

Subject : Specialized Defensive Tactics (Sticily) (301 - 400 13)

Title : Descriptive Vorkeltweise und Sticilien belagert
eine besondere Art der Abwehr

Author : General Max WILSON

Sheet : 1

Analysis : The German defenders of Sicily operated under the following difficulties: inferiority of combat strength of all three services, unreliable allies, a hostile civilian population, difficult terrain, and a severe climate. In order to overcome these difficulties, every effort was made to improve German communications facilities, to concentrate strength only at the most important locations, to withhold mobile reserves, to deceive the enemy, and to construct defensive positions. This report is a critical treatise, not a narrative account.

Circumstances : This report was prepared at POW 6, Garmlach, Germany, under the supervision of 7731 EICOM Historical Detachment. The author had available no important documents and he is not known to have been aided by other prisoners.

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Brigadier General [Generalmajor] WILSON

Barnison, 1 March 1947

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SIGMAW CAPTURESPECIAL PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTION.

Source: Personal recollections.

Special conditions (many sub factors, behavior of the Italians, terrain, and climate), confronted the German command as well as the German troops with unusually difficult problems during defensive operations in Sicily in July - August 1943. These problems were solved in an expedient manner, since command and troops had recognized at an early date the tactical necessities entailed by the struggle for time and space, and the corresponding need for economy in everything. The principles of a rigid defense were relinquished here in favor of a defense by means of delayed actions -- a concept in which the 100,000-man Army* had previously been trained. A special type of defensive warfare was developed, which was -- because of enemy superiority -- successfully adapted also during the further course of the war in Italy. The present study does not concern itself with Allied operations against the Italian armed forces prior to the arrival of German units.

7. Special Problems.

- A. 1. The following will present an approximate picture of the numerical superiority of the enemy:

Grand Forces: 8 : 1

The numerical strength of the then existing Italian forces, as included in the above calculation, is solely based on an estimate.

*The German Army prior to 1935 which had been limited to 100,000 men by the Treaty of Versailles.

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Air Forces : 20 : 1

Naval Forces : No information available; the participation of Italian naval forces in the combat actions was extremely limited.

2. The enemy's superiority in materiel cannot be expressed in terms of a definite ratio. In any event, it was very great. The Seventh American and Eighth British Armies consisted of excellently equipped divisions, while the four German divisions were only scantily provided with the necessary weapons and equipment because of the general shortage of materiel.

B. 1. From the very beginning of combat action the attitude of the Italian units proved that morale had disintegrated. Even though a few commanders still wanted to fight, and even though some units (the Italian artillery, for example) still gave a fair account of themselves, nothing was left of co-ordinated leadership and combat effectiveness. The Italian soldier was tired, aimless, and undisciplined. Consequently, Italian units only rarely constituted an asset in combat, and for the most part only proved to be a liability.

2. The Italian civilian population was unco-operative throughout. It supported the Italian units in their lack of discipline, rendered aid to the enemy in numerous instances, and welcomed him as a liberator.

C. 1. The terrain of the island presented difficulties to which the

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terrain motorized forces were unaccounted. There were high, almost impassible mountain ranges, deep valleys and ravines, few and narrow roads, all surrounded by the sea.

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2. During the hot summer months (up to 140° F. in the shade) the climate had a paralyzing effect on combat action, particularly during the noon hours. Furthermore, cases of malaria, which had been initially corrected during the rest period in a low plain in southern Italy, became active again under the prevailing climatic conditions.

13. The Special Type of Defensive Warfare.

The command gave due consideration to delaying action as the special type of defensive warfare necessitated by the special conditions.

4. It was vital to delay with small forces a superior enemy as long possible, and to avoid heavy losses to our troops. For this purpose the following measures had to be taken:

1. Close control of operations, with as many signal facilities as possible.
2. Concentration of forces, especially artillery and heavy weapons, into points of main effort in the sectors in which the brunt of the enemy assault was expected; outposts set up far forward; defensive sectors organized in depth.
3. Setting aside of mobile reserves for counterattack or counter-thrust.
4. Deceptive measures to mislead the enemy.
5. Timely withdrawal prior to an attack by superior enemy forces,

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and the occupation of new, previously reported, and tactical positions.

2. The following points and examples illustrate the application of the above-mentioned principles under the special conditions described in Section 1:

1. General

a. Control over operations was considerably hampered by the expanse of the area and the scarcity of good roads. There was always a danger that orders and reports would arrive too late. Telephone circuits were not always available; climatic conditions frequently interfered with radio communications, for example each night for several hours in the vicinity of Point AITIA. Consequently, officer-couriers in automobiles, and motorcycle messengers had to be used to an increasing extent.

Examples:

aa. The radio order by the Commander in Chief South to Northern Group for a counterattack in the direction of PALMBO reached the commander of Northern Group one day too late, and was furthermore obsolete.

ab. A report that it had become necessary to withdraw, during daytime, elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment in the sector east of CASTLEBUSH, reached higher headquarters one day later, because the officer-courier had suffered a fatal automobile accident.

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b. Despite the fact that air reconnaissance was only carried out on a limited scale and ground reconnaissance involved a high degree of physical exertion, the command generally succeeded in maintaining a state of defensive alertness in those sectors in which heavy attacks were expected. Example: Although four German divisions were fighting on an almost 100-km.-wide front, no breakthroughs occurred at any point.

c. Mobile reserves could be set aside on a very limited scale only.

Example: As of 23 July the 1st Battalion, 15th Panzer Grenadier Regiment constituted the only reserve in the area around TROIS. On 30 July it was hastily moved to BENTON, and successfully committed for a counterattack west of the town.

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d. Defensive measures could only be carried out on the smallest scale, because of the lack of both personnel and time.

e. The command generally recognized at the right time each instance requiring withdrawal, and in all cases also made an early decision on the location of the new line. For this it deserves special credit.

Example: When the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division found itself in a very critical situation south of BENTON, the order to fall back arrived at the last moment, but still in time.

2. Field Units.

a. Units in the field were likewise confronted by the difficulty

[-5-]

of maintaining signal communications, particularly in the impassable, mountainous areas. These conditions could only be overcome by the simultaneous dispatch of several couriers and messengers along different routes.

Example: A company in a forward position 25 km. southwest of SAN FRANCISCO did not receive the order to withdraw in time, because one messenger had lost his way, and the other one arrived too late. Due to capable leadership, this company was nevertheless able to rejoin the regiment three days later; it had fought its way through the mountains.

b. The concentration of forces into points of defensive main effort was carried out successfully in almost every instance.

Example: In the area south of SAN FRANCISCO, the two battalions on the right defended 3-km.-wide sectors, whereas the battalion on the left had a front of 15 km; even the artillery was concentrated behind the right wing. By adopting the above-mentioned measures the units were able to repel the enemy attack.

c. In most cases not more than one reinforced company could be set aside as a mobile reserve in any regimental sector.

Example: In the difficult operation south of SAN FRANCISCO, the reinforced company which had been located behind the center of the position was put on trucks and rushed to the right wing, where it was able to ward off the threat of an encirclement by the enemy with a counterthrust.

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d. Deceptive maneuvers employed by field units were restricted to the construction of some dummy rifle pits and machine-gun emplacements, which no doubt misled the enemy. Another successful deceptive maneuver is indicated by the following example:

Example: In the sector near MISHKITA, a battalion commander had two trucks drive back and forth on a village road for several hours at night, thus simulating the sound of moving armor; as a consequence, the enemy did not attack at this point, despite apparently extensive preparations.

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e. Active withdrawal prior to an attack by superior enemy forces was -- in practically all cases -- executed on orders from above. Only in rare instances were units pushed back in the course of actual combat. Nevertheless, another withdrawal was executed on orders from above, or as the result of a brief give-and-take on the battlefield, they were always carried out in an orderly fashion -- a proof for the high morale of the troops.

Example: The enemy advance along the road to GSKIN forced a company deployed south of the town to defend itself on three sides. The company commander knew that he was not to fall back until after 2400, but -- because of the precarious situation -- acted on his own initiative, and withdrew his company ahead of schedule, by nightfall. He did it so skillfully that he inflicted considerable casualties on the enemy without sustaining serious losses to his own forces.

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It never happened that a position to the rear had not been selected and surveyed beforehand.

3. Miscellaneous.

a. Among the special conditions described in Section 1, mention must be made of the difficulties caused by the attitude of the Italians.

It was a "special treat" for all commands to issue orders to Italian units in many different situations, and to be finally forced to assume direct command. An Italian unit never held its position when left to itself; conditions became somewhat more tolerable when Italian units were incorporated into German formations by companies or even platoons. The Italian artillery made a better showing, and took an active part in the defense, as for example, south of UFFL. The following example illustrates the methods that had to be employed by the Germans:

Example: In the event of planned retrograde movements, the Italians never withdrew at the proper time, but were at least two hours ahead of schedule. During the early stages these premature withdrawals caused some critical situations, but were later counteracted by appropriate German measures, namely different timetables for the retrograde movements of German and Italian units.

b. The available means of active air defense were limited. Consequently, the field units were forced to exercise the greatest care in the camouflage of men, weapons, and equipment.

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Example: No active anti-aircraft defenses could be employed against enemy artillery liaison planes on their frequent visits. Even so, good camouflage frequently prevented detection.

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c. The conduct of the delaying action was greatly influenced by the necessity of shipping our line across the Strait of Messina. This operation required much personnel and material, and was of course not able to keep the units on the island correctly supplied with the required quantities of ammunition.

For the above reasons, fuel and ammunition had to be used with great economy everywhere. On the other hand, the unit was run completely out of supplies, thanks primarily to the very flexible and far-sighted way in which the supply was handled.

Example: A battalion on its way to an area 30 km. northwest of MESSINA was stopped on its way by a destroyed bridge. In order to reach its new sector south of MESSINA, it had to detour via MESSINA. However, the battalion had only enough fuel to reach MESSINA. A fuel depot which had been established in that town helped out, and the unit reached its assigned sector on time.

The part which the German defensive operations on Sicily played in the general conduct of the war will have to be discussed on another occasion.

Command and troops can be proud of their successes in this defensive battle which was conducted in a fair manner by both opponents.

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... successful at the conclusion of the operation in which the
the bulk of four German divisions, with their entire material, across the
Staff of GEF will be the subject of a further study.

Signed: [Signature]