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[1]

Reconnaissance in the Battle of Sicily

A. General Information

1. During the fighting in Sicily the Luftwaffe was able to carry out reconnaissance flights only in exceptional instances, because of the overwhelming superiority of the Allied air forces, and the availability of only a small number of German reconnaissance aircraft. It may be said that air reconnaissance was instrumental in providing vital information to the German command only in the early phases of the fighting. As an example, on 20 July a German plane reported, that, in the western portion of the island, numerous motorized columns were advancing on the roads leading to PALERMO. Although there was no information as to whether these formations were Italian or Allied, this report was used by the Commanding General of the XIVth Panzer Army Corps as a basis for the decision to commit forces to the protection of the northern flank along the coastal road in the north.

2. Enemy information from the "intelligence agencies" was almost non-existent. Up to the present time it has not yet been ascertained, whether an "intelligence service" had been organized on the island. No reports arrived from the island itself. A few reports arrived from Africa by way of ROME, but, these were of no particular importance to the conduct of combat operations.

3. The Italian air force and an Italian intelligence service, to the extent the latter existed could, with any measure of good will have greatly facilitated the collection of enemy information. However, in this line too,

[1] the results were negative.

4. Consequently, the German command generally had to depend entirely on ground reconnaissance during the fighting in Sicily.

E. Ground Reconnaissance.

I. Strategic Ground Reconnaissance.

1. Also in matters pertaining to strategic reconnaissance the Italian High command failed to put forth any effort.

2. The two German divisions initially committed in Sicily, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and the "Hermann Goering" Division, attempted to conduct strategic reconnaissance with the few available armored scout cars, supplemented by motorized reconnaissance patrols prior to and after the Allied landings. The fact, that this type of reconnaissance was only possible on a very limited scale and did not produce adequate results was due to the lack of additional information through strategic air reconnaissance. The difficulties presented by the existing roadnet --- already emphasized in previous studies --- served to increase the hardships; wireless signal communications were greatly hampered by atmospheric conditions caused by the climate.

[2] All these conditions combined had the result that the command in Sicily did not receive adequate information of the enemy on which to base its strategic decisions.

3. With the "stabilization of the front", i.e. with the beginning of the previously planned defensive actions on about 23 July, strategic ground reconnaissance came to an end.

[2]

II. Tactical Ground Reconnaissance.

During all phases of the operation, tactical ground reconnaissance was conducted with all means at our disposal.

Conducting tactical ground reconnaissance was not easy and therefore did not always produce the desired results.

1. Reconnaissance by armored scout cars, motorcycle platoons, and some motorcycle detachments could not be carried out to the extent necessary, because both the equipment and personnel, at the disposal of troops, were inadequate.

This type of motorized reconnaissance was restricted to the few existing highways; to use undeveloped roads leading through the mountain ranges was deemed impossible.

Whenever reconnaissance forces of this type encountered the enemy on a highway, its usefulness as a reconnaissance force was over. There was no possibility to by-pass. Although the tactical commander would receive a report that contact with the enemy had been made, no further details were available.

2. Reconnaissance by patrols on foot was carried out in every combat engagement by the lower tactical units, in order to supplement motorized reconnaissance activity. This type of reconnaissance had to take into account the elements of time and space which differed as compared to other theaters of operation and had to make allowance for the probability of being engaged in combat.

a. In mountainous terrain extraordinary high demands were placed

[2] on the physical strength of the "lowland-infantrymen", who were neither accustomed to nor equipped for mountain climbing. The hot climate also presented an obstacle.

When attempting to establish the length of time required for a reconnaissance operation conducted on foot, one had to take into account that in areas of flat terrain (south of CATANIA, for example) twice the normal amount of time would be required, while in mountainous regions it would take five or six times as long as was ordinarily the case. Yet, numerous examples indicate, that the reconnaissance patrols on foot operating in high mountain regions nevertheless, accomplished tasks which had been considered as impossible to achieve.

b. Both, the lack of observation and enemy superiority made it highly probable that a foot patrol could be engaged in action.

It was therefore necessary to assign these reconnaissance missions to units of at least squad size. In the case of greater distances or high mountainous regions, often an entire rifle platoon was employed.

C. Conclusion.

In spite of the aforementioned difficulties, it was reconnaissance which eliminated the possibility of strategic and, generally, also tactical "surprises". For this, special credit is due to the command and troops.

Signed: ULICH