

COMMENTS ON
THE RAPIDO RIVER CROSSING

January, 1944

by

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A number of accounts have been written about the unsuccessful crossing of the Rapido River, in Italy, by the 36th Division, in January, 1944. None of them that I have read gives an accurate impression of the situation and all of them are incomplete. As a result, many persons have formed opinions which are not in harmony with the facts. It is in an effort to clear up these misunderstandings that I present the following.

The program for allied military operations in the Italian Campaign was one of continual fighting and continual advance. There was no final geographic objective. The over-all mission was to hold as many German divisions as possible in Italy, away from the Western Front.

From Solerno northward, the Germans were fighting a delaying action. They were taking advantage of every favorable opportunity to gain as much time as possible for preparation of an organized and coordinated defensive position, known as the Gustov Line, which extended from the sea along the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers, northward to Ortona.

In conducting their delaying action, the Germans occupied and defended strong points on favorable terrain until forced to retire. Temporary delaying positions, with little or no fortifications, were established on the Volturno River and other terrain features where advantage could be taken of streams, narrow valleys, groups of stone buildings, high ground and concealment.

The Allies could outflank or overwhelmingly attack these temporary delaying positions occupied by relatively small enemy units. The going was quite difficult at times, but detailed planning and thorough coordination of all arms by higher commanders and their staffs was not demanded by the nature of the operations. Combat teams, composed mainly of Infantry and artillery in various combinations to fit the task could, and did, do the job. Tanks could be used occasionally where the terrain was suitable. In general, operations were conducted during daylight hours. Night operations were limited, except occasionally, to patrolling and out-guard duty. Casualties occurred daily, but in relatively small numbers. Leaders who became casualties were replaced promptly. Unit organization was well maintained. Supply was no big problem.

During this gradual advance by the Allies, the Germans were preparing the Gustov Line, using their engineers and Italian labor. Aerial photographs were taken at intervals by Allied aviation and revealed the progress made in the build-up of field fortifications. Captured German prisoners of war supplied verifying information. Italian civilians who had been eye witnesses to German troop movements, installations and fortifications on the Gustov Line were interrogated, and their knowledge was recorded. Information from all sources was plotted on intelligence maps and periodically published to the command by the Headquarters, Fifth Army. These maps showed in detail the location of field fortifications, strong points, guns, fields of fire, obstacles and mine fields. All of this information clearly revealed that the tactics of the Germans would change from delaying action to an indefinite defense when the Gustov position should be occupied by them.

Delaying positions, stronger than usual, were established in front of the Gustov Line on Mounts Camino, Defensa, Lungo, and Summucro to gain time for and to protect the defense activities. The capture of these forward localities in December and the capture of Mount Porchia and Mount Trocchio and St. Elia between January 12th and January 15th brought the Fifth Army face to face with the main defenses.

The Gustov Line position included the Rapido River as an obstacle. On the front assigned to the II Corps, the river was from 40 to 50 feet wide, from 8 to 12 feet deep, with verticle banks 3 to 4 feet high on both sides. The current was quite swift, about 4 miles per hour. The temperature of the water was very cold, estimated to be a few degrees above freezing. There were no bridges.

A series of strong points were organized along the higher ground, on the German side of the river, and because of the meandering of the stream, varied from 300 to 800 yards back from the bank. These strong points consisted of groups of riflemen, machine gunners, mortar crews, anti-tank crews, and tankers. They were dug in and protected by concrete bunkers and barbed wire. They were so arranged that they were able to protect each other by the interlocking fire of their weapons, and could place concentrated small arms fire along the river banks.

The ground between the river and the line of strong points was flat. All trees and brush within range had been cut down, in order to provide unobstructed observation along the whole front and to give the German gunners a clear view of their sectors of fire. Barbed wire entanglements were constructed so that they would hold attacking troops under direct fire of rifles, machine guns and mortars. Out-guards were posted along the German side at night, to give warning in case of attack, and to prevent the crossing of allied reconnaissance patrols. When the Germans retired from their positions east of the river, they placed mines of various types, principally personnel, where approaches to the river from the American side were most probable.

Supporting artillery of various types was emplaced in rear of the line of German strong points. These were arranged in depth and could be expected to bring down concentrations of fire, as called for, on any concentration of allied troops that might attack the position. In addition to artillery, the rear area of the Gustov defensive position contained local infantry reserves, projector batteries, anti-tank batteries, tank units, and service units. It could be assumed that all of these were controlled by an effective communications system which would include the observation stations on the high ground west of Cassino and south of the Liri River. Observers posted there could examine in detail the entire front of the II Corps as far as three or more miles east from the river.

Elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division manned the defenses opposite the II Corps. The 129th Panzer Grenadier Regiment defended the position north of San Angelo and the 115th Reconnaissance Battalion, and a part of the 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, defended the position south of San Angelo.

All of the above information was contained in intelligence reports issued by the Fifth Army on or before January 12, 1944, or in the intelligence reports of the front line Divisions. Between January 12th and 20th, this information was verified and supplemented by additional reports.

On the American side, the ground was low, flat, and bare for a distance of a mile or so east from the river. It then ascended to somewhat higher levels. The isolated Mounts Trocchio and Porchia were exceptions. Mt. Trocchio was a rocky mass that provided the only good observation point within the area. Except for a few small isolated patches, there was no suitable cover within a mile or more of the river where troops could be concealed during daylight hours. It was therefore necessary to station units and equipment from two to five miles back from the river and maintain outguards and patrols along the river at night. The greater part of the low ground was a deep, thick mud; three to four inches deep for men and six to ten inches deep for vehicles. Dirt roads suitable for use by light farm equipment, crisscrossed the area. There were no roads on the low ground suitable for loaded trucks or heavy vehicles.

During the months of December and January, I had given a lot of thought to possible ways and means for crossing the Rapido at some future date, for it was possible that the 36th Division might get the job. In the same period I had, on occasions, discussed the problem with General Mark W. Clark, the Army Commander, and General Geoffrey Keys, the Corps Commander. I pointed out to them the many disadvantages that would be involved in any attack of the German position between the Liri River and Cassino. This strongly organized position appeared to me to be very difficult to attack successfully, even if there were no unfavorable river. But to attack it with the unfordable Rapido as an added obstacle, covered by the fire of all types of weapons, seemed to me to be very unwise. I could not recall a single instance in military

history where an attack had been successful when made across an unfordable river that was incorporated into the main defensive position, as an obstacle, and covered by fire from the main line of resistance.

My objective in discussing the difficulties involved was to convince General Clark and General Keyes that a crossing of the Rapido should not be attempted between the Liri River and Cassino, and that if attempted, a failure could be expected. I felt that my ideas did not receive logical consideration. I also felt that neither of them fully realized that the Germans had ceased their delaying tactics and were going to defend the Gustov position indefinitely. I felt that neither of them fully realized that piece-meal attacks and bold and venturesome movements, suitable against rear guard and delaying operations, would no longer be suitable against the prepared defensive position.

Since the fortifications between the Liri River and Cassino were much stronger than elsewhere, as revealed by the intelligence reports issued by G-2 of the Headquarters Fifth Army, I suggested that a greater chance of success could be had by crossing the Rapido north of Cassino where the Rapido was fordable. There, a coordinated attack could be made in daylight, with a greater initial attacking force; with greater surprise; on a wider front, and could be made with the intention of seizing Mount Castellone, crossing the mountain ridge, cutting Highway No. 6 west of Cassino and outflanking the defensive position between the Liri River and Cassino.

Such an attack, if made on a broad front, and properly planned and executed, should be successful, and if so, would break the Gustov Line and make it possible to employ armor via Highway No. 6 to assist in an advance up the Liri Valley. This would have been difficult, of course, but it seemed to me to promise greater success with less losses than to make a frontal, piece-meal attack on the strongest part of the Gustov defenses, where, because of limited crossing equipment, the attackers would be confined to very narrow crossing points and would have to build up under fire an attacking force by infiltration west of the river. As early as January 8th, I had made the following entry in my diary: "I'll swear, I do not see how we can possibly succeed in crossing the river near San Angelo when that stream is the main line of resistance of the German position."

Several days after the failure of the 36th Division to cross the Rapido, the 34th Division did make an attack in the area north of Cassino, but by that time the German sector commanders had been alerted, their positions had been strengthened, there was no surprise, the attack was made on a narrow front in piece-meal efforts by only one regiment at a time. The tanks were used in a marshy area where many of them bogged down. The objective of the attack was not maintained in the direction of Mt. Castellone with the intention of subsequently cutting Highway No. 6 west of Cassino. It became directed toward the town of Cassino and the Monastery Hills. It failed to open the Liri Valley. The tactics were the same as had been used during the advance from Solerno against a rear guard and delaying force. The attacks were made on narrow fronts by relatively small forces.

My views were the result of my experience in organizing and defending a position on the Marne River in World War I. On that occasion, I was commanding the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry, 3rd Infantry Division. The battalion had a strength of five rifle companies, a machine gun company, a platoon of 3-inch mortars, a section of one-pounder guns, and one single 75 mm gun. The battalion covered a front along the river where it made a bend of about 5 kilometers, and a depth of about 3 kilometers. The main line of resistance of the battalion was approximately two kilometers south of the river. Small arms fire from the main line of resistance could not cover the river. However, sections of the river were covered by the small arms fire of platoons posted forward as outguards, and by carefully planned artillery concentrations.

The Marne was 50 to 60 feet wide and unfordable. The banks were low and the current was slow. On the German side, the ground ascended rather steeply from the river and much of it was covered with dense woods. There were two villages composed of stone buildings on the river bank. The roads leading to and along the river were firm. These conditions made it possible for the German attackers to store and conceal steel pontons and bridging equipment near the points where they were to be used. They could conceal also, near the river bank, the troops that were to make the crossing.

On the American side, the ground was much lower, giving the Germans full view of most of the area. The personnel and equipment of the American battalion had to be concealed during daylight.

The German attack began at 12:10 A.M., July 15, 1918, with an intense artillery preparation laid down by 88 batteries. The troops were ferried across in steel pontons at three different locations. Construction of three bridges was undertaken. Our prepared artillery concentrations and small arms fire at close range played havoc with these formations, disorganizing them, creating many casualties, and much destruction. The attack on the front of the 1st Battalion was made by the 398th Regiment and two-thirds of the 6th Regiment of the 10th German Infantry Division. The 47th Regiment of the 10th Division was to follow in reserve. The attackers never reached the main line of resistance of the battalion. Only one platoon on that line became engaged. Nevertheless, the casualties on our battalion main line of resistance were high, due to the heavy artillery fire of the Germans.

The fighting was over by 9:00 A.M. A German battalion headquarters and some 350 men had been captured. The remainder were driven to cover, where they stayed until darkness, when all returned to the north bank. The bridges were never built. In the afternoon, a hastily prepared and unnecessary counterattack was made into the sector of the 30th Infantry by a battalion of the 7th Infantry, but it was fully exposed to the view of the German artillery observers and was promptly dispersed. It accomplished nothing.

Actually, the attack of the 10th German Division (less a battalion of the 6th Regiment which attempted to cross on the front of the 38th Infantry and was repulsed) was stopped and turned back by our prepared artillery concentrations and by two rifle companies, one machine gun company, one mortar platoon, one section of one-pounders, all in the outpost zone; and by one rifle platoon on the main line of resistance. The first battalion lost over 600 men out of a strength of 1200. Most of the losses were caused by artillery fire.

The Germans, making the crossing of the Marne, had many advantages that the 36th Division would not have when making the crossing of the Rapido; and the Germans defending the Rapido would have many advantages that the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry did not have in the defense of the Marne. It appeared to me that the unsuccessful crossing of the Marne on July 15, 1918 was about to be repeated, in reverse, on the Rapido in 1944.

On January 2nd, General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, Commanding the Fifteenth Army Group, directed the Fifth Army to make the landing at Anzio and on January 12th, he directed that the enemy should not be allowed any respite in which to reorganize or take up new positions; he must be compelled to react to the threat to his communications and rear, and advantages must be taken of this to break through his defenses. He directed that these operations culminate with an attack by the II Corps across the Rapido River on about January 20th.

In accordance with these directives, the French Corps advanced to the Gustov Line, near St. Elia, north of Cassino on January 15th. The same day, the II Corps took Mt. Trocchio, the last German held locality in its zone of action, east of the Rapido. On January 17th and 18th, the British Fifth and Sixty-Sixth Divisions crossed the Garigliano River near the sea and established a bridgehead on high ground. An attempt to cross the same river by the British Forty-Sixth Division, which was on the immediate left of the 36th Division, on January 19th, was a complete failure. The next day, the 36th Division took its turn in the series of successive attacks along the front, from left to right, from the sea northward.

Field Order #20 II Corps, issued on the 16th of January, 1944, gave to the 36th Division, on the left, the major mission of establishing a bridgehead over the Rapido in the San Angelo area, as far as Pignataro. When the bridgehead should be established, Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division was to pass through on Corps order and attack northwestward up the Liri Valley toward Rome, with the hope of effecting a union of those elements of the Fifth Army on the southern front with those in the Anzio beachhead. The U. S. 34th Division was to be prepared to attack Cassino from the east, or from the new bridgehead at San Angelo, or to pass through the 36th Division, as the opportunity offered. The 34th Division was to make a demonstration on 20 January in its area, in front of Cassino as a feint to divert attention from the 36th Division's attack. Intense artillery support was provided. Engineers, tanks, tank destroyers, and other units were attached to the

36th Division. Before the attack, the III Air Support Command was to bomb strong points in the bridgehead area and to attack known enemy concentrations.

When the decision was made by higher authority that the 36th Division was to cross the Rapido, every possible step was taken to insure success, and special pains were taken not to convey any feelings of doubt on my part to anyone.

Much study was given to the difficulties involved in the operation and to possible ways and means of overcoming them. A number of Division conferences were held, attended by myself, members of the Division Staff, and the various unit commanders. Here the many problems were presented and discussed.

The German observers, posted along the main line of resistance and on the high ground near Cassino and south of the Liri River, had a clear view of the low ground along the river. Because there was no suitable concealment within 1000 yards to one mile from the river, where troops and crossing equipment could be placed and not be discovered and destroyed during daytime, it was decided that it would be less hazardous to approach the river and initiate the crossing under cover of darkness.

Since the Germans had mined the likely approaches and probable assembly areas, it would be necessary to remove these mines from lanes so the infantry could move to the river. This work would have to be completed during the nights of January 18/19 and 19/20. These lanes would have to be outlined on the ground by tape, although there was a possibility that they might be observed by the German outguards during the day and reveal the crossing points.

Because of the poor condition of the farm roads in the area and because the sound of vehicles would alert the German outguards, it would be necessary, for the sake of as much surprise as possible, for infantrymen to carry by hand all crossing equipment from the place of concealment to the river, a distance of 1000 yards or more.

Construction of bridges would have to begin immediately after the leading infantry units should cross and clear the west bank, in order that communication could be maintained and lighter vehicles could cross by dawn to closely support the infantry. This meant that the lighter support bridges would have to be emplaced the first night.

The fact that existing farm roads near the river were narrow and muddy and would not support the required vehicles, made it necessary to treat them with gravel before any volume of traffic could approach to and cross the bridges. This would have to be done just as soon as the bridges were in place.

Sunrise was at 0737 hours and sunset was at 1705 hours. In order to be fully concealed by darkness, movement could not begin before 1735 hours. If 23 minutes is allowed for the troops to march to the place where the crossing equipment was spotted; 30 minutes allowed for boat and foot bridge crews to procure their loads and be assembled; 45 minutes to march to the river in the mud and darkness and get into proper formation; 25 minutes to emplace the footbridges and launch the floats, and 20 minutes for unforeseen delays; 2000 hours is about as early as the actual crossing could begin. More time is required to do these things at night than in daytime, especially in this case, when no previous practice or rehearsal under similar conditions had taken place. This, after the hour of initial crossing, there would be about 11 hours of darkness during which much would have to be accomplished.

On about January 12th, the 142nd and 143rd Infantry Regiments and the 19th Engineers conducted some training over the Volturno River, in the Division training area. This was intended to be in preparation for the Rapido crossing, but was of little or no value because of the different characteristics of the two rivers. Little was taught besides methods of carrying, launching, and rowing the boats on a placid stream which had low banks.

In order for the operation to be successful, a considerable portion of the German main line of resistance would have to be captured and held prior to or soon after daylight, so that the river would be free from enemy small arms and mortar fire and thus make it possible for the bridges to be completed and maintained. This occupation of the German main line of resistance was the key job of the whole operation. Only if this could be done, would troops, tanks, guns, trucks, and other vehicles be able to cross, to support, and to insure exploitation of the initial success.

But how was the infantry to cross the river, advance to and capture a considerable sector of the main line of resistance during darkness, relying only on the weapons they could carry by hand for close support? There was no satisfactory answer. The number of floats and improvised foot bridges available and their vulnerability to destruction by enemy fire would limit each regiment to one crossing area. The available equipment also would limit each regiment to crossing only small numbers of men at a time. In other words, each regiment would be compelled to build up, by infiltration methods, a coordinated attacking force in the dark, west of the river on unfamiliar ground, with no known or visible landmarks to assist in establishing directions, and hence with no proper control by troop leaders. This is difficult enough to do on maneuvers, where there are no casualties, no destruction, and no confusion from outside sources.

How can the artillery support such a maneuver on the part of the infantry? There can be no observed fire during the night. The best that can be done is to

put down as heavy a preparatory bombardment as possible with all batteries, just prior to the time of crossing, for the purpose of keeping down much of the enemy fire and destroying as much as possible of the fortifications on the main line of resistance. Artillery ammunition available would limit this type of bombardment to 30 minutes. After this preparatory fire, artillery support would have to be by concentrations previously arranged and plotted on the map. Some of these would be put down automatically on rearward areas, others would be called for by infantry units in need of close support. This latter would be necessary, but to determine in the darkness and confusion where one is located exactly on the map and on strange ground; where the enemy activity is located on which artillery fire is desired; which prearranged concentration covers that area; and get all this information to the artillery liaison officer when his location is in doubt would be a task beyond the capability of the average human being.

The disadvantages of crossing by night were quite well understood by all concerned. It was also understood that if, in spite of the disadvantages, the infantrymen could not cross the river and advance to and capture a considerable portion of the main line of resistance, and if the engineers could not emplace the required bridges during the eleven hours of available darkness or soon thereafter, they most certainly could not do it in broad daylight when all activities of the attacking troops could be observed and brought under effective concentrated fires. All unit commanders in the Division knew that the basic rule that "night operations must be simple," was being violated. But there was no way they could be made simple under the imposed conditions.

As a result of the several conferences, a final plan was adopted and was published to the command by Field Order No. 42, Headquarters 36th Division, January 18, 1944. However, the pertinent parts of the adopted plan were known to the unit commanders concerned prior to January 18th.

(See Appendix "A" -- Field Order No. 42, 36th Division)

General Hawksworth, 46th British Division, which was on the left flank of the 36th Division, came to the Headquarters of the 36th Division on the afternoon of January 20th to explain to me the failure of his Division to cross the Garigliano River the night before. That failure, of course, made it tough for the men of the 36th Division who, as a result, would have none of the advantages that his successful crossing would have provided. He also extended his best wishes for our success.

On the late afternoon of January 20th, the Army Commander called me on the telephone and extended to me his best wishes, but added that he was worried about the success of the attack. I do not recall my part of the conversation, but I know that it was not encouraging.

The same day, I attended a conference at Headquarters II Corps, during which I explained the Division plan for crossing the Rapido. I pointed out the difficulties involved and stated that everything had been done that could be done to make the attack succeed. I tried to present an optimistic attitude.

As soon as it was dark, elements of both regiments proceeded to carry out their part of the operation. The crossing was preceded by a heavy artillery preparation which began at 7:30 P. M. and ended at 8:00 P. M. The preparation started just west of the river and included the German main line of resistance, as well as known targets in the rear area. It was lifted from east to west on a time schedule. Close in fires started at 7:30 P. M., lifted at 7:55 P. M. and moved west by 100 yard shifts on a prearranged schedule designed to keep artillery fire falling within 150 to 200 yards of advancing troops.

The 141st Infantry on the right (north) sector assigned the 1st and 3rd Battalions to cross at two separate points. The 1st Battalion, assigned to use rubber boats, was delayed because the carrying parties en route to the river were disorganized and part of their equipment destroyed by enemy artillery fire, and because some of them strayed into mined areas. The rubber boats were awkward to carry in the mud, fog, and darkness, and the tape, marking cleared lanes, could not be definitely recognized unless one could stoop down and grope for them. After a time, the tapes were trampled into the mud or destroyed by artillery fire, and confusion followed. Some of the rubber boats could not be successfully launched because of the rapid, swirling current and the high verticle banks. All the boats were eventually destroyed by shell and mine fragments, or were carried off by the swift current. The 3rd Battalion, assigned to cross by means of the improvised foot bridges, was likewise delayed because of destroyed equipment and confusion due to casualties. The one foot bridge not destroyed was successfully put in place by about 4 A. M., and Companies A and B and a part of Company C, of the 1st Battalion, crossed on it. They advanced over the low ground in small groups. A few individuals succeeded in getting through the barbed wire and onto the main line of resistance by daylight. The 3rd Battalion did not succeed in crossing because the one foot bridge that had been emplaced just before dawn was subjected to continuous fire by artillery and mortars and was eventually destroyed. The engineers were unable to emplace the support bridges. Just prior to daylight, the troops that were across the river were ordered to dig in and hold their positions, since they could neither be supported by other troops nor be withdrawn to the east bank. Activities were suspended during daylight with the intention of renewing the attack after nightfall.

The 143rd Infantry was to cross the Rapido at two points. The leading elements procured their boats and were led to the river by members of the 19th Engineers. The 1st Battalion arrived there on time, at 8:00 P. M. They did not receive enemy machine gun fire en route, but there was some artillery falling. There was some confusion due to the clumsy loads and mud, and because of the darkness and fog which reduced visibility to almost zero. The 1st Battalion was on the right, the

3rd Battalion was on the left; the 2nd Battalion was in reserve. The 1st Battalion began to launch the rubber boats immediately upon arrival at the river and started Company C across. The artillery and mortar fire which had been falling on the crossing area was increased, and by the time Company C was across, all the boats had been destroyed. The carrying details of Companies A and B and the engineer guides and ferrymen were disorganized and depressed because of the shell fire and losses. Company C was isolated west of the river and its situation was unknown, although rifle firing could be heard. By 11 P.M., Colonel David M. Frazier, the Battalion Commander, was organizing carrying parties from the personnel of Company B to go back to the original assembly area for more boats. They brought five M-2 wooden boats to the crossing site and B Company started to cross. During this period, artillery and mortar fire were causing many casualties and destroying equipment. The crossing of the 1st Battalion was completed at about 6 A.M., January 21st. The last elements of the battalion crossed on the only foot bridge remaining. It was badly damaged, but still had enough floatage for crossing.

The 3rd Battalion, 143rd Infantry, had difficulties while en route to the river from the assembly area. The members of the 19th Engineers assigned to lead the carrying parties to the river lost their way in the darkness and fog, and wandered into mine fields. The mines and artillery fire destroyed most of the rubber boats and created a great many casualties. Disorganization and demoralization followed, and in the darkness and fog, could not be effectively controlled. Much time was lost in reorganization. The Battalion Commander found it to be impracticable to rely on the rubber boats and decided to use foot bridges for crossing. But, the continual bombardment of the crossing site, and with it the continual loss of leaders and equipment, prevented any effective progress. None of the battalion had crossed by daylight, and it was ordered to return to its original assembly area.

The 1st Battalion was unable to make any important progress after completing its crossing at about 6 A.M. It had to defend itself from the beginning and it was forced into a pocket with the river at its back. There it was fired on continually at short range after daylight by German tanks and self-propelled guns in hull down positions, and by small arms and mortars. The battalion was completely overwhelmed by this fire, and it could not be supported by other troops. Being in the open with no protective cover, it was about to be wiped out when the Battalion Commander, at about 10 A.M., ordered what was left of it to return to the east bank, over the one remaining, damaged foot bridge, the only means of crossing.

At about 10 A.M., January 21st, the Corps Commander accompanied by members of this staff, arrived at Division Headquarters. He directed that a second attack be made by the Division to cross the Rapido during the day, prior to dark, the bridges to be constructed immediately following the launching of the assault boats. He was told that the troops had been ordered to be prepared to renew the crossing at 9:00 P.M. He stated that he desired the attack to be made as soon as possible, preferably before noon, since the sun, shining in the eyes of the German

defenders, would make it more difficult for them to observe our operations in the haze then existing. It was explained that no real gains had been made in the previous attack, that several hours were required to reorganize and prepare for a renewal. The various Infantry units had to prepare the necessary plans, issue required orders, and procure the required crossing equipment. All this would require time. He explained that since some elements of the 141st Infantry were across the river there was every reason why their success should be augmented by a second crossing, to be initiated prior to noon. Of course, there had been no success by either regiment and although some remnants of the 141st Infantry were west of the river, they were disorganized, fighting for survival from whatever cover they could utilize, completely isolated between the river and the main German defenses with no support or communication. The smoke and haze existing at the time prevented artillery observers from directing effective artillery support. Nevertheless, having been directed in positive terms to initiate the second attack at once, I informed the Corps Commander that his orders would be carried out as soon as the engineer officers, who were responsible for assembling the required crossing equipment, and the two regimental commanders could be consulted. The situation was explained to them and to the members of the Division staff, and the hour for crossing was set at 2:00 P.M. Everyone knew that the necessary details and arrangements could not be accomplished by that time. Later the hour was postponed to 3:00 P.M. and again to 4:00 P.M.

Impatience from Corps Headquarters and repeated prodding to get the attack launched, prevented further postponement. Neither regiment was completely prepared at 4:00 P.M., but, nevertheless, the artillery preparation was put down at that time and the 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry, began to cross soon thereafter, using equipment that had been brought in by the engineers during the day. Companies A and B were across by 6:35 P.M. Enemy artillery and mortar fire began falling as the first troops crossed the river, and when the first wave went forward, it met continual and effective machine gun fire. The crossing equipment was gradually damaged and made useless, so that each succeeding group had less equipment than the preceding one. Company C was not across by 11 P.M., and part of the Company never did get across. The battalion made no progress west of the river and was subjected to continual fire that caused a gradual and further reduction in the strength of the units which had already been greatly depleted by the first attack. By daylight of January 22nd, the Battalion Commander and Commanders of Companies A, B and C were either killed or wounded and the battalion was on flat ground with little or no protection from artillery fire. It was ordered back to the east side of the river to reorganize and await instructions.

The leading elements of the 3rd Battalion, 143rd Infantry, arrived at its crossing site south of the 1st Battalion at 4:30 P.M. Smoke had been placed along the river to conceal its approach. Nevertheless, German artillery and mortar fire came down on the battalion while carrying its crossing equipment to the river. It was

more fortunate than the 1st Battalion. Companies I, K and L crossed in rubber boats after which the first foot bridge was put in place, and the entire battalion was across by 6:30 P.M. It came under machine gun fire immediately after crossing and made some progress through the barbed wire. They silenced some of the German machine guns in the zone of advance, but were having great difficulty. Casualties were continuous and progress was slow. By 9:00 A.M., January 22nd, ammunition had to be resupplied, but could not be done effectively because of the exposure to grazing machine gun fire and artillery and rocket fire, which, in greater intensity than formerly, was placed on the troops and crossing sites for one hour from 9:00 A.M. to 10:00 A.M. As a result, the position became untenable.

The 2nd Battalion, 143rd Infantry, was ordered to cross the river at 11:40 P.M. at the site of the 3rd Battalion. As the Battalion approached the river, it was met by engineer guides from the 29th Engineers, but the foot bridge over which it was to cross could not be found. Finally, Captain Herman N. Volheim, from the 3rd Battalion, learning of its situation, guided it to the foot bridge and across to a position on the right of the 3rd Battalion. Companies E and F made little progress. Company G remained in the rear to protect the crossing site. By 8:00 A.M., January 22nd, Companies E and F had advanced only 200 yards from the river. There they were held up by concentrated fire of all kinds. Eventually, they arrived approximately opposite the right flank of the 3rd Battalion. The intense concentrations of fire of all types that was put down by the Germans from 9:00 A.M. to 10:00 A.M. stopped any further progress. The position was untenable. By 1:00 P.M. both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were being repulsed and driven back to the east side of the river. All three battalions were directed to organize defensive positions on the high ground east of the Rapido, in the vicinity of their previously occupied assembly areas. Losses in killed, wounded, and missing for the period of both attacks was reported to be a total of 969 officers and enlisted men.

When it became known that the 141st Infantry could not be prepared to launch the second attack at 4:00 P.M., on January 21st, there was no surprise. Its troops had had a severe test of battle, many leaders had to be replaced, previous difficulties had to be discussed, and improvements decided. Movement within its area in daylight was exposed to German observers. It was not in as good condition after the first attack as the 143rd Infantry. The Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General W. H. Welbur, went to the Command Post of the 141st Infantry in order to assist the Regimental Commander in any way possible to prepare for the second attack. After a review of the situation with the Regimental Commander and members of his staff, it was decided that the attack would be launched just as soon as proper arrangements could be made.

At 10:00 P.M., January 21st, the 2nd Battalion, 141st Infantry, began crossing the river under artillery and mortar fire. Losses and destruction followed. The

same conditions prevailed as existed in the first attack. The rubber boats were punctured by shell fragments or lost due to awkwardness in handling because of the swirling water and high banks. By 1:00 A.M., most of the 2nd Battalion was across. By 3:30 A.M., most of the 3rd Battalion was across. By 5:00 A.M., most of both battalions were over and had managed to advance through the barbed wire to a distance of from 200 to 600 yards from the river where they were forced to dig in and seek protection from all types of fire, which was continually directed at them. Because of the smoke, which had been put down to conceal movements in daylight, the artillery observers were not able to effectively direct close support. The battalions were isolated, pinned down, subjected to constant destructive fire from all types of weapons and being gradually reduced in strength. Communications were impossible. The need for ammunition, food and water, could not be relieved. The wounded could not be evacuated. At about 4:00 P.M., the Germans launched a series of counterattacks, taking advantage of the smoke and haze which concealed their movements. These initial counterattacks were repulsed. By 5:00 P.M., the battalion commanders and executive officers of both battalions and all company commanders except one were either killed or wounded. Accounts of the few who escaped and worked their way back to the east bank indicate that the Germans succeeded in surrounding and capturing those still holding out. The sound of American weapons was heard intermittently until 10:40 P.M. None was heard after that hour. Arrangements were made to ferry surviving personnel back across the river during the night, but were unsuccessful because of the complete darkness and continual artillery fire.

The Corps Commander had kept himself informed of the progress of events throughout the day of the 22nd of January. When it became known that the second attack had had no success, but that some personnel of the 141st Infantry were holding out across the river, he directed that the 142nd Infantry, which had been in corps reserve, be returned to the control of the 36th Division and that a third attack be made by that regiment at 2:30 A.M., January 23rd. The regiment had only a few hours prior to darkness to make the necessary arrangements. The engineers would have to provide the necessary equipment, probably after dark. The time allowed was insufficient and the stage was being set for another disaster. The disadvantages were again pointed out, but they received no more consideration than formerly. Just because some units had crossed the river and were pinned down did not mean the slightest success. There could not be even the beginning of a successful crossing until a considerable portion of the German main line of resistance was occupied and held by us so that bridges could be put in place for supporting troops to cross. Not even a dent had been made in the German defenses. Nevertheless, the statement was made in support of the decision to make another attack, that the Germans were "groggy," their morale was low, and that all that was needed was another "blow" by a fresh regiment to turn them out of their position, for it may be that they are already preparing to withdraw. This was wishful

thinking. The Germans had received no "blows" during the past two days, but we had taken several from them. The positive order was given to the Division to go ahead with the third attack at 2:30 A.M., January 23rd. The Regimental Commander, 142nd Infantry, and other commanders concerned, were notified and preparations were rushed to meet the designated time for crossing. Sometime later, after consulting General Clark, the Army Commander, the Corps Commander, General Keyes, in a telephone conversation with the Division Commander, at about 10 P.M., authorized him to cancel the third attack. This was done immediately.

On January 21st and 22nd, the 34th Division made a number of demonstrations to the north of the sector of the 36th Division, for the purpose of holding the German troops in position on its front. Later, the 36th Division conducted similar demonstrations in support of the attacks of the 34th Division. It is doubtful if they really accomplished any worthwhile results.

At about 4:00^{PM}, January 22nd, a message was received at the Command Post of the 141st Infantry. The translation follows: "To the English Commander: The German Commander desires that the English Commander grant a three hour truce for the purpose of caring for and removing the English wounded. It is desired that the time of the truce be disseminated. The German Commander."

This message was brought to the headquarters of the regiment by Private Gavino Manella, ASN 32885684, Medical Department. He was an aid man attached to Company A, 141st Infantry. He reported that he crossed the Rapido near the "S" bend with his company on the morning of January 21st, at about 5 A.M. They advanced toward the road which is about 600 yards from and parallel to the river. They received mortar fire on their boats while crossing, and machine gun fire soon after they advanced from the river. The company stopped east of the road which has high banks on each side, and began to dig in. They knocked out several machine guns in front of them, but continued to receive fire from other machine guns, firing from the flanks and left rear. There were a lot of casualties. Manella, along with others, carried some of the wounded into a farm house nearby to protect them from the fire of mortars, machine guns, rifles, and hand grenades which were being directed at the company. At about 12 noon, the Germans began closing in on them and at about 12:30 P.M., he and some twenty other men were captured. He did not know how many were killed or wounded, but there were many lying in the field around the house. After being captured, Manella was held in the vicinity of the command post of a German front line unit, probably a company. He observed that the Germans had dug a lot of trenches and there were many machine gun emplacements. Excavations were dug into the embankment for the protection of supplies, personnel and for command posts.

During the afternoon of January 21st, at about 2:00 P.M., some German soldiers with machine guns and rifle grenades arrived at the command post. They were

clean and had not done any fighting. On the morning of January 22nd, there was increased activity around the command post. More ammunition and machine guns arrived and about twenty-five soldiers arrived in the afternoon just before Manella departed with the message. When they gave it to him, they said they wanted to pick up the English wounded as well as their own.

At the time the Manella message was received at the command post of the 141st Infantry, 4 P.M., January 22nd, the remnants of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 141st Infantry, were struggling to maintain themselves west of the river in front of the German positions from which Manella had come. The regimental commander suspected some form of deception or ruse and ignored the request. At that very moment, the German local reserves described by Manella as having arrived at the command post prior to his departure, were taking advantage of the haze and smoke then prevailing to surround and dispose of what was left of the two American battalions.

Shortly before noon on January 23rd, the Army Commander, General Clark, and the Corps Commander, General Keyes visited the Division Commander at the command post of the 36th Division. Brigadier General W. H. Wilbur, the Assistant Division Commander, and Colonel (later Brigadier General) Walter Hess, the Division Artillery Commander, were present. The operations of the preceding two days were discussed primarily along the lines of General Clark's initial statement to the effect "Tell me what happened up here." The conference was not one in which there was any attempt to blame anyone for the serious check which the Germans had given our operations to cross the Rapido. In fact, at one point, General Keyes made a statement generally to the effect that from the information available before the operation, it had seemed to him to be a most worthwhile operation. At this point, General Clark interjected the remark, "It was as much my fault as yours."

At about 10 A.M., January 25th, 1944, the operations officer of the 141st Infantry called the operations officer of the 36th Division and stated that the regimental surgeon had gone to the near bank of the Rapido with an ambulance, had parlied with a German officer who eventually appeared on the far bank, and had requested that our medical personnel be permitted to evacuate our dead and surviving wounded from the German side of the river. The German Commander agreed to this for a two hour period, provided both sides would withhold all fires into that area during that period. The Division Commander approved the request.

The 143rd Infantry was notified of the proposed cessation of fire and was granted the same opportunity to recover its dead and wounded.

Soon after the request for a cessation of fire was approved, the ferrying of the dead and wounded was in progress. Our medical personnel did not wait for an official designation of the hours for the truce. The German soldiers joined our men and assisted in the evacuation. Some of them spoke English. They were reserved but friendly. They joined in conversation with our men and, along with other topics, stated that they thought our men during the second attack should have given up when they were initially surrounded and cut off from returning to the east bank; that by continuing to fight, they only brought casualties on themselves with no hope for success.

Captain Kaplan crossed the Rapido at about 1:30 P.M. to make the final official arrangements. After further conference with the local German Commander, the time for the cessation of fire was set from 3:15 to 5:00 P.M. and instructions were issued to all concerned that there be no firing while the wounded were being recovered.

On this same day, the 34th Division was making an attack north of Cassino, some four kilometers from the right boundary of the 36th Division.

The Corps Headquarters was about to be notified that these arrangements had been completed, and that the medical parties of the two regiments were across the river, when a staff officer, II Corps, called the G-3 of the Division and informed him that a "feinting" operation had been directed to be made within the 36th Division Sector by armored units, all under corps control. This "feinting" operation was to be carried out within one hour. The armored units were already moving into the division area via Highway No. 6 and would proceed to two areas of high ground in the sector of the 143rd Infantry. There they would maneuver around, exposing themselves to view of the German observers to attract attention. This maneuvering was to be accompanied by the tanks firing, from various positions, on certain selected target areas across the river. All this was to give the Germans the impression that another attack was about to be launched. One of the target areas was that in which the 143rd Infantry medical parties were collecting wounded. This was quite disconcerting. It was amazing that higher authority would plan, direct and carry out such an operation within the combat area of the Division without any prior ground reconnaissance or coordination with the activities of units already located in the areas involved, and with no advance notice.

Evidently, the whole "feinting" operation had been planned from a map without regard for the location of troop positions and bivouacs nor for practical routings to avoid destruction of wire lines and disruption of normal arrangements. Moreover, it seemed incredible that the Germans, secure and confident their strong and battle-tested fortifications behind an impassable river, would be much

impressed by such an amateurish affair, especially since they had stopped and turned back with heavy losses two previous attacks by a reinforced division without any material damage to their own defensive arrangements. The situation regarding the collection of our wounded was explained and the corps staff officer was told that the tanks now en route must be turned back. Uncomplimentary remarks passed back and forth. The corps staff officer wanted to know if the 36th Division knew that there was still "a war on" and that the 34th Division was engaged in an attack to the north. This was countered by a comment to the effect that the "pop-gun affair," as ordered, was useless and would appear ridiculous to the Germans and would not help the 34th Division in the slightest. Other comments of a similar nature followed. The upshot was that several liaison officers were dispatched from Division Headquarters to intercept the armored column on Highway No. 6 and turn them back. The commander of the armored unit was surprised and confused, but turned his column about and disappeared eastward. This all took time.

A "crisis" having been averted, it was assumed that normality would ensue. But, not so. A short time after the armor had disappeared, the 143rd Infantry requested an extension of the time for collection of its wounded. Its medical personnel had been delayed and they could not finish the job within the agreed two hours. The request was approved and arrangements were made for a similar extension for the 141st Infantry. All concerned within the Division were notified, but Corps was not immediately informed about the extension of time. The brief calm that followed was soon broken by another telephone call from II Corps. The armored units had been turned around again by Corps staff officers and were once more entering the Division area. This time they would go to a different location, but in the same general locality. Their demonstration and firing would be delayed until after the lapse of time as originally set for collecting the wounded, and would begin at 5:00 P. M. This time the firing would be directed into the area across the river where the 143rd Infantry medical teams would still be collecting dead and wounded. More strong words ensued. More uncomplimentary remarks flew back and forth. In the end, the weary armored column was turned around for the third time. With its personnel in a state of frustration and confusion and with its gasoline supply materially reduced, it again disappeared eastward.

The unsuccessful "feinting" operation thus described kept things in a turmoil for the greater part of the day. In fact, various follow-up actions and reports to Corps headquarters continued until late that night. This incident is a perfect example of the confusion that will result when combat operations are hastily planned and directed by superior authority to take place within the area of a Division in the front lines, without coordination and without consulting the proper persons concerned at Division Headquarters.

While all this was going on, each of the two regiments working as rapidly as possible brought back about 60 bodies and a small number of wounded who had survived three days, during which they had lain among the German mine fields and barbed wire, exposed to the cold January weather, with no food or water, except what they were carrying with them when they crossed the river. Prior to the cessation of fire they could not be approached by friend or foe.

Sometime later, the tables were turned when the 142nd Infantry, of the 36th Division, was defending a position along the summit of Mount Castellone. On the early morning of February 12th, the Germans put down an intense artillery preparation on the top of the mountain and surrounding areas. At dawn, the German infantry attacked the position of the 142nd Infantry in force. It was met and finally repulsed by our men using machine guns, rifles and mortar fire. Hand grenades also were freely used. When the fighting ceased at about 11 A.M., the Germans retired, leaving a great number of their dead lying in front of the position. This time the Germans came asking for a cessation of fire. The next day, on February 13th, a German officer approached the position of the 142nd Infantry carrying a white flag. He requested that his commander be granted permission to pick up and bury their dead. The request was granted for a three-hour period, from 8 A.M. to 11 A.M., the next day, February 14th. Very soon after they began collecting their dead, the commander requested an extension of time of one hour which was authorized. Later the same day, permission was requested to continue the collection of their dead during the same period on the 15th of February. This was refused because the 7th Indian Division on the left flank was to make an attack that night.

Major General Monsabert, of the Free French Force, visited the headquarters of the 36th Division on the afternoon of February 14th. When he was told by the Division Commander that more than 200 German dead had been picked up that morning in front of the 142nd Infantry by Germans under the Red Cross flag, he said in French "Congratulations! Magnificent! You have now partly evened your losses at the Rapido."

On January 25th, two messages were received by pigeon from west of the river. One could have been from our own pigeonier, but was probably written by a German soldier, since there was no fighting west of the Rapido after 10:30 P.M., January 22nd. The pigeon probably came into the loft sometime on January 24th. It does not seem probable that it would loiter two full days en route to its home. The message was: "Everybody is giving up pig wounded. I may as well do the same unless I die first. Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 141st Inf."

Another message was received at 36th Division Headquarters on the morning of January 25th and was translated from the German. It read: "To the American 36th Division: herewith a messenger pigeon is returned. We have enough to eat and what's more, we look forward with pleasure to your next attempt. The German troops."

To anybody who believed that the feints and demonstrations we were making on January the 26th, to support the attack of the 34th Division, were causing the German defenders any anxiety or concern as they sat in their fortifications behind an unfordable river and observed some of our tanks moving about and firing at random, a message received at our pigeon loft on January 27th was revealing. The German soldiers seemed to be having a lot of fun sending messages to us by our own captured homing pigeons. The message was translated as follows: "To the 36th Division: You poor night watchmen, here is pigeon No. 2 back so that you won't starve. What do you plan in front of Cassino, with your tin-can armor? Your captured syphilitic comrades have shown us the quality of the American soldier. Your captains are too stupid to destroy secret orders before being captured. At the moment your troops south of Rome are getting a kick in the pants - you poor nose pickers. The German Troops."

The prescribed allowance of artillery ammunition at the time of the Rapido crossing was:

105 mm howitzer	45 rounds per gun per day
155 mm howitzer	40 rounds per gun per day
155 gun	30 rounds per gun per day
8 inch	
240 mm howitzer	<u>35 rounds per gun per day</u>

For the Rapido crossing, a greater number of rounds per gun per day was authorized, but fewer were actually fired because after the initial preparation, during the darkness, there were few calls for planned concentrations and after daylight the smoke and haze prevented observed fire. The troops, during the time they were cut off on the west side of the river, had no way for calling for close support. As a result, much of our artillery remained idle when they should have been firing heavy concentrations on the German main line of resistance in front of our infantrymen and on German batteries and installations behind their main position. The preparation fire was of thirty minutes duration. If three minutes is assumed as the average interval between fired rounds (most guns or howitzers required a greater interval) only ten rounds per gun was fired during the preparation. This left some 25 to 30 rounds per gun still available within the authorized allowance for the remainder of the day. It is well known that artillery fire cannot neutralize an organized defensive position unless the fire is continuous. The defenders seek shelter from concentrated fire and some damage is done to the

entrenchments and emplacements. But as soon as the concentrated artillery fire ceases, the defenders are ready in their emplacements to resume their defensive fires. It, therefore, was of the utmost importance, if there was to be any success, that our artillery maintain heavy concentrations on the German main line of resistance from daylight on until the main defenses were occupied by our infantrymen. The Division and attached artillery could not produce the volume of fire required to get the desired results and the Artillery Plan, prepared under direction of higher authority, did not provide for it. The fact that smoke and haze obscured the German defenses during daylight and made observed fire impracticable, should not have prevented heavy concentrations being placed on them by map firing. However, such a continuous concentration of artillery fire on the German defenses was necessary to the success of the operation, and it was never put down because the artillery commanders could not determine the position of our own troops. The smoke and haze prevented terrestrial observations, and the isolated troops had no effective way of communicating with the artillery fire center. To have fired by map into the German defenses without knowing the location of our own troops could have caused demoralizing casualties among our own men. As a matter of fact, our infantry received very little real help from our artillery, not because of any failure on the part of the artillery, but because our infantry was thrown into confusion and disorganized at the very beginning of the crossing and were unable to take advantage of the artillery program, due to darkness, casualties, smoke, fog and no effective means of communication.

On January 4th, the Division Engineer, Lt. Col. Oran Stovall was directed to prepare a topographical survey of Cassino, the Rapido River, and the area to the river. At this time, the 36th Division, less the Division Artillery, was in training in rear of the front lines. It was standard operating procedure to conduct engineer reconnaissance on areas within the control of the enemy and where the Division might be employed. Information for this survey was obtained from maps, aerial photos, observations from forward positions, interrogation of Italian civilians, intelligence reports, and other sources. From this information, an engineer estimate of the situation was prepared and was revised when it was possible to conduct personal reconnaissances to the river. The engineer estimate included a list of engineer equipment needed, if and when the Division should have to attack across the Rapido. The Division Engineer, together with members of his staff, devoted the 5th, 6th, and 7th of January in an effort to locate and obtain priority on the needed river crossing equipment. He was surprised to find that there was an appalling lack of basic engineer supplies available to conduct a war. The standard foot bridge needed for river crossings did not exist. All other items were scarce and in short supply. On about January 8th, informed of the nature of the river and the terrain contiguous thereto, and knowing the shortages that existed, he went to confer with Colonel Leonard Gallagher, Engineer, II Corps, to learn the troop list for a possible crossing by the 36th Division and to discuss the engineer plan. The conference lasted several hours, during which possible plans of attack across the

Rapido were considered in turn and discarded as unsatisfactory. The area north of Highway No. 6 was looked upon as a dead-end mountain, and the area south of it was defined as a mud valley, guarded by organized defenses behind an unfordable river, without suitable approach routes or exit roads. The Division Engineer contended that any attack made north or south of Highway No. 6 would create an impossible situation and end in failure and great loss of life. Nobody present was opposed to this view. Colonel Wilson, the Assistant Corps Engineer, a veteran of the II Corps in Africa, compared the Liri Valley to "The Mousetrap Valley" in Tunisia, which was overlooked by dominating heights, but pointed out that it had no river barrier to breach and the valley floor was dry and would support tank maneuvers. The conference wound up with a promise from the Corps Engineer that he would make every effort possible to secure adequate material and equipment for the pending operation and that the Corps Engineer troops would be available to assist the Division with its engineering problems. Thereafter, there was complete understanding and cooperation between the Division and Corps Engineers, although both recognized the handicaps under which they were working.

The corps engineers used white tape initially for marking mine fields and cleared lanes, but changed to Marlin cord, which was round and brown in color, because it was stronger than white tape and would be less likely to be seen by an alert enemy observer on the west shore. The only practical way for infantrymen to find their way during darkness through lanes outlined by Marlin cord is to grope for it and follow it with their hands as they move along. This, of course, was impracticable, with the result that men wandered out of the cleared lanes. But even if white tape had been used, it would not have been effective because of the foggy darkness, the destruction by shell fire, and because it was trampled into the mud by the carrying parties and individuals wandering off course.

The fact that the 141st Infantry did not take part in the river crossing practice on the Volturno on January 10th did not handicap that regiment in the least, nor did the fact that the 143rd Infantry did have some river crossing practice there make the job any easier for that regiment. This was because none of the river conditions were similar. No instruction was given in carrying and launching improvised foot bridges, in launching and ferrying boats in a swift current from high banks, nor in getting into and out of boats when the swift current and high banks make it difficult to keep the boats from capsizing or floating away.

The M2 assault boat is a scow type plywood boat with a square stern and flat bottom. It is approximately 13-1/2 feet long, over 5 feet wide, and weighs 410 pounds. They are transported nested seven to a truck and are intended to be dumped at the water's edge. Each boat carries 12 men plus crew.

The 6-ton pneumatic float carries 24 men, requires 4 men on shore to pull it across, using 1/2" or 3/4" rope. Fourteen men are required when crossing by paddling, 7 on each side. This method is extremely difficult, slow and apt to result in excessive drift when the paddlers are inexperienced. If there is excessive drift, the stern line may be lost and the float cannot be pulled back for the second wave. In a swift current, such as the Rapido, excessive drift cannot be avoided. This type of float is difficult to beach, presented a large concentrated target when loaded and is totally unsatisfactory for an initial assault across a river where enemy fire is to be encountered. It is easily punctured by shell fragments and rendered useless.

The small reconnaissance float carried six men, is about 5' x 6' in size; difficult to get into and out of without capsizing when the current is swift and banks high; easily punctured and rendered useless by shell fragments. It was impracticable to use rafts on the Rapido.

It is only using ordinary respect for the German military profession to assume that they knew something was going on along the Rapido during the three nights prior to the attack. But, in my opinion, the Germans did not cross over to the east side of the river and remine the lanes that our engineers had cleared through the mine fields. They could not have done so because our own engineers were present in the lanes until just before daylight on January 19th and 20th. Some mines were overlooked during the work of clearing and these were exploded later by our own men during the crossing. This gave rise to the rumor that the Germans had remined the lanes. Conditions do not have to be hazardous, nor mine clearing done at night, for clearing teams to miss mines in a road or open area. The usual probing team of eight men on hands and knees, covered a width of about 24 feet, and they would not miss many antipersonnel or wire-controlled mines. Mine detectors were worthless because of the metal strewn area. One enlisted man and one officer were killed and six men were wounded in the engineer party during the final attempt at mine clearing before the first attack.

On January 30th, the Corps Commander directed that the 36th Division prepare to again cross the Rapido, anticipating that the Germans were about to abandon their defenses in order to join with their forces at Anzio. Again every known method of mine clearance was used, including an idea of the Division Engineer that many mines would be exploded by driving a flock of 250 sheep over the area. The use of sheep turned out to be disappointing.

There was so much engineering work to be done in the operation and so little time in which to do it, that only a relatively small part could be accomplished. In the matter of upkeep of roads and jeep trails alone, the work was too extensive to be thoroughly done. The Division Engineer was quite unhappy when the tanks and tank destroyers would run up and down roads and across-country, engaged in so-

His men would work all night to make the roads passable for trucks.
called harassing operations. The tanks and tank-destroyers, by running back and forth and firing random shots into the enemy area, would tear up the roads again. He classed these harassing antics as worthless and made his views known to the armor commanders, who were acting on their own to give their men an opportunity to feel that they had a real part in the operation of firing into the German positions.

After the two unsuccessful attacks across the Rapido and during the period the 34th Division was attacking north of Cassino, the 36th Division was directed to conduct demonstrations in its forward area for the doubtful purpose of creating anxiety in the minds of the German defenders to the extent that they would conclude that an attack was pending and that no troops could be moved away to other threatened areas. The demonstrations were intended to prevent reinforcing the sector in front of the 34th Division. Of course, everybody, including the Germans, knew that if we had been going to attack, we would not have made an ostentatious display of our intentions.

The desire on the part of Generals Alexander, Clark and Keyes to send armor up the Liri Valley had a definite influence upon their decision to attack the Gustav Line between the Liri River and Cassino. They gave the impression, by the orders they issued and by their expressed views, that the main reason for attacking the strongest sector of the German defenses was to create a bridgehead from which the armor would advance rapidly up the Liri Valley and lead the way to join with the Anzio forces. There were two very definite objectives to be attained in succession: first, crossing the Rapido and establishing the bridgehead; second, the breaking out of the beachhead by the armor and its advance up the valley. Too little concern and too little regard for the difficulties involved were given to the successful accomplishment of the first objective and too much confidence and too much of a feeling of assurance was given to the successful accomplishment of the second objective. The result was a lot of wishful thinking that obscured a realization of a probable failure of the first phase. A better procedure and a better course of reasoning would have been to insure the success of establishing the bridge head by facing the cold, hard facts that stood in the way and overcoming them by whatever means were necessary. If they could not be overcome, there was no point in contemplating an advance by armor up the Liri Valley. But even the desire to send the armor up the Liri Valley was not controlled by a realization of the facts that stood in the way.

The German Commander, in preparing his defense, knew that we were going to use armor if he gave us an opportunity and he knew that the Liri Valley was the only suitable terrain for employing armor on a wide front and in sufficient strength to be effective. He therefore, being a trained soldier, would not overlook the necessity for blocking the entrance to the valley by a strong defensive position along the Rapido River and backing up that position by creating obstacles and bottle-

necks where tank formations would be broken up and forced under the fire of anti-tank weapons. Even if the crossing of the Rapido by the 36th Division had been successful and a bridgehead had been established, there would have been no run-away of armor up the Liri Valley. Armor, infantry, and artillery would have had to work together to make any progress, and the going would have been slow and difficult.

The Division had a traffic plan, but it was not published with the Division field order for the reason that only a few vehicles were going to the river during the attacks. If the attacks had been successful, the traffic plan would have been issued in plenty of time to meet the needs of those concerned. The bridge trains were not delayed by traffic, but by poor roads that were made worse by shell craters resulting from enemy fire directed at the trains. Most of the so-called roads were sunken below the general area and could not be drained of water, hence deep mud.

The landing of the 36th Division at Solerno was not a difficult operation although there are many accounts that would give the impression that the 36th Division was in trouble on that occasion. There never was a moment, from the initial landing on September 9, 1943, to the retirement of the German forces on September 19, 1943, when there was any doubt in my mind or in the minds of my subordinates but that the Division would successfully handle any situation that might occur within its sector. On that occasion, the Division was fighting a defensive offense; that is, it was prepared at all times to receive and repel a counterattack by German infantry or armor or both, while at the same time, it gradually extended the perimeter of the beachhead. The 2nd Battalion, 143rd Infantry, met a severe defeat between the Sele and Calore Rivers because it was pushed too far forward from supporting troops and into an isolated position with no protection on its flanks; and the 1st Battalion, 142nd Infantry, was driven off the heights of Altavilla for the same reasons. But, unlike the Rapido operation, the Germans had no organized defensive position, no main line of resistance, no interlocking fire of machine guns sweeping barbed wire entanglements, no effective obstacles. They were fighting a delaying action from the beginning. On the other hand, unlike the Rapido operation, we had ample landing equipment and could put our infantry and artillery ashore on a schedule that insured a more rapid build-up of force on the beach than the Germans could assemble to oppose it. There, we had the initiative. Our plans had been worked out in detail and rehearsed. They were based on the actual situation that confronted us. There was no wishful thinking in their preparation. The Solerno operation was in no way as difficult as the Rapido crossing.

The attack of the 36th Division, on January 20, 21, 22, was looked upon by the German sector commander as a "side show," according to his report. His principal concern was the part of his sector on the high ground south of the Liri Valley ~~was~~ where the British Fifth and Fifty sixth Divisions had established a

bridgehead across the Garigliano. Had it been known then, that the German commander was worried about his defense south of the Liri, and had the 36th Division been directed to pass through and continue the attack of the two British Divisions, the Gustov Line might have been broken there. But, of course, nobody on the American side was aware that such an opportunity existed.

The German commander classified the attack of the 36th Division on January 21 as a reconnaissance in force. He felt no real concern at any time, since both attacks were disposed of without difficulty. In fact, he felt that because the British ceased to push their initial success south of the Liri, and since the attack of the 36th Division had been completely repulsed, he could send a part of his forces to Anzio. On the 22nd of January, or next day, the following troops were transferred to Anzio from the front of the Fifth Army:

- One Corps Headquarters
- One Regiment of Division Artillery, 94th Division
- Two Battalions, 33rd Artillery Regiment, 15th Panzer Division
- 104th Infantry (less one bn.) 15th Panzer Division

At the end of January 25th, the day of the cessation of fire to permit recovery of our dead and wounded, the 15th Panzer Division, which opposed the Rapido crossing, reported having counted 430 American dead and having captured 770 prisoners of war. The 15th Panzer Division reported their own casualties for the same period as 64 dead and 179 wounded.

In his report, the German commander stated that the operation of the 36th Division at the Rapido was not up to the high standard displayed by that Division on Mounts Lungo and Summucro. Of course not! At Defensa, Lungo, San Pietro and Summucro there was maneuver space, attacks were made on relatively wide fronts during daytime, signal communications were maintained, artillery support was available on call, cover and concealment for the attackers existed, supplies were ample and delivered where needed. Even so, the going was difficult but the Germans were driven from what was their principal delaying position in front of the Gustov Line.

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HEADQUARTERS FIFTH ARMY

Office of the Commanding General

January 27, 1944

Major General Geoffery Keyes
Commanding General, II Corps
APO 302, U. S. Army

Dear General Keyes:

I desire to express to you my appreciation and gratitude for the splendid manner in which your Corps carried out its role in facilitating the successful landings of our forces in the vicinity of Anzio. The efficient execution of a difficult amphibious operation and the establishment of a substantial beachhead in the Anzio-Nettuno area have been due in a large degree to the effectiveness of the simultaneous attack by your Corps.

In accordance with a carefully prepared and coordinated plan you have launched and sustained a series of attacks which have accomplished with outstanding success their principal objective, namely, to engage in severe combat the maximum number of enemy forces and thus to prevent their interference with our landings and the establishment of the Anzio beachhead. While doing so you have driven the enemy back along the Rapido front and inflicted heavy losses on his already weary troops. These operations by your Corps have been carried out with great vigor, persistence and success, and have paved the way for future exploitation of the situation which they have made possible.

I shall appreciate it if you will convey to your subordinate commanders, and through them to their troops, my satisfaction and gratitude for the manner in which this task has been performed.

Sincerely yours,

(signed) Mark W. Clark

Marshall Albert Kesselring, the supreme commander of the German forces in Italy, had a different view. In a press conference a few years later, he stated that if one of his subordinates had ordered an attack, similar to the one made on the Rapido, against a defensive position similar to that occupied by the Germans, he would not have treated him very politely.

On a number of occasions I have been asked the question, "If you had it all to do over again, what would you have done differently?" I frankly do not know of any feature of the Division plan for crossing the Rapido that I would change if I were to have to do it again under the conditions and limitations that were imposed at the time. Everything was done that could have been done. We failed because the Germans occupied an ideal defensive position behind an unfordable and difficult river as an obstacle; because the available crossing equipment would provide for only a few very narrow crossing points and only a few men could cross at a time, thus forcing us to make a piecemeal as well as a frontal attack; because the German artillery created casualties before and during the crossing that disorganized our formations and destroyed our equipment. In other words, we failed because the German defenders had decisive advantages which we could not overcome.

However, if I had it all to do over again, I would make a very urgent request for the 36th Division to be permitted to attack north of Cassino where the Rapido is fordable, instead of south of Cassino where the attack was made. I feel now, and I felt then, that north of Cassino we would have been on more equal terms with the defenders, could have taken Mount Castellone without much delay, and cut Highway No. 6 west of Cassino. This would have broken the Gustov Line. A maneuver similar to this was made by the 36th Division on the last day of May, 1944, to get possession of Mount Artamisto, near Velletri. It was successful and did break the defenses in that area. On that occasion, I requested and was granted permission to make that maneuver instead of attacking frontally, where the Germans had repulsed two other U. S. divisions. Perhaps I might have been granted permission to attack north of Cassino if I had requested that the 36th Division be given that option, back in January.

It is my opinion that the sacrifices made at the Rapido by the personnel of the 36th Division were unnecessary and did not accomplish any worthwhile result. There has never been a greater courage displayed by any troops anywhere, when faced with an impossible task, than was displayed by the personnel of the 36th Division on that occasion. The failure was not their fault.

Fred L. Walker

Fred L. Walker

Major General, U. S. A. (Retired)

Alexandria, Virginia
June 27, 1960

ADDENDUM

Two days after General Clark had written the letter to General Keyes, in which he had expressed his satisfaction and gratitude for the manner in which the subordinate commanders and their troops had carried out, with great vigor, persistence and success, the operations of the II Corps, he called me on the telephone and told me to meet him on Highway No. 6 near Magnano. There he talked to me at some length regarding personnel changes he wished to make in the 36th Division. He said he was concerned about the Division, that its morale was low. I replied that its morale was low in the Infantry units; that this was due to the fact that a great many enlisted and commissioned replacements had been received since Solerno and there had not been sufficient time out of the front line since November to indoctrinate them with the Division spirit. I added that the low morale was due especially to the recent reverses on the Rapido River and to the heavy losses of leaders in the lower units. It would take time to restore confidence and morale. General Clark stated that in his opinion the low morale was due to a lack of good officers in key positions.

He directed that I replace Brigadier General William H. Wilbur, my Assistant Division Commander; Colonel Clayton P. Kerr, my Chief of Staff; Lieutenant ^{Colonel} Fred L. Walker, Jr., my Operations Officer; Colonel William H. Martin, Commanding the 143rd Infantry; Colonel Richard J. Werner, Commanding the 141st Infantry, (during the Rapido crossing Colonel Werner was in a hospital recovering from a wound). This was high-handed, unreasoned and unjust. I told him that all of those mentioned were satisfactory to me and that I wished to retain them in their present positions. Although he had no specific fault to find with any of them and did not point out any definite deficiency, and although he did not know any except General Wilbur personally well enough to know their capabilities, he nevertheless required their replacement. All were competent and able officers; all had done superior work in their respective jobs, and all enjoyed the respect and confidence of their subordinate commanders and troops.

General Clark's directive had to be carried out. No single individual could have delivered a more severe blow to the already lowered morale of the 36th Division.

Fred L Walker
FRED L. WALKER
Major General U. S. A. (Ret.)

July 9, 1960

APPENDIX "A"

FO 42

Hq. 36th Div.
18 January 1944

Maps: Italy 1/50000 Sheets 160 I II III IV, 161 III

1. a. See current intelligence reports
- b. Supporting troops.
 - (1) Available Corps artillery reinforces preparatory fires of Division artillery between 1930 and 2030 hours on 20 January, 1944, neutralizing German strong points near the west bank of the Rapido River.
 - (2) The 71st AAA Brig provides AA protection for crossing points.
2. a. 36th Infantry Division; (less the 142nd Infantry in Corps reserve) attached:
 - 1st and 2nd Bns, 19th Engineer (C) Regt, each
 - Bn less one company
 - 636th TD Bn
 - 760th Tank Bn.
 - 443 AAA Bn (less A Btry)
 - Cos A, B, and C 2nd Cml Wpns Bn
 - Cos A and B 16th Armd Engr Bn;

crosses the Rapido River north and south of San Angelo on 202000 A January, 1944; captures San Angelo by dark 21 January, attacking from the north, south and west; establishes a bridgehead for crossing of CCB, 1st Armored Division in the vicinity of San Angelo on the night of D plus 1; protects the left flank of the II Corps.
- b. (1) H-hour 2000 hours
- (2) D-day 20 Jan 1944
- c. For line of departure, boundaries and objectives see operation overlay, Annex No. 1.
3. a. 141 Inf. Regt (attached: 2nd Bn (-1 Co), 19th Engrs (C) Regt; Co A, 2nd Cml Bn)
 - (1) Crosses the Rapido River at 202000 A January 1944 and captures initial objective between Rio Floppetto and Rapido River.
 - (2) Makes a demonstration further south as shown on overlay to indicate a battalion crossing in that vicinity

- (3) Continues the attack to the south and west and captures objectives within first phase line prior to daylight January 21st, 1944.
- (4) Attacks and captures San Angelo from the north and west either separately or in conjunction with the 143rd Infantry Regiment.
- (5) Protects right flank of bridgehead.
- (6) Continues the attack to the west on Division order.

b. 143rd Inf Regt (attached 1st Bn (-1 Co) 19th Engr (C) Regt; Cos B and C, 2nd Cml Bn)

- (1) Crosses the Rapido River with two battalions abreast at 202000 A January, 1944, at areas indicated.
- (2) Captures, occupies and defends objectives within first phase line prior to daylight 21 January 1944.
- (3) Assists 141st Inf Regt to capture San Angelo, by fire and movement from the south and west.
- (4) Continues the attack to the west on Division order

c. 36th Rcn Tr;

- (1) Crosses the Rapido River behind the 143rd Inf Regt on Division order.
- (2) Outposts the line of the Liri River west of its junction with the Rapido River.
- (3) Contacts 46th Div (Br) at junction of Liri and Rapido Rivers, initially.
- (4) Maintains contact with the 143rd Inf Regt on its right
- (5) Protects left flank of bridgehead

d. 36th Div Arty:

- (1) 131st FA Bn - direct support, 141st Inf Regt
- (2) 132nd FA Bn - general support, priority to 143rd Inf Regt
- (3) 133rd FA Bn - direct support, 143rd Inf Regt
- (4) 155th FA Bn - general support priority to 141st Inf Regt
- (5) Div Arty will fire an intense preparation on located German strong points near the west bank of the river from 1930 to 2030 hours, 20 January 1944
- (6) After 202000 A January, 1944, the Div Arty will fire successive concentrations on enemy strong points preceeding the attacking units, time schedule for these fires to be arranged by regimental commanders with artillery units concerned.

- (7) Be prepared to engage promptly any hostile troop movements, particularly tanks, approaching the bridgehead from the west after daylight 21 Jan 1944.

e. 636 TD Bn:

Occupies firing positions near the east bank of the Rapido River, north of Cesa Martino after 202000 A January, 1944, prepared by daylight 21 January, 1944, to support the attack by direct fire on definitely located German positions or on tanks attempting to attack the bridgehead, and prepared to execute long range fires in support of the bridgehead after initial objectives are captured.

f. 760 Tank Bn:

Occupies firing positions near the east bank of the Rapido River and south of Cesa Martino after 202000 A January, 1944, prepared by daylight 21 January 1944 to support the attack by direct fire on definitely located German positions, or tanks on the west bank of the river.

g. 111th Engr Bn: (attached: Cos A and B, 16th Armd Engr Bn)

- (1) Clears mines on east bank of Rapido River at selected crossing points, bridge sites and approaches prior to 20 January 1944.
- (2) Constructs and maintains bridge approaches and exits.
- (3) Maintains roads and clears mines within bridgehead when established.
- (4) Constructs two class 40 Bailey, or armored treadway, bridges at indicated localities after initial crossing.

h. 1st Bn (-1 Co) 19th Engr (C) Regt:

- (1) Reverts to Division control when assault elements of the 143rd Inf Regt completes crossing.
- (2) Constructs 6-ton Infantry support bridges in area of 143rd Inf Regt on night 20-21 January.
- (3) Constructs one Class 40 Bailey bridge on Main Supply Route in vicinity of San Angelo when San Angelo has been captured.
- (4) Spots assault boats and foot bridge equipment on night of 19-20 January for crossing the 143rd Inf Regt.

1. 2nd Bn (-1 Co) 19th Engr (C) Regt:

- (1) Reverts to Division control when assault elements of the 141st Inf Regt completes crossing.
- (2) Constructs 6-ton Infantry support bridge in area of 141st Inf Regt on night 20-21 January.
- (3) Constructs a class 40 Bailey bridge on Main Supply Route in vicinity of San Angelo when San Angelo has been captured.
- (4) Spots assault boats and foot bridge equipment on the night 19-20 January for the crossing of the 141st Inf Regt.

j. 443rd AA Bn:

- (1) AA protection of artillery battery positions and forward assembly areas.

x. All units will carry yellow smoke grenades for identification of front lines to friendly planes and observers.

4. a. Traffic Control:

- (1) The Division Provost Marshall will establish an officer traffic control post at bridges 861156, 866172, 870135 and control posts at RJ 885159 and 903155.
- (2) Other control posts to be established as the situation requires.
- (3) Non-tactical vehicles (except ammunition carriers) heavier than 3/4 ton, restricted west of grade crossing 923150.
- (4) The Signal Officer will arrange communication with all traffic control posts and the Division Provost Marshall.
- (5) Traffic will be held to a minimum; night movements under strict blackout.

b. Miscellaneous:

- (1) The supply officers of the 141st and 143rd Inf Regts will establish QM Class I and Ord class V reserve dumps west of the Rapido River on positions accessible to their respective troops.
 - (a) These reserve dumps to be established on the nights of D plus 1 and D plus 2 in sufficient quantity to serve the troops for two days, should the regular supply channels be interrupted.

(b) Types of rations and ammunition to be determined by regimental commanders.

5. a. Communciation:

- (1) Index 1A - 49 to SCI.
- (2) Wire communication will be established and maintained across the river between regimental headquarters and headquarters of assault battallions.
- (3) Yellow smoke will be used to indicate our front lines to friendly aircraft.

b. CPs: No change.

c. Wire and radio communications will be established with traffic control points at all bridges across the Rapido River.

WALKER
Maj Gen

Official:
WALKER, G-3

Annex 1 - Operations Overlay
Annex 2 - Artillery Plan
Annex 3 - Engineer Plan

The paragraphs of F. O. 42 pertaining to the employment of the Engineers was modified by Annex No. 3, which accompanied the field order, as follows:

1. Troops:

a. 11th Engr Bn

- (1) Will clear mines from approach routes to river
- (2) Will construct and maintain approach routes to river
- (3) Will be prepared to perform normal engineer functions on the far shore after river has been crossed.
- (4) Will assist movement of 36 Div Arty.

- b. 1st and 2nd Bns, 19th Engr (C) Regt, each Bn less 1 Co, attached to 36th Division.

- (1) 2nd Bn atchd to 141st Inf Regt will:
 - (a) provide a minimum of 30 pneumatic reconnaissance boats; 42 M-2 assault boats and 4 improvised foot bridges for crossing infantry assault units.
 - (b) Construct one 6-ton pneumatic treadway bridge at site shown on overlay as ordered by Regimental Commander.
 - (c) Revert to division control upon completion of bridging operations.
- (2) 1st Bn atchd to 143rd Inf Regt will:
 - (a) provide a minimum of 30 pneumatic reconnaissance boats, 20 M-2 assault boats and 4 improvised foot bridges for crossing infantry assault units.
 - (b) construct one 6-ton pneumatic treadway bridge at site shown on overlay as ordered by regimental commander.
 - (c) revert to division control upon completion of bridging operations.
- (3) 19th Engr (C) Regt will construct two class 40 Bailey bridges on proposed Main Supply Route in vicinity of San Angelo as soon as site is free of observed artillery fire or during the nite of D plus 1 or D plus 2 as ordered by Division Commander.

- c. Cos A and B, 16th Armd Engr Bn:

- (1) Co A attached to 1st Bn 19th Engr (C) Regt.
- (2) Co B attached to 2nd Bn 19th Engr (C) Regt.
- (3) Each company will construct one class 40 Bailey bridge for tank crossing at sites shown on overlay, beginning construction at H plus 4 or as ordered by the Division Commander.

2. II Corps Engineers will support 36 Division operations

- (a) By repairing and maintaining Hwy No 6 to 900183
- (b) By repairing and maintaining for automobile traffic, RR ROW to 890158
- (c) Assist artillery, tank destroyer and tank units supporting the 36th Infantry Division

Official:
WALKER
G-3

WALKER
Maj Gen.

13

APPENDIX "B"

Operations in Italy, January, 1944

by

141st Infantry Regiment, Rifle

On January 1, 1944, the 141st Infantry Regiment was resting in bivouac near San Angelo D'Alife, Italy, following the arduous campaigns of December. Relief of the regiment had been effected in the early morning hours of December 30th, and the regiment had been moved by truck to the rest bivouac.

Lt. Col. Aaron W. Wyatt (O-264395), of Ossining, New York, was in command of the regiment, with Lt. Col. Andrew F. Price (O-218892), of Forth Worth, Texas, as Executive Officer. The battalion commanders were: Captain Erman W. Newman (O-357207), of El Paso, Texas, for the 1st Battalion, Major Milton J. Landry, (O-342179), of San Antonio, Texas, for the 2nd Battalion, and Lt. Col. Edwin W. Richardson (O-20830), of Westbrook, Maine, for the 3rd Battalion.

An intense training program was initiated during the period spent at San Angelo D'Alife. When the regiment was withdrawn from the line, 109 officers and 2,517 enlisted men comprised the total strength of the regiment present for duty. A total of 35 officers and 694 enlisted men were assigned to the regiment at that time, reconstructing it to nearly normal strength. The rest bivouac afforded these new men an opportunity to train with and be absorbed in the regimental units.

The afternoon of January 7th, the Division G-3 notified the regiment that it was alerted to be prepared to move January 9th. All units were notified and ordered to have quartering parties, consisting of one non-commissioned officer per company, and one officer per battalion, at the regimental command post ready to move out at 0830 hours the following morning. Captain Ross Young (O-348457), of San Antonio, Texas, the regimental S-3, left with this party the morning of the 8th of January, but reported, when they returned, that there was no suitable area for the regiment within the limits outlined by Division Headquarters. Likewise, sufficient trucks to move the personnel had not been made available, and road clearance had not been granted.

On the morning of January 9th, Captain Young went to II Corps Headquarters, to obtain an area assignment, and reported the result to G-3. Quartering parties were again arranged for, and moved out the morning of the 10th to reconnoiter the area. That afternoon, Lt. Col. Wyatt, the Regimental Commander, and Captain Young attended a meeting held at Division Headquarters, with Major General Fred L. Walker, the Division Commander. The meeting dealt with a contemplated future operation which included a river crossing and subsequent attack.

On January 11th, instructions were given to the battalion commanders for the movement of the regimental combat team. The movement was to take place the evening of January 12.

The initial tactical disposition of the 141st Infantry Regiment in the month of January, 1944, consisted of the relief of the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment of the 1st Armored Division, on Mt. Porchia, the night of January 12. The 2nd Battalion was to occupy the actual positions of the elements of the 6th Armored Infantry on Mt. Porchia, with the 1st and 3rd Battalions disposed to the rear in reserve. During the morning of January 12, Lt. Col. Wyatt held a meeting at the regimental command post with all unit commanders, giving orders concerning the imminent movements following which the Regimental Commander moved to the new regimental command post which had been established, about 1-1/8 miles northwest of Mignano, arriving there at 1445 hours.

Mt. Porchia is rather small compared with the mountainous terrain typical of the central part of Italy. Its significance is derived from its isolated situation commanding the low ground lying between the Mt. Maggiore-Camino hill mass to the south, and Mt. Trocchio to the northwest. Highway No. 6 cuts across the lower northern slopes of Mt. Porchia and the ridge line runs approximately a mile south from that vicinity, forming two humps at the extremities, with a shallow saddle through the center. There is little vegetation on the mountain, the surface being extremely rocky in most places.

The regiment moved up during the first hours of dusk, January 12, to pre-designated detrucking points along Highway No. 6, the historic Via Roma, and and the main arterial supply route to the north. From there, they moved by foot into position. The 2nd Battalion, under the command of Major Milton J. Landry, relieved the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment, which were ^{occupying} ~~employing~~ defensive positions along the forward slopes of Mt. Porchia.

The relieved units, responsible for the continuity of the defensive plans, furnished guides to their positions, and maintained patrols and screening elements to the front and flanks during the operation. Precoordinated artillery harrassing fire was laid down by the 71st Field Artillery Battalion of the 1st Armored Division Artillery. Normal radio activity was maintained to prevent any indication to the enemy of the action taking place. Areas were outposted immediately, and patrols sent out to the front and flanks. Light artillery fire was received intermittently but otherwise the relief was effected without incident, and was completed at 2322 hours.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions closed into their positions at 2115 hours. Both

battalions were in reserve, and were disposed to the rear of Mt. Porchia and off to the left of Highway No. 6. The 1st Battalion occupied positions along the northwest slope of Mt. Giacomo and the 3rd Battalion was along the southwestern slope of Mt. Lungo. Company A, of the 11th Engineer Battalion, and Company C, of the 11th Medical Battalion, both attached to the 141st Regimental Combat Team, had moved into position during the daylight hours of January 12, and the Regimental Cannon and anti-tank companies were to move in during the daylight of January 13.

The 131st Field Artillery Battalion, previously in position, was attached to the regiment as part of the combat team, as the regiment moved into position. The following day a company, less a platoon of medium tanks, from the 753rd Tank Battalion was attached to the regiment for pending operations.

The morning of January 13, the regiment was requested to outpost the area between Mt. Porchia and the British units on the left flank. Company G was directed to outpost this area and maintain patrols to predesignated contact points.

On the nights of January 13-14, the 2nd Battalion engaged in strengthening its outpost line and sending out patrols. Patrol contact with the British on the left was effected. Company F, after several attempts had been frustrated by enemy mortar and small arms fire, eventually succeeded in establishing its outpost lines in the early morning hours. The patrols which had been sent out toward the front contacted enemy elements generally to the left front of the battalion position, in the direction of Mt. Trocchio.

Lt. Col. Wyatt attended a conference held at Division Headquarters at 1100 hours, January 14, with the Commanding General, the Assistant Division Commander, G-2, the Assistant G-3, and the Commanding Officer of the 753rd Tank Battalion. The meeting dealt with the attack on Mt. Trocchio, which was to be launched the following morning. That afternoon, the Commanding Officer of the regiment held a meeting at 1400 hours with the unit commanders of the Regimental Combat Team to give the orders for the attack.

Mt. Trocchio lies about three miles northwest of Mt. Porchia, its long axis following a northeast-southwestern direction. It towers well above Mt. Porchia and occupies a commanding position over the surrounding ground, guarding the Rapido River to the west beyond the mountain, and the southern and eastern approaches to Cassino, several miles northwest on Highway No. 6. The sides are extremely steep and rocky. La Pieta is a medium sized hill, south of the southern slopes of the mountain. The surrounding area, including the low ground between Mt. Porchia and Mt. Trocchio, consisted of low rolling terrain.

The objective of the attack, to be executed in conjunction with the 135th Infantry Regiment of the 34th Division on that night, was to seize Mt. Trocchio and the area to the south and west, including La Pietra and the high ground beyond to the Rapido River. The regimental objective was to take the southern tip of Mt. Trocchio, La Pietra, and the high ground to the south and west, and to outpost the Rapido. Air support, to include bombings of enemy installations and supply routes around Mt. Trocchio and in the vicinity of San Angelo in Teodice, had been requested for the afternoon. The regimental plan of attack called for the 2nd and 3rd Battalions to attack abreast, the 2nd on the right, the 3rd on the left. The 1st Battalion was to move into a reserve position along the southern slope of Mt. Porchia. The assault echelons were to infiltrate into position in the low ground between Mt. Porchia and Mt. Trocchio during the first hours of darkness on January 14, and launch the attack at 0630 hours, January 15.

During the afternoon of the 14th, the Regimental Command Post was moved forward to a point on the southeastern slope of Mt. Porchia, about 1-1/2 miles southwest of San Vittore del Lazio.

Available intelligence information concerning enemy disposition indicated that the regimental objective was defended by the 134th German Infantry Regiment, occupying positions running generally south from Highway No. 6 along the southeastern slope of Mt. Trocchio, across the railroad bed, and past La Pietra to the vicinity of Cesa Martina. Additional information indicated that the enemy units were under normal strength, with elements of the Hermann Goering Division as reserves. Inferences were that the enemy would defend along his line as long as feasible and then retreat to the Rapido River line to defend against a crossing.

Under cover of darkness on January 14, the 2nd Battalion and 3rd Battalion moved into position to launch the attack. The mutual objective of the 2nd Battalion was to work its way to the stream line running through the low ground between Mt. Porchia and Mt. Trocchio. This was accomplished during the first hours of darkness, on the night of January 14. During this period, the 3rd Battalion was also closing in and reached its initial position on the left of the 2nd Battalion at 0030 hours, January 15. Combat patrols of platoon strength went out from both battalions to an outpost line 300 - 400 yards in front of the main positions and dug in. Contact was maintained between battalions, with the 135th Regiment on the right and the British units on the left.

During the night of January 14, the remaining units of the Regimental Combat Team were likewise displaced forward. The 1st Battalion moved up to its reserve position just south of Mt. Porchia. The Anti-Tank Company platoon, with 75 mm guns, moved into the same locality, with the mission to protect against enemy

attack from the direction of the valley south of Mt. Trocchio or from the Highway No. 6, on the north. Company A, of the 753rd Tank Battalion, moved up to a forward position on the forward slopes of Mt. Porchia, prepared to support the attack by firing on targets of opportunity. The 131st and 132nd Field Artillery Battalions, the latter attached for the pending operation, were to execute fire missions on call. They were to lay down an initial barrage, commencing at 0530 hours, January 15, and lifting at 0630 hours.

The attack was launched at 0630 hours, January 15; the 2nd and 3rd Battalions abreast, with Companies E and F on the right, and Companies K and L on the left. Patrols led out, with the remainder of the attacking echelons infiltrating through behind them, gradually increasing the patrols to platoon and company strength. The enemy defenses were well constructed in position, affording them opportune observation of our activities. The difficulty was countered by the use of smoke shells which partially concealed the movements of the foot troops.

Determined resistance was put up by the enemy, especially along the southern sector of the vicinity of La Pietra and south toward Cesa Martina. The regiment succeeded, however, in working through to its objectives. The 2nd Battalion attempted throughout the operation to fully coordinate its activities with the 135th Infantry Regiment, which was attacking on the regimental right flank. At 1050 hours, January 15, the information was received that the 135th Regiment had taken Hill 121, further north on Mt. Trocchio, with little resistance, and had requested that the 2nd Battalion push forward with them. By 1240 hours, the 135th Regiment had seized all their objectives on Mt. Trocchio and the battalions of the 141st Infantry Regiment were working through to theirs.

The forward movement, primarily by infiltration tactics, continued throughout the afternoon. At 1400 hours, January 15, Lt. Col. Wyatt reported to Division Headquarters that everything was proceeding smoothly. By 1800 hours, the forward patrols had crossed beyond their final objectives, and by 0600 hours, January 16, the remainder of the units had infiltrated through to the final objectives. Forward patrols from both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions had gone forward to cross the Rapido River, with instructions to look for mine fields, booby traps, routes of approach, possible fording spots, enemy defensive installations, and general terrain features. Patrol contact throughout the night was maintained with the 135th Infantry on the right flank, and with the British units on the left.

Following the successful operation culminating in the seizure of Mt. Trocchio, the 141st Infantry Regiment was disposed occupying positions defending Mt. Trocchio,

La Pieta, and the high ground to the south and west toward Cesa Martina. Generally the lines paralleled the course of the Rapido River, the next objective of the regiment. The 1st Battalion moved into reserve position along the southwest reverse slopes of Mt. Trocchio. The other units of the Regimental Combat Team, likewise being moved forward, were disposed within the area between Mt. Trocchio and Mt. Porchia.

In preparation for the contemplated crossing of the Rapido River, nightly patrols were organized to cross the river. The course of the river along the regimental sector to the west of Mt. Trocchio from Highway No. 6 on the north to San Angelo, in Teodice, at the south follows a northeastern - southwestern direction. The initial intelligence information secured by the patrols gave some indication of the difficulties to be encountered. The main feature of the Rapido is the swiftness of its current that flows approximately five miles an hour. As a result, a deep channel had been cut with nearly verticle banks from 3 to 4 feet high. The average width of the river was not over 15 yards, but its depth dropping abruptly from the banks to from 10 to 12 feet in the center, presented an additional hazard. Patrols from the 2nd and 3rd Battallions, during the early hours of January 16, crossed the river and brought back that information, and the fact that the bridge in the vicinity of San Angelo, in Teodice, had been blown by the retreating enemy.

During the morning of January 16, Lt. Col. Wyatt attended a conference with the Division Commander at 1115 hours, to discuss the next regimental move. Company A, of the 753rd Tank Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 141st Regimental Combat Team. Arrangements were made for Company A of the 11th Engineer Battalion to provide the necessary rubber collapsible boats to enable patrols to cross the Rapido River. The plans called for one engineer to accompany each boat, and to search for mines at the embarking and debarking points.

The patrols which crossed the Rapido River the night of January 16 - 17 were able to bring back information concerning the enemy defensive installations. The 2nd and 3rd Battallions each sent out two patrols to cross the predesignated points, using collapsible rubber boats.

Only one patrol from the 3rd Battalion was able to cross the river, because of the difficulty encountered in using the rubber boats in the swift current. It crossed in the vicinity just north of San Angelo. The patrol reported that the trees along the river had been cut back to better the enemy observation and afford him a field of fire, and that there were many enemy automatic weapon installations along the western bank. A double apron of barbed wire fence had been erected several hundred yards inland, running parallel with the river. The 2nd Battalion patrols were more successful, both patrols getting across about a mile further north, in the vicinity of the large "S" bend the Rapido forms. Both of these patrols reported a double apron of barbed wire fence had been strung along the western bank in that vicinity.

On the night of January 16 - 17, patrols also maintained contact with the 1st Battalion of the 143rd Infantry Regiment, which moved in further south on the Regimental left flank.

During the darkness between January 16 - 17, troops from the 111th Engineer Battalion succeeded in opening the supply route as far as San Lucia, a small village on the lower southern slopes of Mt. Trocchio. The road had been mined by the enemy. By noon of the 17th, Highway No. 6 was opened as far north as the southern base of Mt. Trocchio. At 1800 hours, Lt. Col. Wyatt attended a meeting with the Commanding General of the Division to discuss the contemplated river crossing.

Beyond continued patrol activity, tactical movements for the night of January 17 - 18 consisted of the 2nd Battalion's displacing forward on the low ground to the south and west of Mt. Trocchio. Company 88 of the 2nd Chemical Battalion, which had been attached to the 141st Regimental Combat Team, moved into the rear and right of the 2nd Battalion. The Anti-Tank Company of the regiment also displaced forward, moving into position to the rear of and between the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. Harassing artillery fire to tie in with the contemplated patrol activity for the night of January 17th had been arranged with the 131st Field Artillery Battalion.

The 3rd night patrols had gone out to cross the Rapido. The night of January 17 - 18, Division Headquarters had directed that the activity be concentrated on obtaining information of enemy strong points across the river, identification of enemy units, and possible routes of access along the approaches from the east.

The 3rd Battalion patrols, attempting to cross west of the regimental southern sector, encountered a great deal of difficulty with the rubber boats and mine fields along the eastern bank of the river. Enemy artillery concentrations further hampered their movements and only one patrol was able to get across the river.

The 2nd Battalion patrols, one from Company E and one from Company F, had more success. The initial plan had been to work the patrols across, have them establish a strong point on the far bank by digging in, and then to build them up to platoon strength and send feelers out from the point further inland. The Company E patrol, under Lt. Gabriel L. Navarrette (0-2055833), of El Paso, Texas, crossed and was able to advance nearly 800 yards west of the river. They then notified the platoon, remaining along the eastern bank of the river, to cross. As soon as the platoon had crossed, enemy machine guns further inland opened up on the patrol. The platoon tried to maneuver so as to flank the guns and aid the patrol, but encountered small arms and mortar fire. The patrol engaged in a running fire fight which lasted nearly twenty minutes. Several men, including Lt. Navarrette, were wounded, but all our men were successfully evacuated. Lt. Navarrette, although wounded in the shoulder, swam back across the river. Enemy casualties included four killed and eight wounded.

The collapsible rubber boats had again demonstrated that they were inadequate for the task of crossing the Rapido. The current was far too swift, and the boats capsized readily in the swirling water. In addition, small shell fragments easily punctured the rubber, rendering the boat useless. Five of the seven boats used by Company E patrols the night of January 17th were lost.

The patrol's reconnaissance disclosed that the enemy had formidable machine gun installations behind ridge lines, running parallel to the river, and that the guns were so emplaced as to cover each other. The reports also confirmed earlier information that aprons of barbed wire had been strung in the area between the river and the main enemy positions further inland.

During the afternoon of January 18, engineers laid a smoke screen along Highway No. 6 from the vicinity of Mt. Porchia south to the road junction leading off to San Vittore, to obscure enemy observation of that area and activities taking place along the road.

Company A, of the 111th Engineer Battalion, was relieved from attachment to the 141st Regimental Combat Team January 18th. During the night of January 18 - 19, several of the units within the Regimental Combat Team changed position. The Cannon Company moved into concealed positions in the vicinity of San Lucia and set up their 75 mm and 105 mm guns. The 1st Battalion displaced forward slightly from their former position. Company A, of the 2nd Chemical Battalion, moved into the same locality as the Cannon Company.

On the afternoon of January 19, the Regimental Command Post was moved to the southeast slopes of Mt. Trocchio, about two miles northeast of San Angelo. That afternoon, the 2nd Battalion of the 19th Engineer Regiment was attached to the 141st Regimental Combat Team.

Further patrol activity was engaged in during the night of January 18-19 and 19-20, in preparation for the approaching crossing of the Rapido River. Strong patrols from each of the battalions were used, and the missions were similar to those of the previous nights. The tactical plans called for the patrols to cross the Rapido in rubber boats, although the patrols were also hampered greatly by the resistance of the enemy, offered with strong machine gun, small arms, and mortar fire. This increased the difficulties of crossing and made reconnaissance on the western side of the river extremely difficult. Several of the patrols were able to make their way across both nights and were able to gather valuable information needed in planning the river crossing. The night of January 19, the patrols were increased in strength, and a cone of artillery fire, directed at the enemy positions, simulating an attack, in order to force the enemy to disclose his gun strength and positions.

The attempt to cross the Rapido River was scheduled for the night of January 20-21. The 36th Division Field Order covering the operation was issued January 18, containing the orders for the 141st Regimental Combat Team, directing that two battalions of the 141st Infantry Regiment attack across the Rapido, commencing at 2000 hours, January 20. The 143rd Infantry Regiment was ordered to attack in conjunction with the 141st sending two battalions across the river south of San Angelo and cooperating with the 141st Infantry in the capture of San Angelo the following day by attacking from the south. The 34th Division on the regimental right flank was to make a demonstration further north, but was not to cross the river. II Corps Artillery was directed to fire preparatory fires to reduce enemy installations along the western bank, preceeding the 141st Combat Team artillery fire.

The Regimental Field Order was issued the 19th of January, at 1400 hours. The 1st and 3rd Battalions were directed to move into a final assembly area located within the hill defilade between the southern tip of Mt. Trocchio, and La Pieta to the south, during the hours of darkness on January 19-20, from which point they would move forward to make the crossing. To aid in the attempt, the 2nd Battalion, in regimental reserve, was ordered to make a demonstration crossing in the vicinity of San Angelo, approximately one mile south of the proposed crossing sites.

The 1st Battalion objective consisted of the high ground due west of the crossing site, 1000 to 1500 yards inland, while the 3rd Battalion, using the same crossing points, later were to move to the south about the same distance inland and take the high ground to the west behind San Angelo.

The crossings were to be attempted in the vicinity of the "S" bend of the Rapido River, situated about a mile west of the southern tip of Mt. Trocchio and approximately in the middle of the regimental sector. Companies A, B, and C, crossing first by means of rubber assault boats, were to launch the attack at 2000 hours, January 20. At 2100 hours, the rifle companies from the 3rd Battalion had the mission of coming next, by means of foot bridges to be installed north and south of the "S" bend. Heavy weapons elements and the Battalion Headquarters Companies of both battalions were to follow on the foot bridges.

The engineering equipment necessary for the operation was spotted by the 2nd Battalion of the 19th Engineer Regiment. In addition, they were directed to install an 8-ton infantry support bridge by 2400 hours the night of the attack, to enable the regimental and battalion anti-tank elements and vehicular traffic to cross. They also furnished guides to lead the men through the mine fields to the crossing sites, and personnel to operate the boat crossings.

The Cannon Company moved into firing position in the La Pleta hill defilade on January 20, prepared to support the attack on the 21st by direct fire on targets of opportunity. Company A, of the 2nd Chemical Battalion, was prepared to execute smoke missions on order. The 155th and 175th Field Artillery Battalions had been placed in support of the 131st Field Artillery Battalion to execute artillery barrages.

During the daylight hours of January 20, the 1st and 3rd Battalions moved into the forward assembly area. Engineering equipment was brought forward, and placed in the boat dump near the final assembly area. At 0850 hours, Captain Young, the Regimental S-3, checked arrangements with the Regimental Communications Officer for the laying of wire for the night's operation. Lines from the forward regimental switch had to be put into each of the battalion command posts, the final assembly area, and the proposed crossing sites at the river. During the morning, G-3 notified Captain Young that the rifle units would use red smoke rifle grenades to indicate spot targets and orange smoke hand grenades with time fuses, placed well ahead of our units, to indicate enemy lines of resistance. These signals would serve as artillery registering points.

An additional communication service was made available for the river operation in the form of carrier pigeons. Eight were furnished to the regiment by II Corps, the pigeon loft being located at II Corps Headquarters. The 36th Division had communication services at the loft to forward and hurry any incoming information immediately. The pigeons were to be used only in case of emergency.

The regimental main line of resistance ran generally north and south from the forward slopes of Mt. Trocchio, south across the high ground west of La Pleta to the lower ground, opposite San Angelo. The stream line of the Rapido ran roughly parallel with this line, the terrain rising gradually toward the east from the river to the forward slopes of Mt. Trocchio and La Pleta further south. From the final assembly area, in the hill defilade between Mt. Trocchio and La Pleta, the 1st and 3rd Battalions had to move through the open terrain to the "S" bend crossing approximately one mile to the west and slightly north.

The ground on the western side of the river was generally low ground, rising toward the west. Most of the terrain was characterized by open rolling fields, intercrossed with hedge lines and drainage ditches. A thin fringe of trees along the river had been cut back to afford the enemy better observation of the river approaches. Enemy defenses were organized behind the hedge lines running through the open ground and along the road running through this area north from San Angelo approximately 1000 yards from the river, but approaching to within 200 yards in the vicinity of the "S" bend. Aprons of barbed wire fences were strung across the fields between the road and the river. This was the nature of the terrain the 141st Regimental Combat Team had to attack across and seize from the enemy.

An intense artillery barrage was laid down prior to the attack by II Corps Artillery and the artillery units attached to the Combat Team, lifting to deeper targets as the attack progressed. Over 31,000 rounds were poured into the enemy positions, saturating the area with one round for every six square yards within the area concerned. At 0510 hours, the afternoon preceding the attack, American planes performed a bombing mission on the western side of the Rapido north of San Angelo.

By 1800 hours, January 20, the assault elements of the 1st Battalion, Companies A, B, and C had cleared the final assembly area and were proceeding to the engineer boat dump to pick up their boats and guides. During the afternoon, enemy shell fire had destroyed several of the boats within the dump and at the last minute reassignments of boat teams had to be made. This was accomplished and the boat teams proceeded toward the crossing sites at the river, led by the engineer guides. Captain Newman, the Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, left the dump at 1900 hours with a wire party to establish the 1st Battalion forward Command Post at the river.

The initial difficulties of the operation were encountered in attempting to get the boat teams to the crossing sites. Company C left the boat dump in a column of boat teams at 1905 hours, proceeding toward the river, and by 1930 hours, both Company A and Company B had started on their way. While proceeding from the dump to the crossing site, the engineer guides with Company B missed the proper turning point leading to the "S" bend, and led the company several hundred yards past and into the vicinity of the battalion forward command post. The column had to be turned and a great deal of confusion resulted, during which an enemy artillery barrage was laid into the area. Several men, including Captain Selser R. Harmanson, (O-354116) of Wharton, Texas, were killed and over twenty were wounded, among them Lt. Martin F. Tully (O-1305347), of Chicago, Illinois. In spite of his wounds, however, Lt. Tully was largely instrumental in reorganizing the company and continuing it on its mission. Finally, he collapsed and was evacuated. Several of the boats had been destroyed during the shell fire.

By 2030 hours, engineering guides had reported to Captain Newman that Company A and Company C had reached the river with their equipment. Later reports, however, indicated that Company A had been led into a mine field and stranded, the engineer guides having lost their way because the white tape marking the cleared lanes had been lost or destroyed. Lt. Warren G. Beasley (O-1289029) of Mt. Vernon, Indiana, was wounded while leading the company to the river, and Lt. Clarence M. Artymovich (O-1294411) of Detroit, Michigan, took over the company and attempted to contact the Battalion Commander. All his efforts failed, however, and Lt. Artymovich attached his company to the 3rd Battalion elements which had come up to await the installation of the foot bridges.

The Company B guides likewise failed to get their company through to the crossing site. Following the earlier disorganization of the company, two officers were sent to reconnoiter paths through the mine fields to the river. They were unable to locate the paths, however, and at 0230 hours, January 21, Captain Newman led the company through to the vicinity of the "S" bend. The men of the company then attempted to launch the assault boats, but all their efforts were unavailing. The steep banks and swift current made it impossible to get the boats into the river upright and prevent them from capsizing. Shell fragments destroyed two of the rubber boats the company had, and the men were ordered to disperse in the area and await the foot bridges.

Heavy enemy resistance was encountered throughout the operations, and the artillery and mortar concentrations directed at the crossing sites were the primary disabling and disorganizing factor. Working constantly under the well coordinated enemy fire, the units were unable to proceed as planned.

Periodic reports from the 143rd Infantry Regiment received at the Regimental Command Post indicated that it was also experiencing similar difficulties in attempting to cross south of San Angelo. One company had succeeded in crossing by boats by 2243 hours, January 20, but all attempts to install foot bridges had failed, and they were then attempting to improvise wooden bridges.

Attempts to make the crossing by means of the foot bridges the 3rd Battalion personnel were to use likewise encountered great difficulty. Of the four bridges which were to be installed, one was defective and never taken from the engineer dump. Another had been destroyed in a mine field en route to the river, and a third destroyed in the vicinity of the crossing site by artillery fire. Hence, only one serviceable foot bridge was available at the crossing site, but it was finally installed in spite of the difficulties and the enemy fire falling in the area. Captain Young, the regimental S-3, and Captain Edgar Ford (O-332396) of Rusk, Texas, the 3rd Battalion S-3, were at the crossing and were instrumental in directing the installation. Immediately Companies A and B were rushed across and were over shortly after 0400 hours, January 21.

Continued and effective enemy mortar and artillery fire obstructed the proceedings. Many casualties were suffered, both wounded and killed. After Companies A and B had crossed, the engineer personnel were forced to abandon the bridge because of the concentration of incoming fire. Subsequently, to that time, only a few men of Company C succeeded in getting over.

The 3rd Battalion assault elements had been able to carry their schedule through, as far as getting to the river, but none of the elements crossed the night of January 20-21. Only one bridge had been installed and units of the 1st Battalion were given

priority and rushed across first. Attempts by the 2nd Battalion of the 19th Engineer Regiment to construct the eight ton infantry support bridge had been similarly frustrated. At 0400 hours, January 21, it being obvious that the support bridge could not be installed that night, anti-tank and vehicular elements that had been scheduled to cross were notified to remain in their former positions.

At 0515 hours, January 21, General W. R. Wilbur, the Assistant Division Commander, gave orders that all elements still on this side of the river be withdrawn to the assembly area before daybreak, and that the men who had succeeded in getting across be instructed to dig in at their present positions and hold. This order was given to the 1st and 3rd Battalion forward command posts and the units at the vicinity of the crossing sites withdrawn. Lt. Col. Edwin W. Richardson, the 3rd Battalion Commanding Officer, and Captain Ford, the 3rd Battalion S-3, were wounded at the bridge crossing and had to be evacuated.

All contact with the men across the Rapido was lost by the morning of January 21, and their whereabouts on the western side was never accurately determined. All attempts to establish communications with them were ineffectual. The sound of the American small arms fire heard during the morning and day, however, indicated that the men had moved substantially inland from the river toward the west.

Information received from several wounded men who managed to work their way back during the daylight indicated that the units across the river on the west bank had suffered heavily. Constant shelling of their positions prevented any effectual reorganization of the men or any further progress toward objectives. All communications were hopelessly beyond repair. Casualties included killed, wounded, and some captured; and at 1200 hours, January 21, the regimental S-3 estimated that the regiment had suffered a 7% reduction in strength.

Lt. Col. Wyatt held a meeting at the Regimental Command Post at 0900 hours, January 21, with the Unit Commanders of the Regimental Combat Team. Plans were made for continuing the attempt to capture the objectives across the river. Originally, the plan was to cross at noon, with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions as assault elements. By direction of the Commanding General of the Division, however, H-hour was set back until 1500 hours, and was later delayed until 2100, January 21, due to failure of crossing equipment to arrive on time and mechanical difficulties.

The crossing was again attempted at 2100 hours, January 21, by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, with similar missions, equipment, and plans. The 143rd Infantry Regiment was again going to cross on the regimental left flank, south of San Angelo.

Similar difficulties, both mechanical and due to enemy fire, were encountered that had been experienced the night before. The assault boats were again proved totally inadequate for the task. Many capsized in the swift current, and others were rendered useless by enemy mortar and artillery fires. The engineer foot bridges were likewise unsatisfactory, though some personnel was able to cross thereby. The majority of the men who crossed did so by means of improvised foot bridges. Mines along the approaches to the crossing sites created additional, serious hazards.

In spite of the difficulties, nearly all the units were able to get across the Rapido the night of January 21. By 0055 hours, January 22, Company E was across and Company G followed immediately. The regimental commanding officer, Lt. Col. Wyatt, had left the Regiment Command Post at 2000 hours, and went to the forward Regimental Command Post to stay in close contact with the proceedings. The 3rd Battalion, then under the command of Major Robert E. Mchaffey (O-384193), of Breckenridge, Texas, succeeded in erecting and maintaining a foot bridge across the Rapido south of the "S" bend and by 0330 hours, January 22, Companies K and L had crossed to the west bank. Company F encountered great difficulty in turn with the rubber assault boats and a foot bridge they had secured from the engineering dump, and had been able to get only a few of their men across. Company I was likewise delayed, though small elements succeeded in crossing just before noon.

Elements of the 2nd and 3rd Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Companies ^{and Companies} H and M crossed immediately after the rifle companies, shortly after 0400 hours, January 22. Enemy mortar and artillery fire had not been quite as intense or concentrated as it had been on the previous night, but was becoming increasingly heavy toward morning. By 0530 hours, Companies, E, G, H, L, K and M, and elements of Companies I and F and of both Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Companies were across.

All attempts to install a support bridge were unsuccessful and were abandoned at 0233 hours, January 22, and the engineers ordered to bring up and install a Bailey bridge instead. The project was carried forward, preparations begun on the approaches, and the equipment gathered in the vicinity of the "S" bend of the river by 0430 hours, January 22. Enemy fires, however, frustrated any effectual efforts to complete the installation. At 0630 hours, Division Headquarters notified Lt. Col. Wyatt that General Walker wanted work on the bridge continued in spite of enemy fire. This was complied with, but the attempts were ineffectual.

Reports received from the 143rd Infantry Regiment throughout the night indicated that they had had like success in getting across. By 0345 hours, they reported one battalion across, and at 0630 hours, that all their units were across and were receiving heavy mortar and artillery fire.

In order to obscure enemy observation of units across the river, arrangements had been made to place smoke pots along the Rapido and on Mt. Trocchio, before dawn on January 22. This work was detailed to the elements of the 1st Battalion, which had not succeeded in crossing the night of January 20-21. Over 300 pots were placed and ignited before dawn and additional ones set out during the day to maintain a smoke screen. The pots were placed well up-wind so as not to reveal any specific location of activities.

The 2nd and 3rd Battalions, once across, pressed forward toward their objectives. Beginning about daybreak, enemy fire of all types began to increase in intensity from the German defensive installations inland from the river. In spite of this strong resistance, the men were able to penetrate the first organized lines of resistance, which included breaking through the barbed wire aprons strung through the open ground west of the river. These penetrations varied from 200-600 yards beyond the river. Beyond this distance, because of the curtain of enemy fire and the heavy casualties among the officers and enlisted men, they were unable to proceed and were forced to dig-in on position. The open and exposed terrain subjected the troops to all types of enemy fire, which constantly swept the area.

Attempts were made during the morning of January 22 to reorganize and continue the attack toward objectives. At 0900 hours, Lt. Col. Price visited the forward Regimental Command Post and the 2nd and 3rd Battalion forward command posts on the eastern side of the river, to check the situations and expedite any possible reorganization. At 1100 hours, Lt. Col. Wyatt sent a message to each of the Battalion Commanding Officers, directing that no one must withdraw across the river and that continued attempts had to be made to organize, dig in, and bring fire power to bear against the enemy.

At noon, the Executive Officer of the 2nd Battalion advised the Regimental S-3 that the majority of the men across were located about 600-700 yards across the river, east of the final barbed wire line, and that the Battalion Headquarters groups were several hundred yards closer to the river. The penetrations were generally west of the "S" bend, and toward the south. Throughout the day, advantage was constantly taken of lulls in enemy firing to effect reorganization, but without substantial accomplishment due to the difficulties of communication, and the increased enemy fire the attempts invariably caused, merely increasing the already heavy casualties. At noon, January 22, the regimental S-3 estimated that the reduction in strength was approximately 20%.

By 1700 hours, the Commanding Officers and Executive Officers of both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, together with all the Company Commanders, with the exception of Company E, had either been killed or wounded. Telephone communication

which had been maintained with great difficulties from time to time during the day had been irretrievably lost. Efforts to resupply ammunition, water, and rations were equally unavailing, since enemy fire completely commanded the river line and the approaches to the east.

During the afternoon of January 22, an attempt to divert enemy fire from the men across the river was made, using tanks from the 760th Tank Battalion. Captain Copeland, of that battalion, directed two platoons of tanks to approach the river in the vicinity of the previously used crossing sites, one to head toward the south, and the other toward the north. The tanks during the operation fired into the enemy positions, but failed to accomplish the results desired.

At approximately 1600 hours, January 22, the enemy began a series of counterattacks against units on the west banks. The only information available on these attacks consisted of individual accounts of the survivors, and at the best reflect incomplete views. The smoke haze laid down to screen reorganization activities and protect our men obscured any over-all picture, and greatly aided the enemy in his counterattacks.

These pieced-together accounts indicate that about 1600 hours, January 22, the Germans began a series of counterattacks by first feeling out the exact location and strength of our units, with about two companies of men. This continued until about 1700 hours, when a counterattack of major proportions was brought to bear in the form of an encirclement. Hard, bitter fighting repulsed this and several subsequent attempts by the Germans to overrun the regimental positions. The enemy was able, however, to gain a well defined concept of our relatively confined positions, and subsequently saturate the entire position with repeated concentrations of artillery, mortar and automatic weapons fires. Toward 2030 hours, our forces were nearly out of ammunition. The defenses against the counterattacks had taken a further heavy toll in casualties among the troops, and it is believed that they were largely wiped out or taken prisoner, although American small arms fire was heard as late as 2300 hours. It was difficult to estimate the enemy losses, although they were believed to be heavy.

The severe losses suffered caused an entire revision of plans for operations for the night of January 22. Lt. Col. Wyatt had given orders for continued attempts to install a Bailey bridge across the river and a covering force from Company C had proceeded to the crossing site to protect the engineer personnel. The urgency was dictated by the need to get armored elements across as soon as possible. At 2240 hours, January 22, however, the engineers were directed to abandon the bridge attempt and the covering force was withdrawn.

Surviving elements of the 2nd and 3rd Battallions, supplemented by the men who had been able to work their way back across the Rapido, effected what reorganization they could on the east bank of the river.

The 143rd Infantry Regiment had encountered similar circumstances in attempting to establish and hold a bridgehead across the river. They had withdrawn earlier, their units being reported back across the Rapido during the afternoon.

The afternoon of January 22, about 1600 hours, Pvt. Savino Manella, one of the medical aid men of Company A, returned to the Regimental Command Post bearing a note purportedly from the German Commanding Officer, asking for a cessation of artillery fire for several hours to enable the Germans to evacuate the German and "English" wounded. Pvt. Manella had been captured the morning of January 21, after the initial attempt to cross, and had been attending the American wounded in a room of a farm house within the German positions. He reported that several large groups of fresh German replacements had reported into the area during the day of January 22. He had been released about noon of the 22nd with the note, and had made his way back to this side. Because of the informal nature of the note and the circumstances surrounding the transaction, the note was interpreted as having been designed only as a ruse to secure relief from our artillery fire.

Ferrying patrols were organized for the night of January 22, to attempt to communicate with the western side of the Rapido in order to bring back any men who might have remained in their positions alive or wounded. These were unavailing because of the continued German control of the river bank and the approaches to the east. At 1200 hours, January 23, it was estimated that the regiment had suffered a loss of 53.7% reduction in strength. The estimated strength of the battallions at that time being as follows:

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Enlisted Men</u>
1st Battallion	21	397
2nd Battallion	14	295
3rd Battallion	12	271

Approximately accurate figures on the number of known casualties suffered during the Rapido River operations, compiled after more details were learned, are as follows:

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Enlisted Men</u>
Killed in Action	9	67
Wounded in Action	22	311
Missing in Action	17	624
Total	48	1,002

The 36th Reconnaissance Troop was attached to the 141st Infantry Regiment during the afternoon of January 22, primarily to execute patrol missions. During the night, they had several patrols out along the river, and had established four strong points along the front of the regimental southern sector. The 2nd Battalion, under Lt. Col. John C. L. Adams (0-15716), who had been recently assigned to the regiment, was in defensive position along the western slopes of La Pleta, with the 3rd Battalion, then under Captain Carthel N. Morgan (0-342878), of San Antonio, Texas, on their left flank along the lower ground to the south. The 1st Battalion, under Captain Newman, was located to the rear of the 2nd Battalion, in regimental reserve.

Heavy smoke to screen activities in the vicinity of the "S" bend in the river was laid down during the daylight of January 23, by Company A of the 2nd Chemical Battalion. II Corps Artillery units had requested that the area be allowed to clear to increase their observation. After checking with General Wilbur, however, the smoking was continued to facilitate the return of any of our men still across the Rapido and trying to get back.

Elements of the 36th Division, including the 141st Infantry Regiment, were directed to demonstrate strongly toward the river during the night of January 23-24, to simulate crossing in that sector. The demonstration was to divert attention from the 34th Division, on the regimental right flank, which was to attempt to capture Cassino from the north. The time set for the demonstration was 2100 hours, January 23. During the afternoon, at 1400 hours, the Division G-3 had advised the regiment that Company A of the 2nd Chemical Battalion was being attached to the 34th Division, effective at once, and that they were to move into the 34th Division sector as soon as possible.

Further attempts to retrieve any men remaining across the river were made as soon as darkness permitted the night of January 23-24. Orders were given to the 1st Battalion at 1430 hours that they would send two patrols out with that mission. Lt. Phillip F. Ortman (0-1290804), of Peoria, Illinois, from C Company, organized and let the patrol on its mission. They ran into mine fields and small armed fire from the opposite bank as they approached the river, and inasmuch as they had to be back in before the time scheduled demonstration at 2100 hours, they did not attempt the crossing. At 2330 hours, they again set out on their mission, but with no greater success. Machine gun and mortar fire from the closely guarded western bank prevented any crossing.

The following morning, January 24, a patrol from the 1st Battalion was again sent out under Lt. Ortman. In addition to searching out any wounded remaining alive, the patrol was to feel out and locate any enemy strong points. Using the

rubber boats, the patrol was able to cross this time with little opposition. Following this success, plans were immediately made to exploit the possibility of establishing and holding a bridge head on the western bank. Foot bridges were spotted by the engineers, and Company C alerted to be ready to cross.

The initial success that the patrol had encountered, however, was short lived. They had been able to penetrate several hundred yards beyond the river and had located many bodies and several men still alive. Their activities drew increasingly heavy fire from enemy strong points further inland, and they were forced to withdraw. Artillery fire on enemy positions and smoke screening activities were ordered to aid the patrol in withdrawing. Further attempts to install foot bridges were postponed until after darkness. The patrol returned to the 1st Battalion Command Post at 1600 hours, January 24.

The 36th Division was again ordered to stage a demonstration of a river crossing the night of January 24-25. The activities of the 34th Division for the night of January 23-24 had been cancelled late the night before, and set for the following night. Three separate demonstrations were staged, between 2130-2230 hours, January 24, and between 0030-0130 hours and 0330-0430 hours, January 25, in an attempt to contain the enemy in his present position until dawn. Tanks from the 760th Tank Battalion participated in the demonstration, moving toward the river at the previously used bridge sites at the "S" bend, and firing across into enemy positions.

Owing to the necessity of coordinating activities between the demonstration periods, the night of January 24-25, and increasingly heavy enemy artillery fire, proposed plans to install foot bridges across the river were abandoned. At 1615 hours, the Commanding Officer gave orders for the engineer equipment to be dispersed. Patrol activity for that night was confined to maintaining lateral contact and in establishing strong points of resistance forward from battalion positions. A patrol from the 36th Reconnaissance Troop, operating along the river bank in front of the 2nd Battalion positions, reported at 0520 hours, January 25, that it had located and knocked out a German machine gun along the opposite bank.

Defensive arrangements were strengthened during the night of January 24-25 in anticipation of a possible enemy counterattack because of the activities of the 34th Division to the north. Artillery fires were arranged for defensive tactics, strong points of resistance organized, and patrol activities organized in that light. During the night, enemy planes twice passed over the regimental forward line positions, dropping flash bombs and probably photographing installations.

All attempts to rescue any wounded men across the river had been thwarted by the complete enemy control of the western bank and the approaches from the east.

The morning of January 25, a final attempt was made by sending medical aid men under the Red Cross flag to the river. Litter teams from the 1st and 2nd Battalions were sent along as carrying parties. At 1015 hours, all artillery units were ordered not to fire into the area concerned - across the Rapido and inland from the vicinity of the "S" bend south to San Angelo - all firing to cease at 1045 hours.

At 1043 hours, January 25, the party headed for the river under full observation of the enemy positions. They proceeded to the river, crossed in rubber boats, and gained the western bank unmolested. Two German men came down to meet them at 1130 hours, and a short time later, three of the enemy aid men and several of their officers came forward. The Germans requested a cessation of hostilities along the front from north of the "S" bend south to San Angelo to enable both sides to evacuate their casualties. A truce until 1500 hours was agreed on, and later extended to 1700 hours. Division Headquarters and all artillery units concerned were notified.

Both sides worked feverishly to evacuate as many casualties as possible in the time available. Approximately 50 of our men and an estimated 80 Germans worked side by side within the area. By 1700 hours, the deadline of the truce, 3 wounded and about 50 dead had been brought back across the river. Hostilities were resumed at that time.

The Germans who came out into the area throughout the truce maintained a friendly attitude and were anxious to help our men in any way possible, although they refused to allow them to go beyond the barbed wire aprons strung about 500 yards inland. They appeared well dressed and fed, and judging from their uniforms, medals and campaign ribbons, were veterans of many campaigns, some as far back as Suditanland Occupation. The regimental observation post reported that throughout the truce, the enemy strong points were constantly well manned. The information our men were able to gather regarding the enemy defenses corresponded pretty closely with that received from patrol activities and prisoners of war.

In their conversation with our men, the Germans couldn't seem to understand why our bridgehead had continued to hold out so desperately. Several of them stated that the Americans who had crossed the river had fought with great determination and courage.

Lt. Col. Wyatt held a meeting at the Regimental Command Post at 1300 hours, January 25, with the Unit Commanders of the Regimental Combat Team and the Regimental Staff, to discuss and arrange a realignment of the regimental defensive disposition, taking into consideration the recent operations and recent attachments to ^{the} detachments from ^{and} the Regimental Combat Team.

The necessary movements were to be accomplished during the hours of darkness of January 25-26 and fragmentary orders were issued at that time to facilitate unit preparation. The Field Order was issued at 1800 hours, January 25, covering the disposition of the regiment together with the units of the combat team to which had been attached the 1st Battalion of the 142nd Infantry Regiment, Troop A of the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron, and a platoon of Company C, of the 2nd Chemical Battalion. Company C, of the 760th Tank Battalion, and the 2nd Battalion of the 19th Engineer Regiment had been detached from the combat team.

The main line of resistance consisted of organized strong points in front of the battalion sectors. Generally, the line ran parallel with the north-south Rapido River stream line, from Highway No. 6 on the northern tip to a point opposite San Angelo to the south.

Note: The remaining paragraphs of the regimental report are omitted since they do not pertain to the Rapido crossing operations on January 20, 21, 22, 23.

Casualties of the 141st Infantry Regiment for the month of January, 1944, were as follows:

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Enlisted Men</u>	<u>Total</u>
Killed in action	8	49	57
Died of wounds	1	8	9
Wounded in action	22	292	314
Injured in action	-	22	22
Missing in action	18	587	605
Total	<u>49</u>	<u>958</u>	<u>1,007</u>

(Note: Many were reported "missing in action" because no one could be reported "killed in action" until there was positive proof in the case of each individual.)

Enemy casualties and captured and destroyed material for the month of January, 1944, are as follows:

	<u>Known</u>	<u>Estimated Additional</u>
Prisoners of War	16	
Killed	36	<u>66</u>
Wounded	--	128
Machine guns knocked out	5	6
81 mm Mortars knocked out	1	3

APPENDIX "C "

OPERATIONS, 143rd INFANTRY REGIMENT

January 1944

At the beginning of the New Year the 143d Infantry Regiment, in bivouac at SAN ANGELO D' ALIFE, ITALY, was undergoing another series of training programs designed to maintain the regiment in a constant state of readiness to return on short notice to the front lines. The most difficult problem involved receiving, assigning, and orienting replacements, and reorganizing the companies in order to make use of the experienced officers and non-commissioned officers where needed. During the engagement at SAN PIETRO and on MT SAMMUCRO in the month of December the regiment suffered casualties amounting to 906 men and 53 officers. These vacancies were filled during the period from 1 January 1944 by 416 enlisted replacements and 90 officer replacements. As compared with previous replacements, received after the SALERNO beach landing, the new men appeared to be more suited to combat physically but their training of from four to six months was insufficient for the strenuous combat which we were experiencing. Especially unfortunate was the fact that many of these men, having just arrived in a strange land and assigned to a new organization, were so quickly going to be carried into one of the most bitter operations to be experienced by the regiment, that of attacking across the RAPIDO RIVER against the German Gustav Line.

The Gustav Line ran from the southwest along the GARIGLIANO to the junction of the RAPIDO RIVER then running northwest on the west bank of the RAPIDO to CASSINO. After being driven off of MT CAMINO, MT MAGGIORE, and out of SAN PIETRO and SAN VITTORE the boche had fallen back on this line with the intention of holding at all cost what was believed to be the last major defensive line before ROME. Before taking a crack at this line the regiment went through another "dry run" crossing on the VOLTURNO near SAN ANGELO D' ALIFE which turned out to be very successful and gave confidence to unit commanders even though there were so many new men who had received but little training since leaving the States. It may even be said that the morale of the troops and confidence of the commanders exceeded expectations.

The regiment left SAN ANGELO D' ALIFE on 15 January 1944 and closed into bivouac in the vicinity of MT LUNGO one mile north of MIGNANO by midnight, a motor march of approximately 35 miles. Under cover of darkness on the night of 17 January the 1st and 3rd Battalions moved forward from MT LUNGO to occupy front line positions on the east bank of the RAPIDO between the 142d Infantry, on the right, and the British Durham Light Infantry, on the left. The 2d Battalion moved on the night of 18 January from MT LUNGO to a reserve position in rear of the 1st and 3rd Battalions. West of the 1st Battalion's right flank on the west bank of the RAPIDO the town of SAN ANGELO appeared to be a formidable fortress. From our previous experiences we had learned that the boche used buildings in

towns to an excellent advantage by running self-propelled mounts through a knocked out wall, the mount resting inside the building and firing from small openings or the muzzle protruding slightly over a low wall. Antitank guns, machine guns, and mortars were employed similarly. Our artillery was not too effective against these positions.

Orders were received for the attack across the river on the 20 January. For an accurate account of the attack as described by Colonel WILLIAM H. MARTIN, O-335128, Regimental Commander, from Houston, Texas, who was an actual eyewitness to the attack, the complete, official report is quoted:

"The 143d Infantry Regiment was ordered to cross the RAPIDO RIVER, at two (2) points, night 20-21 January, time of initial crossing 2000 hours. The crossing was preceded by heavy artillery preparation starting at river line and falling West of river as far as 500 yards. This fire was placed on areas known to be organized as strong points, and was lifted from East to West on prearranged time schedule. It included fire from 133d Field Artillery Battalion, 132d Field Artillery Battalion, and 68th Field Artillery Battalion, giving close support to this Regiment and twelve (12) other battalions from Division Artillery and Corps firing in the areas on time schedule, but in general support of the Division operation. Close in fires started at H minus 30 and lifted at H minus 5, and moved west in 100 yard shifts on a prearranged time schedule designed to keep artillery fire falling within 150 to 200 yards of advancing troops at all times. Companies "B" and "C", 2d Chemical Battalion were used to thicken the fire of the artillery.

"At 2000, 20 January, the leading elements of First Battalion reached its crossing point on the RAPIDO RIVER, carrying pneumatic reconnaissance boats from the 19th Engineers to forward boat assembly areas. Engineers assisted in guiding the initial elements to the river crossing site. A heavy fog hung over the river and visibility was nil. Intermittent artillery and mortar fire was falling in the vicinity, but no small arms fire at this time. The 3d Platoon of Company "C", led by Second Lieutenant RAYMOND NUNEZ, O-17030001, of Beaumont, Texas, was the first to cross and immediately came under small arms and mortar fire. Some of the rubber boats were destroyed by mortar fragments and small arms fire, but enough boats were brought down to get the other two rifle platoons across under fire. By this time all the rubber boats had been destroyed and the Engineer details were badly disorganized and dispersed. German artillery and mortar fire was falling on and near the crossing site, and there had been rather heavy losses in Companies "C" and "B". No report from Company "C" on the west side of the river, but heavy small arms fire was heard from that side. At 2255, I personally went to the river to find out the situation and was accompanied by Brigadier General KENDALL of the 88th Division, and by Captain MILTON H. STEFFEN, O-405938, Battalion Executive Officer, of Huntsville, Texas. We found Major

DAVID M. FRAZIOR, O-222230, Battalion Commander, of Houston, Texas, at the head of his battalion on the east bank of the river and attempting to secure additional boats for the crossing of his next company. No Engineers were around, so we organized a carrying party from Company "B" and took them to the boat assembly area where we found an Engineer Lieutenant and 28 men of the 19th Engineers dug in and in their fox holes. These men were used to assist the Company "B" men carry the five M-2 boats from this point to the crossing site. Upon arrival of the boats Major FRAZIOR started his company "B" crossing the river. All during this time German mortar and artillery fire was sweeping the crossing area, and casualties were mounting. By 0500, 21 January, 1st Battalion was placing two foot bridges over the river and completed the crossing of the entire Battalion by 0600. The foot bridges were destroyed in part by enemy fire, but one of them still had sufficient floatage for crossing.

"At the southern crossing site, over which the 3rd Battalion was ordered to cross, considerable difficulty was encountered before the initial waves reached the river. Engineers leading the boat groups to the river lost their direction in the dense fog and got into a mine field. The rubber boats were destroyed, and casualties occurred among both the Engineers and the Infantry, badly dispersing and disorganizing both. Much time was lost reorganization, after which the Battalion Commander moved his foot bridges forward with the view of using them early to effect the crossing. Artillery and mortar fire held up the movement to the river, and disorganization and confusion resulted in the dark and fog. Casualties were heavy, and at daylight the battalion had not succeeded in getting anyone across, and were ordered back to their original positions, under cover.

"By 0716, the 1st Battalion, on the west side of the river, had been unable to make any progress against the German prepared positions, and were under heavy machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. They had been forced into a pocket, with the river to their backs, and were receiving fire from German tanks or self-propelled guns in hull-down positions west of the road. Major FRAZIOR requested orders to pull back across to the east side of the river, which was denied by the Commanding General. Before these instructions reached Major FRAZIOR, fire had become so intense as to make his position untenable, and his battalion was threatened with being wiped out completely. He brought his men back across the river to his initial positions, using the partially destroyed foot bridge, clearing in his area about 1000, 21 January.

"Orders were received by this headquarters, from G-3, that attack would be launched against German positions on west side of RAPIDO RIVER at 1600 hours, 21 January, to seize, occupy, and defend against any attack, the objectives assigned by the Commanding General in his previous order for the attack. Warning orders had been received at 0820 to continue the attack 21 January at 2100 hours.

Plans for carrying out the order were made and battalion and attached unit commanders were given oral orders at 1030 hours, 21 January, to expect renewal of attack as early as 1400 hours, 21 January. The time was later set at 1600 hours and the attack jumped off at that time. Heavy smoke from smoke pots, chemical mortars, and artillery was placed along the far and near side of the river, and 3rd Battalion troops reached the river bank, under mortar and artillery fire, at 1430 hours. Rubber boats were used to carry Companies "K", "I", and "L" across, after which the first foot bridge was put in the water. The entire Battalion was across the river at 1830 hours, and had been under heavy machine gun fire from the time the first wave hit the water. Casualties were heavy, but evacuation continued across the foot bridge to near side of river.

"The 1st Battalion crossed north of Blue, starting at 1600 hours. The river had been smoked heavily and boats were taken to the crossing site, under cover of the smoke. Enemy artillery and mortar fire began falling as the first troops reached the river, and when Company "A" sent the first wave across, it met heavy machine gun fire. The company completed its crossing under heavy fire and Company "B" followed, both companies being over by 1835. The Battalion Commander crossed with Company "B" and reported no progress against heavy resistance. Company "C" had not been able to cross at 1935. At 2033 hours, the Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 19th Engineers, reported all of 1st Battalion across river, and that one foot bridge was completed and another being built. He also reported one foot bridge under construction at the 3rd Battalion crossing. At 2317 hours, information was received from 1st Battalion that Company "C" had not yet crossed the river, and Battalion Commander was directed to speed the crossing of his Company "C". Heavy machine gun fire and mortar fire was holding up the progress of both 1st and 3rd Battalions. Little information was received from either, after the crossing, but the 3rd Battalion was making their way through the wire and was taking out some of the machine guns in their zone of action. In the 3rd Battalion, Company "I" was on the right, Company "K" on the left, and Company "L" to left rear. They were advancing with extreme difficulty and receiving heavy casualties. Reports from men who returned next day, indicated that the German machine gun positions were wired in and the bands of fire were interlocking. Many men were wounded in the lower extremities, or in the buttocks, by the low grazing fire as they moved or crawled forward.

"The 2nd Battalion was ordered to cross at the 3rd Battalion site, at 2340 hours. As the battalion approached the river, they were met by Engineer guides, but they were unable to find the foot bridge, over which this battalion was to cross. Captain HERMAN M. VOLHEIM, O-249593, of 3rd Battalion, from Venice, California, guided them to the bridge and across into the enemy position on the right of the 3rd Battalion. Companies "E" and "F" crossed and Company "G" was held back in position near the foot bridge to protect the rear. At 0800, 22 January, these two companies were held up about 200 yards west of the river and receiving

heavy fire of all kinds. They were pushing forward slowly, using all the fire power they had and reached the approximate flank of the 3rd Battalion, that had made very slow progress. Hand grenades were used, as well as the rifle grenade, on the enemy machine gun positions. Movements forward were by small groups, employing fire and movement. Intense artillery and mortar fire caught both Battalions and caused many casualties. At 0900, the 3rd Battalion reported running out of ammunition and was resupplied from forward dumps established on the river during the night. This ammunition had to be hand carried through terrific small arms and artillery fire. Nebelwerfer fire came down on positions, lasting from about 0900 to 1000 hours and at 1117 the foot bridge had been almost completely destroyed. Men were being driven back toward the river from both battalions, and the position became untenable.

"At 0135, 22 January, Major FRAZIOR, Commanding Officer 1st Battalion, reported that he was wounded by mortar fire and was evacuated to the near side of the river. His battalion was making no progress and Company "C" had not yet completely crossed to the west side. Lieutenant Colonel MICHAEL A. MEATH, O-265895, was ordered to the 1st Battalion to take over the command, and Captain JOEL W. WESTBROOK, O-410474, of Waco, Texas, was sent to guide him. It was 0500 before they were able to reach the 1st Battalion Command Post, where Major FRAZIOR still awaited them, having refused to leave his post until he could acquaint the relieving officer with the situation. Lieutenant Colonel MEATH found the battalion badly disorganized, and for the most part had been driven back to the east side of the river, and the bridge and all boats destroyed. The big job was to reorganize, as Companies "A", and "B", and "C" had lost their commanders and the battalion was in the open flat ground with little or no protection from artillery fire. He was ordered to improve his positions by moving to the high ground further back, reorganize, and await instructions.

"At 1240 hours, the situation found the 1st Battalion reorganizing east of the river, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions being savagely driven back to the east side of the river, having only a few isolated groups remaining on the west side, still fighting it out with the Germans. All three battalions were ordered to organize defensive positions on the high ground east of the RAPIDO RIVER in the vicinity of their previously occupied assembly areas.

"In conclusion, I desire to invite attention to the fact that the RAPIDO RIVER was strongly defended by a force equal in number, or superior to the attacking force. The first attack was made, under cover of darkness, but was unsuccessful. The British attack on the south, the previous night, had likewise been unsuccessful. An attack by the 34th Division to the north, on a subsequent night, was likewise unsuccessful. The last attack by this regiment was made in daylight, which was furthermore, and more decisively, unsuccessful. Losses from attacks of this

kind are tremendous in man power and material, and in addition have a devastating demoralizing effect upon those few troops who survive them. Officers and men lost in the RAPIDO RIVER crossing cannot be replaced, and the combat efficiency of a regiment is destroyed. If we continue to gamble against odds with the German Army, it is my opinion we will greatly assist him in his efforts to defeat us. It has been said that success in battle depends upon the leadership of commanders; it can be truthfully said that as long as leaders who have the guts to plunge into hopeless odds such as this operation, are sacrificed like cannon fodder, our success in battle will suffer in proportion and disaster will eventually come."

Casualties suffered during both attacks were enormously high. Including all killed, wounded, and missing, the total amounted to 969 officers and enlisted men, and these losses occurred within a two day period. (See attached appendix for complete casualty list). During the battle three of the regiment's outstanding leaders were lost. Captain CARL R. BAYNE, O-351495, Commanding Company "F", of Yoakum, Texas, was killed while leading his company in the attack after crossing the river. Captain MILTON H. STEFFEN, O-405938, Executive Officer of the 1st Battalion, of Huntsville, Texas, and Captain HENRY C. BRAGAW, O-366581, Commanding Company "K", of Winnabow, North Carolina, were missing after the engagement. Major DAVID M. FRAZIOR, O-222230, Commanding the 1st Battalion, of Houston, Texas, was wounded during the engagement and evacuated, and it was felt that he would not return to the regiment. The loss of these courageous leaders, as well as the loss of many others, seriously weakened the regiment. The defensive line held by the regiment, after the two unsuccessful attacks, was held by a thinly spread line of weary troops.

As a matter of fact, the effectiveness of the regiment had been reduced to such an extent that Captain THOMAS H. LUNDAY, O-387366, Regimental S-2, of Mexia, Texas, made a rather humorous, unofficial statement concerning the enemy capabilities: "The Germans can hold and occupy their present positions, or they can withdraw, or they can occupy our positions." Although no prisoners were captured during the period, the regiment obtained, by patrolling prior to the attack, information of immediate value such as the location of gun emplacements, barbed wire, and mines. Three different patrols had crossed the river before the night of the first attack and were fired on, but their mission of locating the enemy defenses was accomplished. Also, from the intelligence reports received from higher headquarters it was learned that elements of the German 104 Panzer Grenadier Regiment occupied the positions which we were to attack. Intelligence reports received after the attack disclosed that we had inflicted heavy casualties on the Germans.

Characteristic of his aggressive and determined spirit Colonel MARTIN had personally directed both attacks across the river. For his courageous actions on the afternoon and night of 21-22 January 1944, he was awarded the Silver Star by Major General FRED L. WALKER, Division Commander. His actions are described in the citation which accompanied the decoration:

"WILLIAM H. MARTIN, O-335128, Colonel, 143d Infantry Regiment, for gallantry in action on the night of 21-22 January 1944, in the vicinity of SAN ANGELO in TEODICE, ITALY. After issuing orders for a renewed attack against strongly fortified enemy positions on the west bank of the RAPIDO RIVER on the afternoon of 21 January 1944, Colonel MARTIN proceeded from his command post to the river crossing site in order to direct personally the course of the attack. At the crossing site, under direct fire from enemy machine gun, rifle fire, and heavily concentrated mortar and artillery fire, Colonel MARTIN, displaying outstanding vigor and magnificent courage, without regard for his own life but thinking only of the effectiveness of his command, moved gallantly along the river banks issuing instructions and directing the attack. Inspired by his heroic actions and display of calm but forceful leadership the men of his regiment crossed the treacherous river successfully. During this period he was shaken by the concussion of mortar and artillery shells bursting about him, yet he continued to speak words of encouragement to the troops and guide groups of men who had become disorganized by the artillery fire. His presence on the front lines inspired confidence and encouraged his troops to the greatest effort. His gallant action reflects great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered the service from Houston, Texas."

The officers and men who crossed the RAPIDO carried with them the heritage and tradition of a distinguished, battle scarred regiment. Great in victory, unconquerable in spirit, and admirable in defeat, the record of her accomplishments and of the men who made her great will live as a shining example of honor to the military service.

DOUGLAS N. BOYD
Captain, 143d Infantry
Adjutant