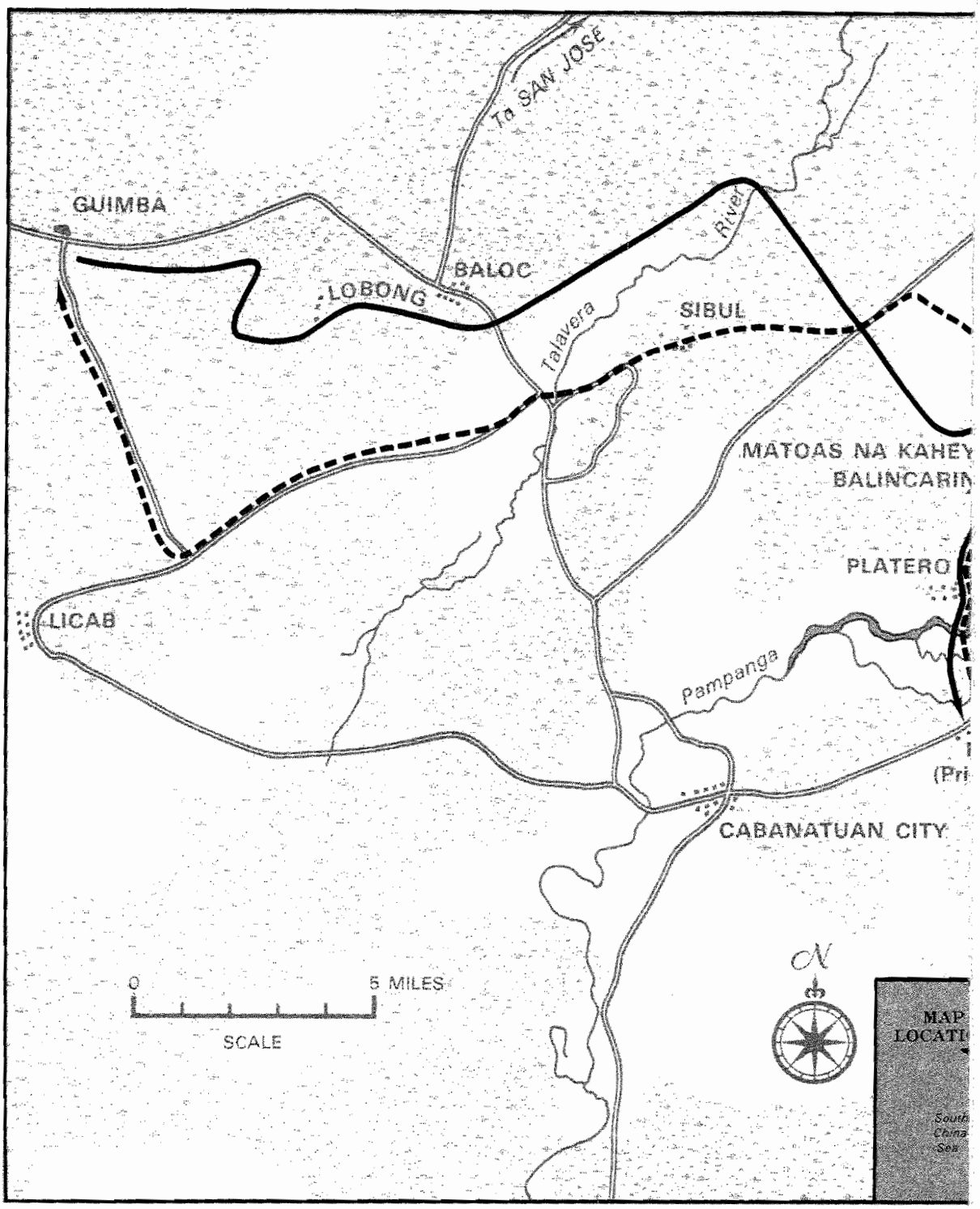
With its preliminary planning complete, Mucci's force left base camp by truck convoy at 0500 on 28 January, halted at Guimba, and left with native guides at 1400 to march to a guerrilla camp near Lobong about five miles to the southeast. Guerrilla Captain Eduardo Joson, who had worked with Major Lapham before the American return to the Philippines, joined the Rangers there with eighty men. Although the civilian population was overwhelmingly friendly toward Americans, Joson feared the possibility of a clash with Communist Huk guerrillas operating in the area and took necessary precautions. He left twenty armed men to guard the camp at Lobong and sent most of his guerrillas far out to Mucci's flanks to prevent the column from being ambushed.[11] The force then marched east.

Except for the area east of Lobong, which was heavily forested, much of the march was through open grasslands and rice paddies. The force crossed into enemy territory about a mile south of Baloc after dark, forded the Talavera River at midnight, crossed the Rizal highway at 0400 the following morning, and arrived at Balincarin at 0600.[12] The Rangers' detailed planning, thorough map reconnaissance, and guerrilla support proved effective; in spite of the frequent lack of concealment and the sighting of Japanese tanks on major roads, the force completed the fourteen-mile march from Lobong without incident.[13]

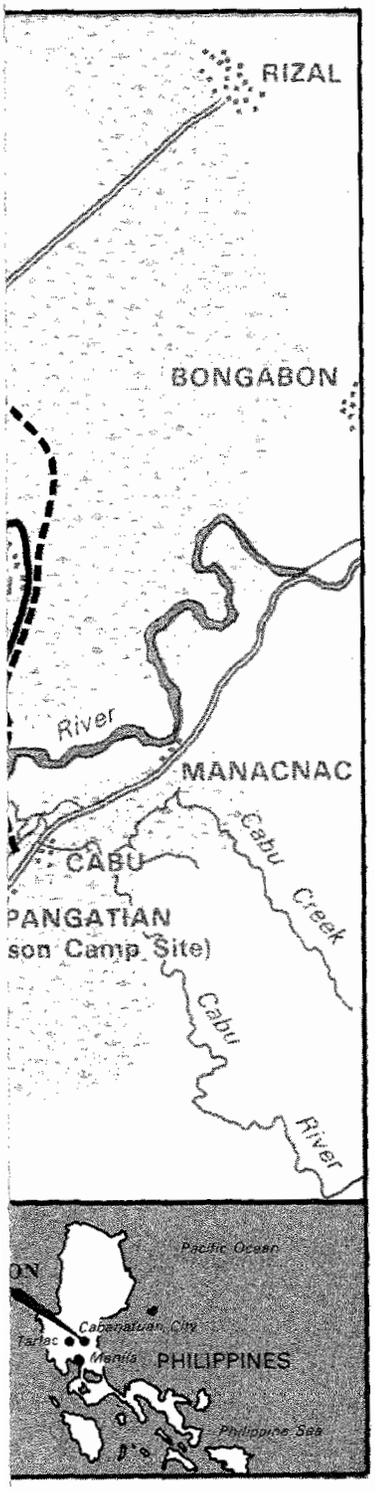
At Balincarin, the Rangers met Lieutenants Thomas Rounsaville and William Nellist of the Alamo Scouts and learned that the scouts were still gathering information the Rangers would need for their final plans. They were soon joined by guerrilla Captain Juan Pajota, who had worked with Major Lapham and was the guerrilla area commander at Cabu, and his force of approximately 90 armed and 160 unarmed men.[14] (See Map 5.)

Rounsaville, Nellist, and Pajota all told of large numbers of Japanese troops in the area. The highway in front of the camp had been heavily traveled by withdrawing Japanese during the previous twenty-four hours and two to three hundred enemy were bivouacked on Cabu Creek, a mile north of the compound. Pajota's men also reported that at least one Japanese division was at Cabanatuan City less than four miles to the south.[15] The number of Japanese in the area convinced Mucci that a delay in the operation would be prudent, and he decided to postpone the raid for twenty-four hours.[16]

Although the available information did not permit Mucci to complete his plan, the Rangers and guerrillas did what they could with the information they had to assure the success of the mission. Prince and Pajota arranged to have the guerrillas provide all-around security, assemble a carabao-cart train large enough to carry 200 liberated POWs, and prepare food for 650 men along the return route. The guerrillas instructed the civilians north of the Cabanatuan City-Cabu highway to remain in the area



Map 5. Cabanatuan Operation: Routes to and from the Objective, January 1945


RIZAL
BONGABON
River
MANACNAC
Cabu Creek
CABU
PANGATIAN
son Camp Site)
Cabu
River
Pacific Ocean
Cabanatuan City
Tarlac
Manila
PHILIPPINES
Philippine Sea

but to detain outsiders who might enter it until after the prisoners were freed. The guerrillas also told them to pen all chickens and tie and muzzle all dogs so the animals would remain silent while Mucci's column passed through the area. Civilians in the vicinity of the objective were told to leave for the sake of their safety but to do so gradually in order not to alert the Japanese.[17]

Mucci's force, flanked by Joson's and Pajota's guerrillas, left Balincarin for Platero about two and one-half miles to the south shortly after 1600. When it was about halfway to Platero, the force was joined by Alamo Scouts who updated Mucci's knowledge of the situation. The scouts verified what Rounsaville, Nellist, and Pajota had already stated but added that a new Japanese force of about division strength was heading toward Bongabon from the southwest.[18] The news that even more Japanese were in the area confirmed the wisdom of Mucci's decision to delay the operation.

The Rangers entered Platero at dusk and were met by the town's inhabitants, who greeted them with a choral welcome and a sumptuous meal. While most of the column was resting, planning and reconnaissance continued. Mucci's officers and noncommissioned officers worked with Filipinos to convert a one-story wooden building into an emergency hospital while the Alamo Scouts and guerrillas completed their reconnaissance, verified maps and aerial photographs, and selected provisional firing positions.

The new information they gained was highly detailed and made precise final planning possible. They determined that the stockade was on the south side of the Cabanatuan City-Cabu highway, measured 600 by 800 yards, and was enclosed by three barbed wire fences about four feet apart and six to eight feet high. Other less formidable barbed wire fences divided the camp into several compartments. The main entrance was barred by an eight-foot-high gate secured with a heavy lock and was guarded by one sentry who stood in a well-protected shelter. There were also three occupied twelve-foot-high guard towers and one pillbox that was occupied by four heavily armed men. One building inside the compound was believed to contain four tanks and two trucks.

Although only seventy-three Japanese were on guard at the stockade, about one hundred and fifty additional troops had entered the compound at 1100, apparently to rest. The large Japanese force that had been at the stockade the day before had left early on the morning of the 30th, and traffic on the nearby highway was light. The nearest outside threat to the success of the mission was a force of about eight hundred Japanese with tanks and trucks at Cabu. The prisoners were housed in buildings in the northwest corner of the compound, and activity in the camp appeared to be normal.[19]

With the reconnaissance complete and conditions favorable, Mucci confirmed his decision to attack at dusk. The men were thoroughly briefed, and each man was assigned a mission and instructed on his responsibilities. Mucci considered surprise essential and told his men to make every

effort to gain it. The plan was logical and provided for the methodical accomplishment of the mission.

Captain Joson's guerrillas were to establish a roadblock on the main highway and 800 yards southwest of the compound to stop any Japanese who might come out of Cabanatuan City. A six-man bazooka team under Staff Sergeant James O. White of 2d Platoon, Company F, would give the guerrillas antitank protection. Captain Pajota's guerrillas were to establish a roadblock at the highway bridge over Cabu Creek 300 yards northeast of the compound and stop any Japanese who might come out of Cabu. The guerrillas were also to cut the phone lines linking the camp to the outside just prior to the attack.

On Pajota's recommendation, an American airplane would buzz the compound just prior to the attack. The guerrillas had noted that the camp guards kept their eyes skyward when American aircraft were in the area, and Pajota believed that a well-timed overflight would distract Japanese from the Rangers as they crept forward.

The 2d Platoon, Company F, was to eliminate the guards at the rear entrance of the stockade and prevent Japanese from moving into the area of the compound occupied by the prisoners. Six men from the platoon were also detailed to destroy the pillbox at the northeast corner of the stockade.

The 1st Platoon, Company C, led by First Lieutenant William J. O'Connell, was to force the front gate of the compound open and kill Japanese in several known locations. In particular, 1st Section, led by Staff Sergeant Preston N. Jensen, was to attack across the highway, kill the guards at the gate and in nearby guardhouses, and gain entrance to the compound. The 2d Section, led by Sergeant Homer E. Britzius, was to cross the highway to the right of 1st Section and support 1st Section's action by firing at enemy positions through the fence. Weapons Section, led by Staff Sergeant Manton P. Stewart, was to follow 1st Section through the gate and then move to the right of 1st Section and advance to destroy with bazooka fire the building housing the tanks and trucks. The 2d Section was to lift its fire as Weapons Section went in, and then pass through the gate and move to the right edge of the stockade to prevent Japanese from escaping.

The 2d Platoon, Company C, led by First Lieutenant Melville H. Schmidt, was to follow 1st Platoon into the compound, open the prisoners' section of the camp, and begin evacuating them while providing its own close fire support. In particular, 1st Section, led by Staff Sergeant Clifton Harris, was to enter the compound after 1st Platoon, force the entrance to the prisoners' enclosure, and fire on the pillbox under attack by 2d Platoon, Company F. The 2d Section, led by Staff Sergeant William R. Butler, was to follow 1st Section in and then go to the right flank of the prisoners' enclosure to prevent Japanese from entering it. Weapons Section, led by Staff Sergeant August T. Stern, Jr., was to remain in reserve at the beginning of the attack and then direct the prisoners through the main gate and start them on the march north.

When all prisoners were clear of the compound and on their way to friendly lines, Captain Prince was to signal the Rangers to withdraw by firing a red flare from the rear of the column. When the column was at least a mile from the camp, Prince would signal the guerrillas manning the roadblocks to withdraw by firing a second flare. After withdrawing, the guerrillas would provide rear and flank security for the column.[20]

The Alamo Scouts kept the stockade under continuous surveillance immediately prior to the attack. Civilian runners maintained communication between the scouts and the main body at Platero and carried periodic intelligence reports to Mucci, who was thus kept informed of the situation at the objective.

Mucci, his Rangers, and their Filipino and American attachments left Platero for the objective at 1700 on 30 January. The entire force under Mucci's command numbered nearly 375. Only a radio crew, which was to maintain communication between the Rangers and higher headquarters, had been left behind in Platero where several armed villagers provided security. Unknown to Mucci, Pajota had already sent an additional 400 guerrillas ahead. Pajota had not told the Americans about these men or about their four water-cooled .30-caliber machine guns because he wanted to use them as he thought best without having to discuss the matter with Mucci. Half the men, Squadrons 200 and 202, were to form a reserve near Joson's roadblock. The other half, Squadrons 201A and 204, were to position themselves near Manacnac on the enemy side of Cabu Creek. This latter group was to attack the Japanese from behind if they threatened to cross the Cabu before the Rangers had completed their mission.[21]

On the first leg of its march to the objective, the column advanced along a well-concealed, narrow dirt trail that cut through tall grass and bamboo. After marching a half mile, the force reached the Pampanga River and split into three elements. Pajota and Joson led their men across the river and headed toward their blocking positions, while Mucci led the main body across the river and toward the compound. Although Mucci's aerial photograph showed only short grass, rice paddies, and shallow ponds covering the two miles between the river and the objective, high grass covered almost half the distance and gave the Rangers concealment to within about a mile of the compound. It was 1800 and twilight when Mucci's force reached the far side of the grassy area. Stretching before them to the south for more than a mile lay a treeless, shrubless plain of rice paddies and ponds. Only a single nipa hut a mile ahead broke the flatness of the horizon.

The 2d Platoon, Company F, which was to kill the guards at the rear of the stockade, split off from the main body and headed east under its platoon leader, First Lieutenant John F. Murphy. After marching about a half mile, it dropped down into a streambed that it would follow to the east fence of the compound.

The 1st and 2d Platoons of Company C, led by Company Commander Prince, continued forward another 500 yards before they saw the stockade's

guard towers on the horizon. Assuming that if they could see the Japanese, the Japanese could see them, the Rangers dropped to the ground and began crawling toward the compound. It was a mile away, and the Rangers would have to crawl for seventy-five minutes to reach it.

While the Rangers were closing on the objective, the guerrillas were preparing their roadblocks. Pajota's force, strengthened by the men and machine guns he had not told Mucci about, covered the highway, the bridge over Cabu Creek, and other likely river-crossing sites. The extra men proved useful for it was the dry season, the creek was low, and the Japanese would probably be able to cross the Cabu in many places. Happily for Pajota, the Japanese had not posted guards at the Cabu, and the Filipinos were able to prepare their positions in relative security. Some of the guerrillas crossed to the far side of the creek to lie in ambush while others planted a time bomb under the far end of the bridge. The time bomb, which was one of several delivered by an American submarine, was set to detonate between 1940 and 1950 hours. Mucci had scheduled the attack on the compound to begin shortly after 1930, and Pajota set the bomb with the hope of destroying Japanese who might try to cross the bridge to aid the compound's garrison.

At 1840, three-quarters of an hour before the attack was to begin, a single P61 Black Widow from the 547th Night Fighter Squadron approached the objective area as planned. It flew over the bridge and prison compound twice at an altitude of 200 feet, scaring and distracting the Japanese before it left to search for enemy troops who might be on the roads leading to the compound.

Twenty-five minutes after the P61 left, Prince, the 1st and 2d Platoons of Company C, the combat photographers, medics, several guerrillas, and Alamo Scouts completed their mile-long crawl and arrived at a drainage ditch across the highway from the main gate of the stockade. There, they were in position to attack.

While Prince's element waited in its assault positions, First Lieutenant John F. Murphy and 2d Platoon, Company F, crept under the highway through a large culvert and advanced toward the back of the compound through a five-foot-deep ditch that ran parallel to and fifty yards outside the compound's east fence. As the Rangers passed the guard tower at the northeast corner of the compound, a sentry in the tower raised his rifle and looked toward the ditch as though alerted to the Americans' presence but soon lowered his weapon, apparently convinced that nothing was there. The Rangers then continued forward undetected, positioning men opposite the guard towers and pillboxes they were to bring under fire. Murphy and the last Rangers to go into position arrived near the rear gate at 1925.

Because Murphy's element had the greatest distance to go to reach its assault positions and would arrive there after the rest of the force was in place, Mucci chose him to give the signal to begin the attack. Murphy's Rangers were in position and ready to attack at 1930, but Murphy wanted to be certain that they were completely prepared and their positions were

secure. He thus sent several men to retrace the route the platoon had followed while getting in place, inspect the squad positions, and check nearby buildings to ensure that they were not occupied. These precautions delayed the attack fifteen minutes, but Murphy would be sure that his men were ready.

The moonlight was bright, and the Rangers were able to select their targets while waiting for Murphy's signal. Some aimed at the red glow of cigarettes they saw in the shadows, while others aimed at men relaxing in their underwear inside still-lit barracks. The 150 enemy who were passing the night in the compound and were supposed to leave the following morning were a headquarters unit. The seventy-three guards were a polyglot assortment of Japanese, Koreans, and Formosans. They were not a match for the well-trained and highly motivated Rangers.

At 1945, Murphy aimed his M-1 rifle at an open window in the nearest barrack and fired. His shot was the signal to begin the attack. Superior leadership, training, combat intelligence, and planning prevailed in the brief encounter that followed. (See Map 6.)

When Murphy gave the signal to start the attack, Company F began throwing hand grenades and firing carbines, rifles, automatic weapons, and rifle grenades into the compound from outside the east fence. The Rangers concentrated their fire on pillboxes, guard towers, and Japanese who were unfortunate enough to be exposed.

Company C, which had been in position opposite the front of the compound, also began firing on Murphy's signal. The men gave special attention to a waist-high concrete shelter and guard tower at the main entrance and to a nearby guard shack. A lone enemy soldier who was standing guard in the shelter when the attack began became the initial target of much of the company, and Staff Sergeant James V. Mellican saw the upper half of the man disintegrate in the Rangers' concentrated fire. All guard towers, guard shacks, and pillboxes were neutralized within thirty seconds after Murphy fired the first shot.

The Rangers then stormed the compound. Staff Sergeant Theodore R. Richardson of Company C charged across the highway to the compound's main gate and shattered the lock with a shot from his .45-caliber pistol. Two Japanese who tried to prevent the Americans from entering were killed by Richardson and Private First Class Leland A. Provencher.

With the gate open, Staff Sergeant Preston N. Jensen and 1st Section, 1st Platoon, rushed into the camp. To Jensen's right, Sergeant Homer E. Britzius and 2d Section dashed across the highway and gave 1st Section covering fire through the fence. Staff Sergeant Manton P. Stewart's Weapons Section followed 1st Section through the gate and ran 300 yards to the central part of the camp where it destroyed two trucks and a corrugated-metal tank shed with bazooka fire. The assault was proceeding as planned and no American casualties had yet been suffered.

While the Rangers were attacking the compound, Pajota was fighting his own battle at the bridge. When the Filipinos heard Company F's opening shots, they began firing on a Japanese battalion in bivouac less than 300 yards beyond Cabu Creek. The stunned Japanese counterattacked the Filipinos repeatedly in piecemeal fashion, suffering heavy casualties, but were unable to gain ground. Pajota's time bomb blew a gap in the bridge, and his four machine guns killed many Japanese who tried to jump to the Filipino's side of the bridge or cross the creek where it was shallow. Bazookamen with Pajota also put two Japanese tanks and one truck out of action.

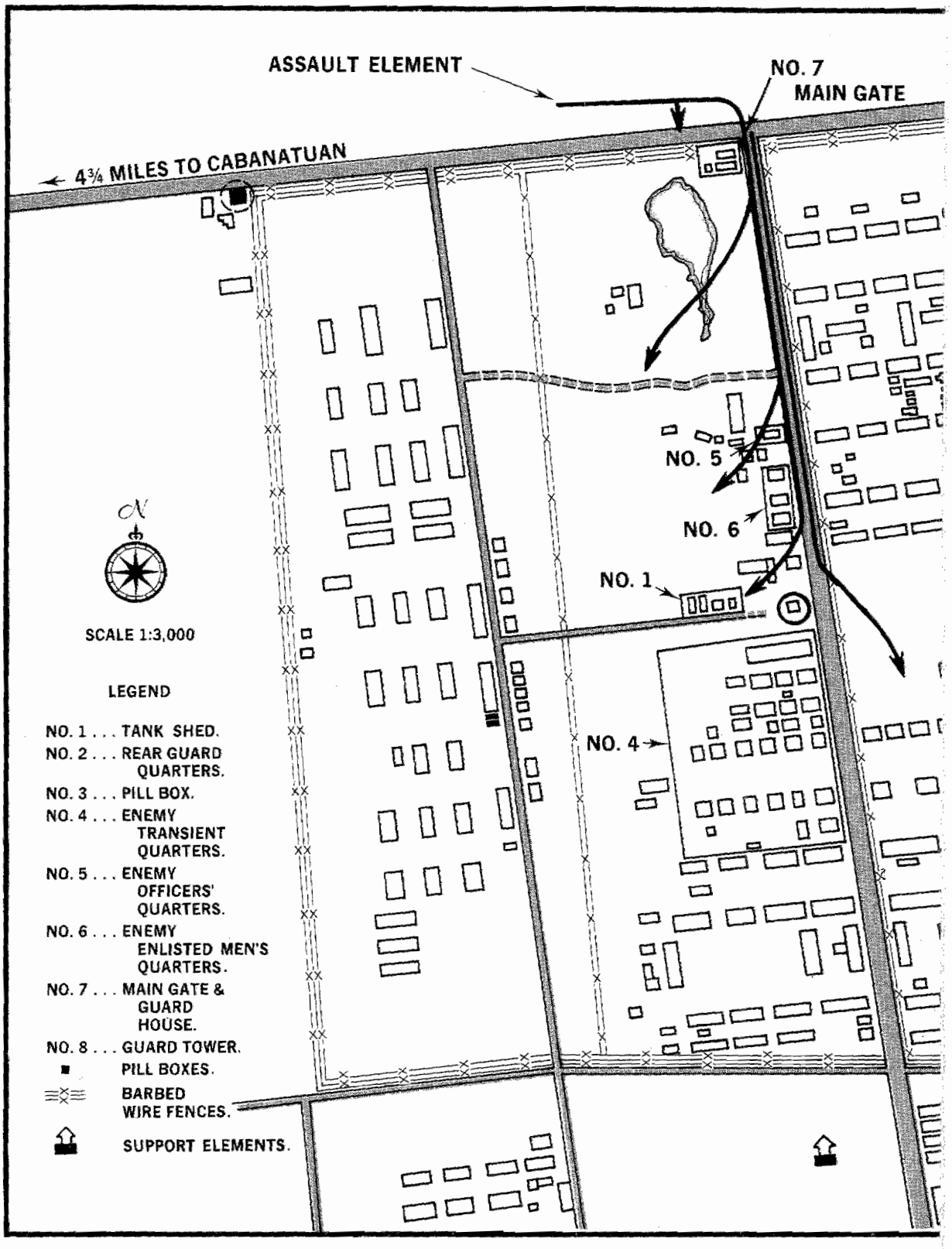
Several minutes after the raid began, Private First Class Leland A. Provencher of 1st Platoon, Company C, liberated the first POW. He was an American generator operator who was temporarily away from his fellow captives. The rest of the prisoners would be freed by 2d Platoon, Company C, led by First Lieutenant Melville Schmidt.

The 2d Platoon, Company C, performed its mission smoothly and as planned. The platoon's 2d Section, led by Staff Sergeant William Butler, charged up the compound's central road and joined 1st Platoon in firing to the right and rear into the Japanese-occupied southwest area of the stockade. The 1st Section, led by Staff Sergeant Clifton Harris, stopped short of 2d Section and turned left to the prisoners' area of the compound, which it entered after shooting the gate's lock off.

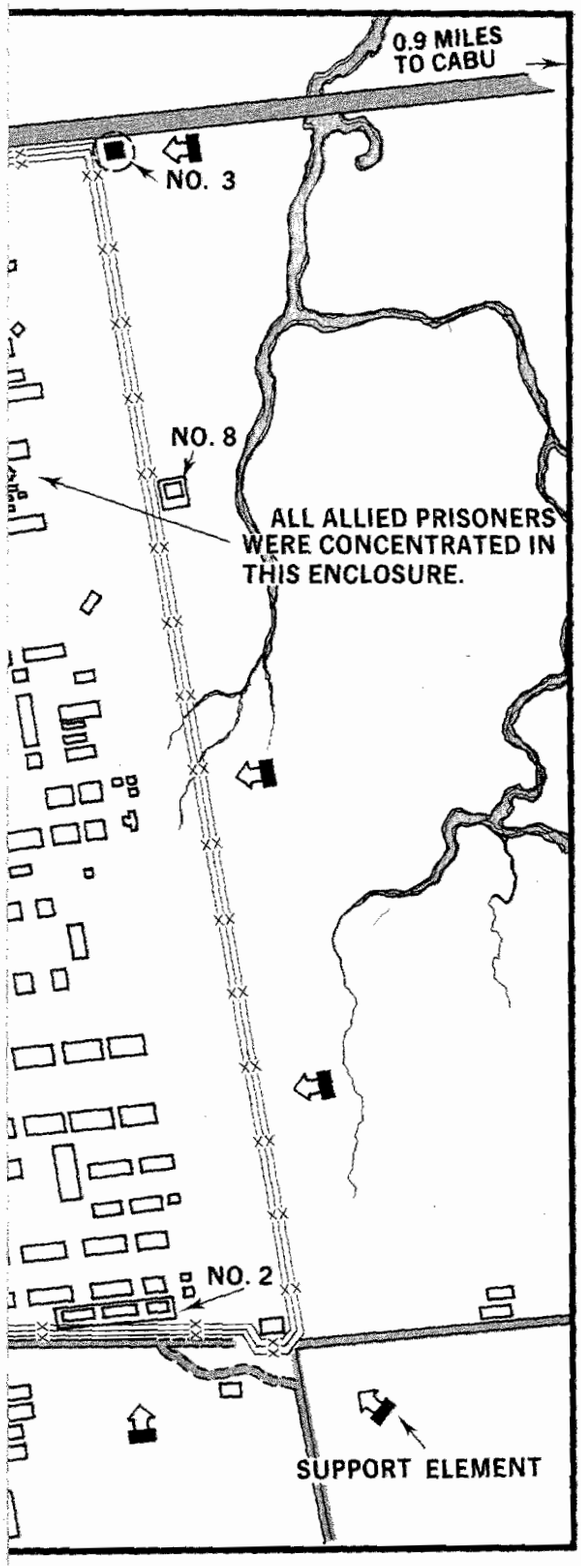
What little enemy resistance still remained twelve minutes after the attack began dwindled to a few scattered shots, and the Rangers began leading the first POWs from the compound. Unfortunately, during this phase of the operation, the Rangers suffered their first casualties when a Japanese light mortar fired three rounds toward the front gate and wounded six men. Alamo Scout Rounsaville and battalion surgeon Captain James C. Fisher were among the casualties. Fisher would die before he reached friendly lines.

The Japanese continued to attack Pajota's positions during the evacuation of the compound but remained unable to gain ground or inflict casualties on the Filipinos. Joson's roadblock, in contrast, was not attacked. Any likelihood that it would be attacked ended shortly after 2000 when one of the P61s assigned to provide air cover for the operation strafed and destroyed a Japanese convoy that was heading from San Jose toward Cabanatuan City and the roadblock.

At 2015, a half hour into the raid, Prince completed his second search of the POW's area of the compound to ensure that no prisoners were being left behind. When he was satisfied that the area was cleared, he fired one red flare into the sky to begin the withdrawal. Unknown to Prince or anyone else, however, one dysentery-weakened British civilian prisoner had hidden in the latrine at the sound of the first shots and never came out. He would be discovered near the camp after midnight by Filipino guerrillas and rescued. Tragically, one POW had died of an apparent heart attack while being helped out of the compound.



Map 6. Cabanatuan Operation: Actions at the Objective, January 1945


0.9 MILES
TO CABU
NO. 3
NO. 8
ALL ALLIED PRISONERS
WERE CONCENTRATED IN
THIS ENCLOSURE.
NO. 2
SUPPORT ELEMENT

Six men from Company F were the last Americans to withdraw from the objective, and as they did so, the Japanese brought them under fire. The six were trotting along the outside of the compound fence toward the highway when they began receiving scattered rifle shots. Some of the Rangers fired back, while others dashed through the moonlight toward the drainage ditch they had come through during their approach. When Corporal Roy Sweezy turned to fire his M-1 at the Japanese, he was shot through the chest with an automatic weapon and died several minutes later. He and the fatally wounded Captain Fisher were the only Rangers to die in the operation.

Most of the Rangers and liberated POWs were at or approaching the Pampanga River by 2030, forty-five minutes after the raid began. All men except those who were at the roadblocks or on other security missions were across the river by 2045, and Prince fired the flare to signal Joson and Pajota to withdraw. Joson withdrew immediately, sending half his men to provide security around Platero, the first barrio Mucci's column would pass through on its march to friendly lines. The other half of Joson's men would provide flank security for the column when it left Platero. Pajota was unable to withdraw when Prince gave the signal because his men were still battling the Japanese on Cabu Creek. Pajota's fight continued until shortly after 2200 when the exhausted Japanese ended their attack. His guerrillas had virtually destroyed a Japanese battalion without suffering any fatalities or serious wounds. They then withdrew by marching around the battlefield in a southeasterly direction and established themselves as a rear guard on the Pampanga to protect Mucci's column from pursuit.

As successful as the infiltration and raid had been, the Rangers' mission would not be fully accomplished until they safely brought the liberated POWs to friendly lines. All means were taken to assure their safe deliverance. Carabao carts that had been requisitioned from local civilians were awaiting the POWs on the south bank of the Pampanga River. The column's first stop was in Platero, where it reorganized and ate. There, guerrilla doctor Carlos Layug treated the sick and wounded. Food and water were provided by local people, and the hospitality and concern the Filipinos displayed in Platero would be shown again by other civilians in other barrios during the remainder of the return march. Those ex-POWs who were able to walk went under Ranger escort to Balincarin as soon as they could be assembled. The first of them left Platero at 2100.

When the column reached Balincarin, it received more food and water from local people, as well as fifteen carabao carts to add to the twenty-five it already had.[22] Captain Fisher was left in Balincarin with thirteen Alamo Scouts and Rangers and some guerrillas, and a light aircraft was requested to evacuate them. The aircraft would never arrive, and Fisher would die about the time the main column reached friendly lines.[23]

The column left for the next barrio, Matoas Na Kahey, at midnight and arrived there at 0200 the following morning, 31 January. The civilians at Matoas Na Kahey gave additional food and water to the column and

provided it with eleven more carabao carts. When the column left at 0230, it had fifty-one carts and was a mile and a half long.

The most dangerous leg of the return march lay slightly beyond Matoas Na Kahey where the column would cross the Rizal highway. The risk of crossing an insecure highway in enemy territory with a long, slow column of weakened ex-POWs was compounded by the fact that difficult terrain on the opposite side of the highway would not permit the column to cross directly over. Instead, it would have to enter the highway and march one mile south before crossing. Because of the length of the column, as much as two-thirds of it would be on the highway during the movement.

Discovery by the Japanese would be disastrous. It could not be avoided if the column was on the road at an inopportune time, but discovery could be prevented through proper security. This was provided by First Lieutenant William J. O'Connell's 1st Platoon, Company C. One section of the platoon, armed with a bazooka and antitank grenades, established a roadblock 400 yards northeast of where the column was to enter the road. A second section established another roadblock 3,000 yards to the south. Luckily, no Japanese used the road during the crossing. The column took an hour to clear the highway and did so by 0430 without being discovered. The men halted in a small barrio at 0530 and resumed their march toward friendly lines after a short rest.

The Rangers had been unable to make radio contact with the forward base at Guimba since before the raid began and had not yet informed Sixth Army of their success. They made several more attempts to contact Guimba at about dawn but failed, and at 0800, they arrived at the small town of Sibul. Local people once again provided the column with food and water and with an additional twenty carabao carts. While the column was resting, the base at Guimba succeeded in establishing radio contact. Mucci requested that trucks and ambulances be prepared to meet the column, which resumed its march shortly after 0900.[24]

At about 1100, Technician 5 Patrick Marquis, who was on the point and several hundred yards in advance of the column, was halted by a Sixth Army reconnaissance patrol. The trucks and ambulances Mucci had asked for were only a short distance to the patrol's rear, and an hour later, the former POWs were at the 92d Evacuation Hospital in Guimba.[25] With that, the Rangers' mission was accomplished.

Commentary

The Cabanatuan prison camp raid was an overwhelming tactical success. At a cost of two Rangers killed, the 6th Ranger Battalion (-), reinforced by Alamo Scouts and Filipino guerrillas, liberated 511 American and Allied POWs and killed or wounded an estimated 523 Japanese.[26] Their success was both recognized and rewarded. General Douglas A. MacArthur, who said that the raid was "magnificent and reflect[ed] extraordinary credit to all concerned," awarded the Distinguished Service Cross to Mucci, the

Silver Star to all American officers, and the Bronze Star to all American enlisted men who participated in the operation.[27] All Filipino officers and enlisted men were awarded the Bronze Star.[28]

The operation was immediately singled out for special comment in the Sixth Army weekly G2 report, which described it as "an almost perfect example of prior reconnaissance and planning . . . ."[29] It was further held up as demonstrating "what patrols can accomplish in enemy territory by following the basic principles of scouting and patrolling, 'sneaking and peeping,' [the] use of concealment, reconnaissance of routes from photographs and maps prior to the actual operation, . . . and the coordination of all arms in the accomplishment of a mission."[30]

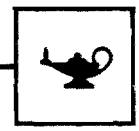
All of the principles and techniques that the weekly G2 report pointed out were important because they contributed to the Rangers' undetected approach to the objective, their gaining complete surprise over the Japanese, their smooth assault on the compound, and their successful liberation of the prisoners. Of equal, if not greater, importance was the one indispensable element that the report did not mention—an aggressively friendly civilian population. The Filipinos conducted reconnaissance, surveillance, and security missions in support of the operation, chose the routes to and from the objective, fought Japanese in the objective area, provided transportation to friendly lines for the sick and wounded, and provided food and water for all. The success of the mission would have been unlikely without Filipino friendship and support, and impossible had the Filipinos sympathized with the Japanese.

Subsequent Developments

The 6th Ranger Battalion did not take part in major combat operations after Cabanatuan. Their activities in the Philippines were limited to providing security for Sixth Army headquarters, conducting reconnaissance patrols, searching for Japanese stragglers, and eliminating small pockets of enemy resistance. In one such encounter, the Rangers annihilated seventeen saber-bearing Japanese officers who had taken shelter in a bunker to avoid Filipino guerrillas. The battalion's records show only one Ranger killed in action, one dead of wounds, and three wounded in all of the operations that followed Cabanatuan. None of these losses were suffered in the incident involving the Japanese officers.

Conclusion

7



Most of Rogers' Rangers' nineteen standing orders, which appear in FM 21-75, *Combat Skills of the Soldier*, deal directly or indirectly with two principles of war—security and surprise. The more than two centuries that have passed since Major Robert Rogers first wrote his standing orders during the French and Indian War have not diminished the importance of these principles. On the contrary, modern lessons based upon security and surprise are present in the five operations that have been examined in this paper. Because the United States and its Allies do not have a monopoly on Ranger operations, and their forces may come under Ranger-style attacks as well as conduct them, these lessons are best seen from the perspectives of both the attacker and the attacked.

From the attacker's perspective:

- It is essential that troops conducting Ranger operations have surprise in their favor because they are usually lightly armed and frequently isolated from friendly forces.

- Surprise is much more easily gained over an enemy who has lost his tactical cohesion than over one who is well organized. This is especially true if he is in retreat. Gaps in the enemy front are easier to find and exploit, and even if local surprise is lost, an enemy unit that is in disarray might not have the ability to warn others of the attacker's presence.

- In populated areas, the ease or difficulty with which surprise is gained will be greatly dependent upon the sympathy and support of the local population.

From the defender's perspective:

- Troops who have lost their cohesion or otherwise have gaps in their front are especially vulnerable to and will probably invite enemy Ranger-style attacks.

- In areas populated by civilians who are friendly to the enemy, the enemy can be expected to conduct Ranger-style operations, and he will be more likely to gain surprise.

In spite of the importance of security and surprise in the operations studied, the greatest lessons are to be drawn from another principle of war—

unity of command. The Rangers suffered from an absence of unity of command throughout World War II. The 1st, 3d, and 4th Ranger Battalions did not come under the effective command of a single headquarters until shortly before Anzio; and the 2d, 5th, and 6th Ranger Battalions remained, for all practical purposes, separate entities throughout their existence. This had unfortunate effects on the Rangers' mission assignments, training of replacements, and unit cohesion.

The six Ranger battalions were formed in response to separate requirements in the Mediterranean, northern Europe, and the Philippines; their formation did not reflect a centralized plan to put the Ranger concept into action. The 1st, 3d, and 4th Ranger Battalions came closest to being expressions of a unifying concept, but even under Darby's forceful leadership, the goal of a true regimental headquarters remained elusive almost until the end.

Because of the lack of a separate Ranger command, the missions assigned to Ranger Force and the individual Ranger battalions were determined by the various headquarters to which they were assigned or attached. Some major commanders, such as Terry de la Mesa Allen and Walter Krueger, tended to use their Rangers in accordance with their special skills. Others, such as Mark Clark, did not.

Even when employed by perceptive commanders, however, the Rangers' missions were mixed. The 1st Ranger Battalion, which was in North Africa from 8 November 1942 through 10 July 1943 and was used more properly than Ranger Force's other two battalions, spent only eight days of those eight months conducting true Ranger operations. During the same period, however, they spent 30 days in conventional infantry combat and 212 days training themselves and others and in reserve. They thus spent almost four times as many days in conventional combat than they did in Ranger operations and spent most of their time on noncombat duties. This latter fact was not necessarily bad, as it was partly the result of the Rangers being held back for appropriate missions and was preferable to their being wasted in prolonged conventional combat.

The replacement of the heavy losses that frequently occurred when they were in prolonged conventional combat, and sometimes occurred when they conducted true Ranger operations, posed special difficulties for the Rangers. Because of the absence of a headquarters responsible for all Ranger battalions, there was no single center where replacements would be trained by Rangers, to Ranger standards, for the Ranger battalions. The 1st Ranger Battalion and Ranger Force made a valiant effort to train their replacements as thoroughly as time allowed, but the number of men they could detach as instructors and the amount of time that these could spend with their trainees was determined by the needs of the headquarters to which they were assigned or attached. The commanders and headquarters that controlled the Rangers were usually too busy fighting their own conventional battles to exert themselves developing special missions for the Rangers. The losses that the Rangers suffered conducting conventional operations, com-

bined with the lack of a dependable source of Ranger-trained replacements, inevitably led to a dilution of the Ranger battalions with less well-trained men and to a decline in their unit cohesion.

Some critics have maintained that the Rangers are superfluous because there is nothing the Rangers do that cannot be done by good conventional infantry. This contention contradicts the lessons of war. Conventional units suffer casualties and are subject to the same consequences of attrition as the Rangers. They, too, suffer the loss of trained men and cohesion that are necessary for success. If troops such as the Rangers are not held in reserve for special missions, there is no assurance that, when such missions are necessary, there will be any unit capable of accomplishing them.

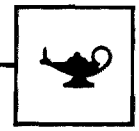
The need for highly trained units for special missions is supported by the fact that, except for the Rangers' amphibious landings in which there was time to plan and occasionally rehearse, most of the Rangers' missions were conducted on short notice. This is important. In spite of the Rangers' traditional emphasis on detailed planning and thorough preparation, most World War II Ranger operations were conducted without these advantages. Under such circumstances, only exceptionally well-trained and cohesive units such as the Rangers are likely to succeed. The survival of World War II Ranger battalions as highly trained and cohesive units would have been more complete had there been a Ranger headquarters to control them.

In 1981, I concluded my biography of William O. Darby with these words:

> While the modern Ranger tradition begun by Darby continues, the struggle which he waged has yet to be won. The First and Second Battalions, Seventy-fifth Infantry (Ranger), like the Ranger battalions and companies which came before them, are without their own Ranger headquarters.[1]

Happily, this condition no longer exists. In 1984, Headquarters and Headquarters Company and the 3d Battalion, 75th Infantry (Ranger), were activated, increasing Ranger strength and placing all three battalions under a single regimental commander. Unity of command has been achieved, and the evils which came from its absence in the past are less likely to occur in the future.

Notes



Most of the documents cited below are found in the journals and files of the 1st, 3d, 4th, 5th, and 6th Ranger Battalions and the journals and files of units and headquarters with which the Rangers served. These documents are in the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland, and are available in both their original form and on microfilm. A note referring to an original document contains the letters "SF," representing Suitland Files, followed by the file number of the folder in which the cited document is stored. A note referring to a microfilm copy of a document contains the code SF-INBN 72-37 followed by the number of the microfilm roll and the numbers of the frames on which the cited document appears. The letters SF represent Suitland Files, as above, and the code INBN 72-37 appears on each roll of microfilm containing the Ranger battalions' journals and files. Documents that are found elsewhere than the Suitland Files are appropriately identified.

Chapter 1

1. Subject letter, "Commando Organization," from Major General James W. Chaney to CG USANIF, 1 June 1942, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 4—6.
2. Technically, the word *commando* denotes a battalion-equivalent unit of appropriately trained soldiers but is commonly used in referring to the individual soldier who is a member of a commando.
3. Lucian King Truscott, *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1954), 37—38.
4. Subject letter, "Commando Organization," from Major General Russell P. Hartle to Distribution, 7 August 1942, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 7—10.
5. Subject letter, "Commando Organization," 1 June 1942.
6. Ibid.
7. Major General Edmond H. Leavey (U.S.A., Ret.) to James J. Altieri, 3 August 1965, copy in author's collection.
8. Truscott, *Command Missions,* 40.
9. Subject letter, "Commando Organization," 7 August 1942.
10. Ibid.

11. 1st Ranger Battalion, Diary, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 93—101.
12. USANIF and V Army Corps (Reinforced), General Order no. 7, 19 June 1942, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 8, frame 83. The TOE authorized the battalion 441 enlisted men. The figure 488 includes a 10-percent overstrength in each grade to offset attrition anticipated during training.
13. Subject letter, "Commando Organization," 7 August 1942.
14. 1st Ranger Battalion, Diary.
15. Subject letter, "Progress Report," from Darby to Brigadier General Lucian King Truscott, Jr., 17 July 1942, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 8, frames 89—91.
16. Progress Report on U.S.A. Rangers, from Colonel Charles A. Vaughan to HQ, Special Service Brigade, undated, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 8, frames 84—85.
17. Subject letter, "Progress Report," 17 July 1942.
18. R. W. Thompson, "Massacre at Dieppe," in *History of the Second World War,* vol. 37, edited by Barrie Pitt (Hicksville, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 1973), 1017.
19. 1st Ranger Battalion, Diary; James J. Altieri, *The Spearheaders* (New York: Popular Library, 1960), 64—75.
20. 1st Ranger Battalion, Memorandum, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 141—44.

Chapter 2

1. 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 1 January 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 212—15.
2. Colonel Herman A. Dammer (U.S.A., Ret.) and Elizabeth Dammer, interview with author, McLean, VA, 15 July 1972.
3. "U.S. Rangers," lecture presented by Darby with Dammer's assistance at the Army and Navy Staff College, 27 October 1944, copy in author's collection (hereafter cited as Darby lecture).
4. 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 1 January 1943.
5. Altieri, *The Spearheaders,* 115.
6. Dammer interview, 15 July 1972.
7. 1st Ranger Battalion, Training Guides, SF-INBN-1-3.13; Lieutenant Colonel Peer Buck (U.S.A., Ret.), interview with author, Plover, WI, 18 November 1972.
8. Darby lecture, 27 October 1944.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Notes on interview with Colonel William O. Darby, 18 May 1944, Infantry Hall Library, HQ, Army Ground Forces, Fort Benning, GA, SF.
12. 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (11—12 February 1943), 5 March 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 220.
13. 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (14—28 February 1943), 5 March 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 219.
14. II Corps, Operation Plan WOP, Operation WOP Outline Plan, 9 March 1943, SF-301-0.13.
15. II Corps, G-3 Journal and File, G-3 Periodic Report of 17 March 1943, 1st Infantry Division, 2300 17 March 1943, SF-202-3.2; 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 9 April 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 221.

16. 1st Infantry Division, G-3 Journal and File, Memo from Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen to Darby, 17 March 1943, SF-301-3.2.

17. Ibid.

18. 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 9 April 1943.

19. 1st Infantry Division, G-3 Operations Report (15 January—8 April 1943), SF-301-3.

20. 26th Infantry Regiment, Dextrous 1 Unit Journal, Report of Operations (8 November 1942—8 May 1943), SF-301-Inf(26)-0.3 (hereafter cited as Dextrous 1 Unit Journal).

21. Ibid.

22. Altieri, *The Spearheaders,* 198—99; 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 9 April 1943.

23. 1st Infantry Division, G-3 Journal and File, SF-301-3.2.

24. Dextrous 1 Unit Journal.

25. Altieri, *The Spearheaders,* 199.

26. James J. Altieri, *Darby's Rangers: An Illustrated Portrayal of the Original Rangers* (Durham, NC: The Seeman Printery, 1945), 44.

27. Dextrous 1 Unit Journal.

28. Altieri, *The Spearheaders,* 199.

29. Altieri, *Darby's Rangers,* 44.

30. 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 9 April 1943.

31. Dextrous 1 Unit Journal.

32. Ibid.

33. II Corps, G-3 Journal and File, Telephone conversation, Captain Lord to Major Chase, 1215 21 March 1943, SF-202-3.2.

34. 1st Infantry Division, G-3 Operations Report (15 January—8 April 1943); 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 9 April 1943.

35. 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 9 April 1943.

36. Ibid.

37. Subject letter, "Procurement of Personnel Necessary for Activation of Additional Ranger Battalions," from Darby to CiC AFHQ, 14 April 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 285.

38. AFHQ incoming message no. 6300, from General George C. Marshall to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 2355 19 April 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 287.

39. Letter, HQ, North African Theater of Operations to Darby, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 286; Subject letter, "Volunteers for Ranger Battalions," from HQ, Atlantic Base Section to Darby, 17 May 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 228.

40. Altieri, *Darby's Rangers,* 46.

41. Memorandum, Fifth Army G-1 to Darby, 29 April 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 294.

42. Colonel William S. Hutchinson (U.S.A., Ret.), interview with author, Jacksonville, FL, 14 June 1973.

Chapter 3

1. Albert N. Garland and Howard McGaw Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1965), 226—27.
2. 3d Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (10—18 July 1943), 31 July 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 4, frames 2—4.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.; Altieri, *Darby's Rangers*, 53.
5. 3d Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (10—18 July 1943), 31 July 1943.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. 3d Infantry Division, G-2 Journal (10 July—17 August 1943), G-2 Periodic Report no. 8, 17 July 1943, SF-303-2.2.
11. Ibid.
12. Former Ranger Stan Zaslaw, interview with author, Deerfield, IL, 19 June 1972.
13. Subject letter, "Status of RANGER Battalions," from Darby to CiC AFHQ, 10 August 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 290—91.
14. 1st and 2d Indorsements to letter from Darby to CiC AFHQ, 12 August 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 297.

Chapter 4

1. 1st Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (9—29 September 1943), 15 November 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 306; 3d Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (9—30 September 1943), 25 November 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 4, frames 29—30; 4th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (9—29 September 1943), 5 October 1943, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 4, frames 124—26.
2. Michael J. King, "William Orlando Darby: A Military Biography" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1977), 219.
3. Subject letter, "Ranger Infantry Battalions," from Major Roy Murray to CiC AGF, 28 November 1943, copy in author's collection.
4. VI Corps, Journal and File (1 November 1943—20 February 1944), Subject letter, "Umpire Notes on Operation of 1st Ranger Group," from 45th Infantry Division Artillery to Office of Problem Director, VI Corps Planning Group, 20 January 1944, SF-206-3.2.
5. Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1969), 353; VI Corps, Journal and File (1 November 1943—20 February 1944), Subject letter, "Attachment of Troops," from VI Corps to units concerned, 16 January 1944, SF-206-3.2.
6. William O. Darby, 201 File, HQ, NATOUSA Promotion Letter, 11 December 1943, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO.
7. VI Corps, Outline Plan, Operation SHINGLE, Field Order no. 19, VI Corps, 15 January 1944, SF-206-0.13.
8. Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 358—59.
9. Ibid., 388—90.
10. VI Corps, After Action Report (January 1944), VI Corps Historical Record—The Mounting and Initial Phase of Operation SHINGLE (January 1944), SF-206-0.3.

11. Hutchinson interview, 14 June 1973.
12. Field Order no. 2, Ranger Force, 29 January 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 525.
13. 3d Infantry Division, G-2 Estimate, 29 January 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 521—22.
14. 3d Infantry Division, Field Order, Operation SHINGLE, SF-303-3.9.
15. Ranger Force Journal entry, 291835 January 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 528.
16. Fifth Army, G-2 Report no. 142, 26 January 1944, SF-105-3.2.
17. Ranger Force Journal entries, 292300, 292315, 300125, and 300140 January 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 528.
18. Ranger Force Journal entries, 300248 and 300249 January 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 528.
19. Captain Charles M. Shunstrom, "Capture of the First and Third Ranger Battalions," SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 752.
20. Major Jack Dobson, "With the Rangers at Cisterna," in Altieri, *Darby's Rangers,* 83—84.
21. 3d Infantry Division, G-2 Estimate, 29 January 1944.
22. VI Corps Historical Record—The Mounting and Initial Phase of Operation SHINGLE (January 1944).
23. Fifth Army, G-2, Special Report, 9 March 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frame 751.
24. After Action Report (22 January—5 February 1944) Ranger Force, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 676—82.
25. Ibid.; Shunstrom, "Capture of the First and Third Ranger Battalions."
26. Shunstrom, "Capture of the First and Third Ranger Battalions"; Altieri, *The Spearheaders,* 266.
27. Former Ranger Robert Ehalt to the author, undated (1978), copy in author's collection.
28. VI Corps, Subject letter, "Battle Casualties, 6615 Ranger Force in the Action of 29—30 January 1944," 16 February 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 1, frames 683—88.
29. Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino,* 391.
30. General Mark W. Clark (U.S.A., Ret.), interview with author, Leland, MI, 8 September 1973.
31. VI Corps Historical Record—The Mounting and Initial Phase of Operation SHINGLE (January 1944).
32. Hutchinson interview, 14 June 1973.
33. Henry L. Stimson, "Memorandum for the President." 2 May 1945, in William O. Darby, 201 File. Stimson's memorandum disproves an account of Darby's promotion that had once been generally accepted. That account cited only the fact that Darby's promotion had been posthumous and implied that, because it was posthumous, it was honorary. General Mark W. Clark gave credence to that account in his book, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), writing that he had "asked General Marshall to promote (Darby) to Brigadier General posthumously, and he did . . . ." When I showed a copy of Stimson's memorandum to Clark during an interview on 8 September 1973, he appeared to be genuinely surprised and said that he had always thought Darby's promotion was the result of his (Clark's) own recommendation.

Chapter 5

1. John K. Mahon and Romana Danysh, *Infantry,* pt. 1, *Regular Army,* Army Lineage Series (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1972), 889.
2. 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (6—10 June 1944), 22 July 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 5, frames 2—5; 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (1—18 September 1944),

10 October 1944, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 5, frames 102—11; 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (1—31 December 1944), 10 January 1945, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 5, frames 179—96.

3. 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report (1—28 February 1945), 10 March 1945, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 5, frames 365—73.
4. The description of the objective presented in the brief Ranger history that appears in the 1962 edition of FM 21-50, *Ranger Training and Ranger Operations,* is misleading. Although it tells of the Rangers seizing "the high ground commanding the main German military supply route west of Zerf," the objective was on high ground only when approached from the east. The Rangers' blocking position was at the eastern rim of a plateau, and when approached from the west, as it would have been by retreating Germans, it was level. It was also level when approached from the north and south, as it was by counterattacking Germans. Thus, any description of the Rangers' objective as being on "high ground" is only one-quarter correct. This error is traceable to the Rangers' own after-action report that describes the objective as being on "high ground" without elaboration. A too casual examination of a topographical map of the objective area also suggests height. A physical inspection of the site, such as I made in 1984, reveals a position that is far less defensible than FM 21-50 implies. These facts make the 5th Ranger Battalion's victory at Zerf all the more worthy of note.
5. 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 10 March 1945.
6. Ibid.
7. Combat Command B, 10th Armored Division, S-3 Periodic Report (252400—262400 February 1945), 26 February 1945, SF-610-CCB-3.1.
8. 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 10 March 1945.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.; CCB, 10th Armored Division, S-3 Periodic Report, 26 February 1945.
11. 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 10 March 1945.
12. 94th Infantry Division, G-2 Journal and File.
13. 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 10 March 1945.
14. Ibid.
15. 94th Infantry Division, G-2 Journal and File.
16. 5th Ranger Battalion, After Action Report, 10 March 1945.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.

Chapter 6

1. 6th Ranger Battalion, History of King II Operation, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 6, frames 3—9.
2. Subject letter, "Historical Data," from Captain Arthur D. Simons, CO, B Company, 6th Ranger Battalion, to the Adjutant General, 7 February 1945, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 6, frames 24—28.
3. Ibid.
4. Forrest Bryant Johnson, *Hour of Redemption: The Ranger Raid on Cabanatuan* (New York: Manor Books, 1978), 180.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 181—84.
7. Ibid., 182; Subject letter, "Ranger Mission at the Pangatian Prison Camp," from HQ, 6th Ranger Battalion, to Sixth Army G-3, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 6, frames 236—40. The prison

camp in question was near both Cabanatuan and Pangatian and is known by both names. I have chosen to identify the camp with Cabanatuan, which is the larger of the two towns.

8. Narrative of the Sixth Ranger Infantry Battalion from January 2, 1945, to July 1, 1945, SF-INBN 72-37, roll 6, frames 65—81.
9. Sixth Army, G-2 Weekly Report no. 74 (31 January—7 February 1945), SF-106-2.1.
10. Johnson, *Hour of Redemption,* 208—9.
11. Ibid., 210. The Huks, or Hukbalahaps, were the People's Anti-Japanese Army. They were largely Communist led and operated mainly on the fringes of the central Luzon plain. After World War II, they would style themselves the People's Liberation Army and fight an unsuccessful guerrilla war against the government of the newly independent Philippines.
12. Subject letter, "Ranger Mission at the Pangatian Prison Camp."
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Johnson, *Hour of Redemption,* 220.
16. Subject letter, "Ranger Mission at the Pangatian Prison Camp."
17. Ibid.; Johnson, *Hour of Redemption,* 229.
18. Ibid.
19. Subject letter, "Ranger Mission at the Pangatian Prison Camp."
20. Ibid.; Narrative of the Sixth Ranger Infantry Battalion from January 2, 1945, to July 1, 1945.
21. Johnson, *Hour of Redemption,* 223, 260—62.
22. Subject letter, "Ranger Mission at the Pangatian Prison Camp"; Johnson, *Hour of Redemption,* 286—316; Narrative of the Sixth Ranger Infantry Battalion from January 2, 1945, to July 1, 1945.
23. Johnson, *Hour of Redemption,* 339.
24. Subject letter, "Ranger Mission at the Pangatian Prison Camp"; Johnson, *Hour of Redemption,* 317—43.
25. Subject letter, "Ranger Mission at the Pangatian Prison Camp."
26. Sixth Army, G-2 Weekly Report no. 74 (31 January—7 February 1945); Message, from Colonel White to Colonel Hutchinson, 31 January 1945, SF-106-2.2.
27. Narrative of the Sixth Ranger Infantry Battalion from January 2, 1945, to July 1, 1945.
28. Johnson, *Hour of Redemption,* 347.
29. Sixth Army, G-2 Weekly Report no. 74 (31 January—7 February 1945).
30. Ibid.

Chapter 7

1. Michael J. King, *William Orlando Darby: A Military Biography* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981), 187.

Bibliography

Official documents, personal letters, interviews, and books were drawn upon in the preparation of this *Leavenworth Paper*. Of these, the official documents were the most important for it would have been impossible to do this study without them. Except where otherwise noted, the official documents are found in the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland, and are available in both their original and microfilm forms. An entry referring to an original document contains the document's title followed by the letters SF, representing Suitland Files, and the number under which the document is cataloged. An entry referring to a microfilm roll contains the roll's title, microcopy number, and roll number.

Official Documents

Unit Journals and Files

1st Ranger Battalion. Journals and Files. INBN-1-0.1, Historical Information, 1942—1944, through INBN-1-0.7, Unit Journal, November—December 1943. Microcopy no. 72-37, roll 1.

1st Ranger Battalion. Journals and Files. INBN-1.0.12, Messages, February—December 1943, through INBN-1-3.13, Training Guides, 8 July 1943. Microcopy no. 72-37, roll 2.

3d Ranger Battalion. Journals and Files. INBN-3-0.3, Report of Action, 10—18 July 1943, through INBN-4-1.14, Special Orders, June 1943—January 1944. Microcopy no. 72-37, roll 4.

5th Ranger Battalion. Journals and Files. INBN-5-0.3, After Action Report, 6—10 June 1944, through INBN-5-1.13, General Orders, 1944—1945. Microcopy no. 72-37, roll 5.

6th Ranger Battalion. Journals and Files. INBN-6-0.3, History of King II Operation, August—December 1944, through INBN-6-30.0, Report of Mess Inspection, May 1945. Microcopy no. 72-37, roll 6.

Ranger Battalions. Historical Background Information on Ranger Battalions and Tables of Organization and Equipment. Microcopy no. 72-37, roll 8.

26th Infantry Regiment. Dextrous 1 Unit Journal. Report of Operations (8 November 1942—8 May 1943). SF-301-Inf(26)-0.3.

Combat Command B. 10th Armored Division. S-3 Journal and File. SF-610-CCB-3.1.

1st Infantry Division. G-3 Journal and File. SF-301-3.2.

1st Infantry Division. G-3 Operations Report (15 January—8 April 1943). SF-301-3.

3d Infantry Division. G-2 Journal (10 July—17 August 1943). SF-303-2.2.

3d Infantry Division. Journal and File. SF-303-3.9.

94th Infantry Division. G-2 Journal and File. SF.

II Corps. G-3 Journal and File. SF-202-3.2.

II Corps. Operation Plan WOP, 9 March 1943. SF-301-0.13.

VI Corps. After Action Report (January 1944). SF-206-0.3.

VI Corps. Journal and File (1 November 1943—20 February 1944). SF-206-3.2.

VI Corps. Outline Plan, Operation SHINGLE. SF-206-0.13.

Fifth Army. G-2 Journal and File. SF-105-3.2.

Sixth Army. G-2 Weekly Report no. 74 (31 January—7 February 1945). SF-106-2.1.

Nonunit Documents

Darby, William O. 201 File. National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO.

Notes on interview with Colonel William O. Darby, 18 May 1944. Infantry Hall Library, HQ, Army Ground Forces, Fort Benning, GA. SF.

"U.S. Rangers." Lecture presented by Darby with Dammer's assistance at the Army and Navy Staff College, 27 October 1944. Copy in author's collection.

Letters

Ehalt, Robert. Letter to author, (undated) 1978.

Leavey, Edmond H., Major General (U.S.A., Ret.). Letters to James Altieri, 3 August and 14 October 1965. James Altieri's files.

Interviews with Author

Buck, Peer, Lieutenant Colonel (U.S.A., Ret.). Plover, WI, 18 November 1972.

Clark, Mark W., General (U.S.A., Ret.). Leland, MI, 8 September 1973.

Dammer, Herman W., Colonel (U.S.A., Ret.), and Elizabeth Dammer. McLean, VA, 15 July 1972.

Hutchinson, William, Colonel (U.S.A., Ret.). Jacksonville, FL, 14 June 1973.

Zaslaw, Stan. Deerfield, IL, 19 June 1972.

LEAVENWORTH PAPERS

1. *The Evolution of U.S. Army Tactical Doctrine, 1946—76*, by Major Robert A. Doughty
2. *Nomonhan: Japanese-Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939*, by Dr. Edward J. Drea
3. *"Not War But Like War": The American Intervention in Lebanon*, by Dr. Roger J. Spiller
4. *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War*, by Captain Timothy T. Lupfer
5. *Fighting the Russians in Winter: Three Case Studies*, by Dr. Allen F. Chew
6. *Soviet Night Operations*, by Major Claude R. Sasso
7. *August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria*, by Lieutenant Colonel David M. Glantz
8. *August Storm: Soviet Tactical and Operational Combat in Manchuria, 1945*, by Lieutenant Colonel David M. Glantz
9. *Defending the Driniumor: Covering Force Operations in New Guinea, 1944*, by Dr. Edward J. Drea
10. *Chemical Warfare in World War I: The American Experience, 1917—1918*, by Major Charles E. Heller, USAR
11. *Rangers: Selected Combat Operations in World War II*, by Dr. Michael J. King

RESEARCH SURVEYS

1. *Amicicide: The Problem of Friendly Fire in Modern War*, by Lieutenant Colonel Charles R. Shrader
2. *Toward Combined Arms Warfare: A Survey of 20th-Century Tactics, Doctrine, and Organization*, by Captain Jonathan M. House
3. *Rapid Deployment Logistics: Lebanon, 1958*, by Lieutenant Colonel Gary H. Wade
4. *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, by Lieutenant Colonel David M. Glantz

Published Works

Altieri, James J. *Darby's Rangers: An Illustrated Portrayal of the Original Rangers.* Durham, NC: The Seeman Printery, 1945.

_____. *The Spearheaders.* New York: Popular Library, 1960.

Blumenson, Martin. *Salerno to Cassino.* U.S. Army in World War II. Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1969.

Clark, Mark Wayne. *Calculated Risk.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950.

Garland, Albert N., and Howard McGaw Smyth. *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy.* U.S. Army in World War II. Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1965.

Johnson, Forrest Bryant. *Hour of Redemption: The Ranger Raid on Cabanatuan.* New York: Manor Books, 1978.

King, Michael J. *William Orlando Darby: A Military Biography.* Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981.

_____. "William Orlando Darby: A Military Biography." Ph.D. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1977.

Mahon, John K., and Romana Danysh. *Infantry.* Pt. 1. *Regular Army.* Army Lineage Series. Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1972.

Nichols, Lester M. *Impact: The Battle Story of the Tenth Armored Division.* New York: Bradbury, Sayles, O'Neill Co., n.d.

Thompson, R. W. "Massacre at Dieppe." In *History of the Second World War,* edited by Barrie Pitt, vol. 37. Hicksville, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 1973.

Truscott, Lucian King. *Command Missions: A Personal Story.* New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1954.

U.S. Department of the Army. FM 21-50. *Ranger Training and Ranger Operations.* Washington, DC, 1962.

STUDIES IN PROGRESS

Counterattack on the Naktong: Light Infantry Operations in Korea, 1950

●

Standing Fast: German Defensive Doctrine on the Russian Front During World War II

●

Tactics and Doctrine in Imperial Russia

●

U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965

●

Seek, Strike, and Destroy: U.S. Army Tank Destroyer Doctrine in World War II

●

Evolution of the Corps

●

World War II Eastern Front Atlas

●

Peacekeeping Operations

●

Mobilization-Related Correlates of Success in American World War II Infantry Divisions

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1988-554-001/82063



Dr. Michael J. King

Michael J. King is a graduate of De Paul University and holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in history from Northern Illinois University. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Airborne and Ranger Schools and served as a platoon leader and rifle company executive officer in the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry, in Germany. While in the U.S. Army Reserve, he served as S2 of the 12th Special Forces Group (Airborne). He is the author of *William Orlando Darby: A Military Biography*. Dr. King completed the research for this *Leavenworth Paper* while a Teaching Fellow at the Combat Studies Institute.

COMBAT STUDIES INSTITUTE

Missions

The Combat Studies Institute was established on 18 June 1979 as a department-level activity within the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. CSI has the following missions:

1. Conduct research on historical topics pertinent to doctrinal concerns of the Army and publish the results in a variety of formats for the Active Army and Reserve Components.
2. Prepare and present instruction in military history at USACGSC and assist other USACGSC departments in integrating military history into their instruction.
3. Serve as the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's executive agent for the development and coordination of an integrated, progressive program of military history instruction in the TRADOC service school system.

