

Lt Col Russell Darkes, 143rd Infantry, US 36th Infantry Division

It was early December, 1943, three months after the invasion of Italy at Salerno, that the First Battalion, 143rd Infantry of the 36th Division was given the mission of capturing Mt. Sammucro (better known as Hill 1205) as part of the overall plan in the push towards Cassino.

In a daylight attack with 'C' Company on the left, 'A' Company on the right and 'B' Company in Reserve, we accomplished our mission, or so we thought. Late in the afternoon, Capt. Horton, 'C' Company Commander, received orders to continue the attack down the forward slope of Sammucro and capture the village of San Pietro. Capt. Horton immediately called all platoon leaders to assemble at the very crest of the mountain to issue his attack order before darkness approached. It was to be a night attack. Suddenly, there was a sharp crack with a light 'thud'. After several seconds trying to determine what happened, Lt. Simmons from Belfast, Maine and I noticed that Capt. Horton and the other two Lieutenants were lying very still and bleeding profusely from their heads. All three of them were killed instantly by one lone bullet fired by a German sniper from the 'A' Company area.

Lt. Roy Goad, second in command of 'C' Company, immediately informed the Battalion Commander of what had happened. He directed Lt. Goad to send a rifle platoon to attack thru 'A' Company area. 'A' Company was pretty well pinned down by now because of the Germans that had infiltrated into their position. With my 1st platoon of 'C' Company I was given the mission. I moved my platoon several hundred yards down the mountain to the rear of 'A' Company position. I had my men fix bayonets (one of the few times that we attacked with bayonets) and cautioned my men to shoot only if necessary. Within twenty minutes we were at the crest of Mt. Sammucro in 'A' Company area, and had captured seventeen Germans without firing a shot. When they saw us coming with fixed bayonets, their hands went up in the air and they pleaded 'Komerad', 'Komerad'. No doubt one of those seventeen was the one that fired that fatal shot that killed three of our fine officers of 'C' Company. Mt. Sammucro was finally secured.

Needless to say, the attack by 'C' Company for that night was called off by the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Frazier. The next day, 'B' Company, the Company in Reserve, was ordered to attack and capture San Pietro. Again it was to be a night attack. (Because of our depleted officer strength, 'C' Company was to remain in defensive position until 'B' Company accomplished their mission and in the event of German counterattacks). As I recall, the attack was to commence at 10:00 P.M. that night. They made a good effort, and after four or five hours of vicious fighting and heavy losses in men and officers, the survivors returned to their original positions. A full complement of officers in a Rifle Company in World War II was six officers: five lieutenants and one captain, the Company Commander. 'B' Company was at full strength when the attack started. Five of their six officers were Killed in Action that night, including their beloved Captain, Henry T. Waskow from Belton, Texas, a really fine young officer, 26 years of age, as I recall. 2nd Lieutenant Davenport of Pittston, Pa. was the only surviving officer of 'B' Company. It appeared that San Pietro was impossible from our avenue of approach even after intensive bombardment by our artillery and mortars.

On a Sunday afternoon a few days later, I believe it was December 12, 1943, I was directed by the Company Commander to lead a Combat Patrol consisting of my entire first platoon down the forward slope of Mt. Sammucro. Normally the mission of a combat patrol is to annihilate

enemy outposts, certain enemy gun positions as well as gather any information about the enemy that may be observed. The patrol cannot, and is not expected, to fight an entire battle by itself. I immediately assembled my platoon sergeant and squad leaders and briefed them on our mission. Extra ammunition and hand grenades were issued to the men, canteens filled, and we were ready to go. From the peak of Sammucro we started down the forward slope in the direction of San Pietro. I had given orders to remain well dispersed, about twenty-five yards between men and that we would advance in a diamond formation. My two platoon scouts would be in the lead. I would follow them. My platoon sergeant, Sgt. Gorman O'Daniel, from Corsicana, Texas, would be approximately in the center of the formation with the platoon guide. Sgt. Costilla, also a National Guardsman from Texas, would bring up the rear, keeping his eyes open for any possible stragglers.

The upper portion of Sammucro is very open, practically no vegetation, nothing but rocks, so both the enemy's, as well as our observation was excellent. The last man of my platoon had just come over the crest of the mountain and our formation and dispersion looked perfect to me. About that moment several German machine guns opened fire on us from some distance down the mountain, using tracer ammunition. They only fired several bursts and I don't think any of my men were hit with the machine guns, but within seconds the Germans followed with many, many rounds of mortar fire. They had determined the range (distance) by firing the machine guns first and could then immediately zero in with their mortars, effectively. Mortar shells are, in a sense, a lot more deadly than machine guns, because of the dispersion of fragments.

It took me only several seconds to evaluate the situation and realize we were in a death trap. Then I yelled at the top of my voice for everyone to turn back and get over the crest of the mountain from whence we came.

As it turned out, not all of my men made it back across the crest. The enemy mortar shells were just coming in too thick and fast. Five of my men were Killed in Action that Sunday afternoon. After almost fifty years I don't remember the names of all of them but I do remember two very specifically—my Platoon Sergeant, Second in Command next to me, Sgt. O'Daniel and P.F.C. Fred Yeske, one of my three Browning Automatic Riflemen, a professional baseball pitcher from Collinsville, Connecticut, as I recall. Apart from the five K.I.A., we had no other casualties, but even so, the effectiveness of my platoon was greatly reduced. Several days later, the Battalion Medical Officer—it could have been Capt. Graham—along with a number of his enlisted medical personnel, crossed over the crest of Sammucro, displaying a huge Red Cross Flag to retrieve the bodies of those K.I.A. The Germans respected the flag and not a shot was fired as the bodies were retrieved. San Pietro again evaded the Americans.

Several days later we were informed that one of the other regiments of the 36th Division would put on an attack toward San Pietro, supported by tanks. We were told the attack would start after a piper cub (an artillery spotting plane) would come over and waggle its wings. This was a signal that the attack was to begin. From our position on the top of Mt. Sammucro, we had a bird's eye view of everything that happened. Moments after the piper cub flew over, American tanks came out of the wooded area at the base of the mountain moving forward. In very short order two or three of our tanks were knocked out by German anti-tank fire. The rest of the tanks turned around and headed towards the rear. Again this attack was unsuccessful.

On a clear night, Mt. Vesuvius, which had recently erupted after years of dormancy, could easily be observed from our position on Mt. Sammucro. It was estimated to be approximately 75 miles

from our location and well to the south of Naples. The red flames and lava erupting appeared eerie at night. During the day only the huge belching of smoke was seen.

The ascent of Mt. Sammucro was extremely steep and rocky as you approached the upper one-third towards the peak. Mules were obtained from the Italian Government and Italians, as mule skimmers, brought most of our supplies, such as ammunition, rations, and five-gallon cans of water about two-thirds of the way up the mountain. Beyond that point the terrain was too rough for the mules to go any further. We would then send a detail of four or five men at a time. They were issued pack boards and each man would bring up either a case of ammunition, a case of rations, or a five-gallon can of water to our front line positions. It was a very difficult operation but the only way to get supplies to our front lines at the peak of Mt. Sammucro. To my recollection, this is the only instance where we used mule trains to keep us supplied at the Front.

Normally, the weather on Mt. Sammucro was anything but pleasant. Sunny Italy certainly does not compare to Sunny Florida. The temperature ranged, roughly, from 28 degrees at night to 40 degrees during the day. It was the rainy season along with occasional snow flurries. We slept in our slit trenches which would normally be dug in the ground, but since the mountain consisted of practically solid rock with many loose rocks scattered around, we built them with rocks. We would build a rock wall about two feet high, seven feet long, and five feet wide, in order to accommodate two men. We used the buddy system with two men in each slit trench. One of them was to be on guard, while the other one slept. They would take turns all through the night. The rainy weather made life quite miserable and almost as much of an enemy as the Germans. Even so, it is amazing how comfortable you can be with wet blankets once your body heat accumulates and the blankets start steaming. Of course, we always slept with all our clothes and combat boots on, not knowing what minute the Germans may counterattack. Rifles were always loaded and laying by our side.

After several weeks, the rainy weather started to take its toll. Many of the men developed trench foot. It is caused by prolonged exposure to cold and wet conditions and slows the blood circulation in your feet. First you feel a numbness and then discoloration--first turning blue and then almost black as well as a lot of swelling. I became a victim after about sixteen or seventeen days on Sammucro. During a lull in the action one day, I decided to remove my shoes to let my socks air dry and dry out my shoes a bit because I did feel a numbness in my toes and feet. To my surprise, I couldn't get the combat boots off my feet. Even with the laces entirely removed, the boots wouldn't budge. My feet were swollen that badly and I hadn't realized it. I reported to the Company Commander and he directed me to report to the Battalion Aid Station Immediately. The Aid Station was located about a mile down at the base of the mountain. Taking my rifle and a few toilet articles, I stumbled down the very rugged and rocky mountain. I no longer had any feeling whatsoever in my feet and it seemed like I was walking on stilts with feeling only from the ankles on up. The Battalion Medical Officer immediately cut the boots off my feet, took one look, put me on a stretcher and loaded me into an ambulance and on to a Field Hospital, possibly twenty-five or thirty miles behind the Front.

As an after thought, I might mention that while there at the Battalion Aid Station, I noticed this rather small man with baggy GI trousers and field jacket. It happened to be Ernie Pyle, the famous World War II War Correspondent. He wanted to know the full story of Captain Waskow's death, how his body was brought down the mountain on mule back and whatever information he could gather. As I recall, he wrote an article concerning Capt. Waskow that appeared in Time Magazine shortly thereafter. Years later a movie, entitled "G. I. JOE" also portrayed the death of

Capt. Waskow. Later in 1944, as I recall, Ernie Pyle left the European Theatre to spend a short time at his home in Arizona or New Mexico and then proceeded to the Pacific Theatre where he was killed by a Japanese machine gunner, I believe in April of 1945. His body now rests in the Punch Bowl, the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, overlooking Honolulu.

At the Field Hospital it was a repeat performance of the Aid Station. The Medical Officer took one look at my feet and ordered me to be evacuated to the 17th General Army Hospital in Naples. He immediately put me to bed and Major, the Medical Officer, came in and examined my feet and instructed me not to leave the bed and to keep my feet uncovered up to my knees. He also told me I had a bad case of trench foot and that my feet may have to be amputated because of the possibility of gangrene setting in. He came to see me once a day for the next several days without further comment. About the fourth day he took a pin and asked me to look in some other direction. He would prick me with this pin starting at the bottom of my toes, continuing up over the ankles until I would twitch, which indicated feeling was returning. He did this daily and after several more days, life began returning and I would feel those pinpricks further and further down towards my toes. In approximately four weeks the discoloration disappeared and life and circulation had returned to my feet. I was mighty thankful when he informed me there would be no amputation. I was discharged from the hospital and given transportation into a Replacement Centre in Caserta, just outside Naples. I was to be assigned to any unit that needed an officer, and there were many, but I begged to be returned to my beloved 'C' Company of the 143rd Infantry. My wish was granted, and I was given transportation to join my unit, which was now located at the Front close to the Rapido River.

Our next major operation was to be the Rapido River crossing. It was now about 15 January 1944. We were on the high ground some three or four hundred yards from the river. We sent patrols out nightly to determine whether any Germans were on our side of the River. There were mines and booby traps placed there by the Germans at one time or another.

On 20 January, we received the attack order to cross the Rapido River that night. Combat Engineers would have foot bridges constructed for our crossing. The Rapido was a small River by many standards, no more than twenty-five or thirty yards wide, but very swift and twelve to fourteen feet deep. Our artillery laid down a tremendous barrage on the Germans prior to our crossing. This appeared to simply alert the Germans, who were well dug in on their side of the River at the base of the high ground. They had many machine gun emplacements with grazing fire over the level terrain right up to the river bank. After suffering many casualties, there was no way we could proceed any further. Capt. Simmons, who was slightly wounded, ordered what remained of the Company to return across the river to our previous positions. Early the next morning Company Commanders were called to Battalion Headquarters to discuss the gravity of the situation. The Battalion Commander instructed Capt. Simmons to report to the Aid Station because of his wounds of the night before. That left me in command of "C" Company. Shortly after noon on the 21st, I was told by the Battalion Commander that we would cross the river again that night. Because of the many casualties suffered the previous night our strength was tremendously reduced and morale was at a very low point. However, orders are orders, and attack we did. It was a repeat of the previous night with many more casualties killed, wounded, and taken prisoner.

Communication with battalion or adjoining companies was nil. We had radio silence for fear of German interception. Our field telephone lines were knocked out by German artillery and

mortar fire. Lt. Thomas, Heavy Weapons Company Commander, "D" Company, accompanied me in the attack with his heavy machine guns supporting my Company. We ended up in a shell hole on the German side of the River and were absolutely pinned down. We were close enough to the German lines that we could hear them re-load their machine guns. The ammunition for their machine guns came in sections of fifty rounds. They would fire a burst of fifty and we could hear them work the bolt to load another section of fifty. This continued for several hours.

Towards morning, and after all artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire had died down, Lt. Thomas and I decided we would make a dash for the foot bridge and return to our side of the River. The foot bridge consisted of a double row of planks tied to the top of a number of pontoons. At least half of the pontoons had been deflated by shell fragments or machine gun fire. We finally made our way across the foot bridge, in spite of the precarious condition, to the American side of the River. When we returned, we discovered that the Battalion Commander and several of his staff members were killed or wounded during the night. Again the Battalion suffered tremendous casualties and its fighting ability was severely depleted. Higher headquarters planned to have us attempt a third crossing which would have been complete annihilation of the greater part of two regiments of the Division. Common sense finally prevailed and that was the end of the Rapido River fiasco. Some months later I was awarded the Silver Star for Gallantry in Action for my participation in the Rapido River crossing.

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The weeks lingered on with our unit mostly in defensive positions and continually sending out patrols to our Front to maintain contact with the Germans.

In early May, several other Lieutenants and I were given the opportunity for a five-day rest leave. We were flown to Sardinia to one of our U. S. Army Air Corps bomb groups (at that time it was not yet known as the U. S. Air Force).

When we arrived with the bomb group we were informed that we could fly with them on missions or simply relax in their headquarters area. Being young and adventurous, I decided to fly along on several missions. Their planes consisted primarily of B24's (better known as flying coffins). The first mission I accompanied was over Anzio. We had some flak over the target area, but returned safely to the Air Field in Sardinia. The mission lasted approximately four hours. My second mission was much longer. Again it appeared that the bombs were dropped accurately and we headed back for Sardinia. However, shortly after we left the vicinity of Bologna, the weather closed in and visibility was practically zero. The pilots, after conferring with each other and probably their base, decided to land on the island of Corsica. We had lunch there and after several more hours the weather cleared and we headed back to their home base in Sardinia.

I can't say that I really enjoyed going along on those missions, but it was certainly something different than being shot at the Front. I did get quite sick on that second mission. As it turned out, just as the bombardier opened up the bomb bay doors and let the bombs drop, I "threw up" out of the bomb bay doors. I happened to be sitting right by the bomb bay.

There had always been a friendly rivalry between Air Corps and Infantry Officers. Both seemed to think the other had the "gravy" job. After my return to solid ground after that second mission I was thankful that I was an Infantry Officer and not an Air Corps Officer.