

: AUTH: C.O., 550th Inf.:  
 : DATE: 2 November 1944:  
 : INIT: *WOS* :

HEADQUARTERS 550TH INFANTRY AIRBORNE BATTALION  
 Office of the Commanding Officer

APO 512, U.S. Army,  
 2, November 1944.

SUBJECT: Report of the Operations of the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion for the Period 1 October to 31 October 1944.

TO : Commanding General, 1st Airborne Task Force, APO 758, U.S. Army.

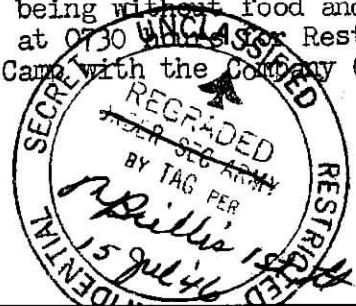
1. On 1 October 1944 the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion, less Company "B", was located in and around Barcelonnette, France. In support of the Battalion and attached to it were the following organizations: 463rd Parachute Field Artillery Battalion; One platoon of Company "A", 40th Engineers; One platoon of Tank Destroyers (Company "B", 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion; and One platoon of 4.2 Mortars (83rd Chemical Battalion). All of these elements went together to make up the 550th Infantry Combat Team. Company "B", 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion was on temporary duty in the city of Nice, France, with the mission of providing Military Police patrols and allied duties. Unit dispositions of the 550th Infantry Combat Team in and around Barcelonnette as of 1 October 1944 are shown on the attached overlay # 1. (France 1:100,000)

2. An "A" Company patrol, consisting of eight men and an officer attempted to dislodge an enemy O.P. party on Tete de Cugaret (53.5 - 47.5) on the morning of 2 October. Approaching to within three hundred yards of their objective the patrol came under heavy enemy machine gun fire and was forced to withdraw back down the slope after the patrol leader (2nd Lt. Ernest Waddle) had been seriously wounded. Routine patrols in the Condamine and Camp des Fourches areas marked the activities of the 3rd and 4th October. Intermittent enemy artillery and mortar fire continued in all sectors as had been the case for the preceding month, though the volume of fire can only be described as light and the effects as harassing. A reconnaissance patrol reconnoitered the high ground near La Tour (30.1 - 57.1) and found evidences of German patrols having recently passed through the area.

3. Snow began falling the night of 5th and 6th October in the Camp des Fourches area and by dawn of the 6th, visibility had been reduced to twenty feet. Towards 0600 hours this same date, a small enemy patrol entered into the defense fortifications of Camp des Fourches proper and were promptly fired on by men of Company "A" in position in the blockhouses. One German was killed and the remainder escaped in the snowstorm. The snow continued all day long and into the night of the 6th and 7th of October, and began to assume proportions of a blizzard. Heavy snow had also fallen in the Tete de Cugaret and Tete de Sigaret region necessitating the withdrawing of an 81mm Mortar Section from forward positions in a blockhouse below Tete de Cugaret to Camp Cugaret.

4. By morning of 7 October snow in the des Fourches sector had reached a level depth of eighteen inches; the very narrow supply road from Restefond to Camp des Fourches being covered by drifts in some places four to five feet deep; the road itself now entirely closed to military vehicles. Mules could not negotiate the road either. With the immediate prospects of being without food and supplies, two platoons of Company "A" left des Fourches at 0730 with the Company Commander (56 - 36) while the third platoon remained in the Camp with the Company Commander.

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**BASIC:** Report of the Operations of the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion for the period of 1 October to 31 October 1944, dated 2, November 1944, (Cont'd):

The storm increased in intensity throughout the day and it became increasingly apparent that the Camp would have to be evacuated if the supply route could not be reopened. This latter task had been attempted by the use of a requisitioned civilian snowplow and another sent to the Battalion by Division; however the equipment at hand could make no headway in the face of the intensity of the storm. This same date, a platoon of Company "C" moved to Fort Tournoux (51.5 - 50.5) from which excellent observation of St. Ours (known to be occupied by the enemy) was obtainable.

5. On the morning of 8 October four men were wounded, three of them severely in Camp des Fourches during an artillery and mortar shelling but their evacuation could not be accomplished until after a French ski-patrol made their way into the camp later that day. During the night of the 8th-9th October, enemy patrols had worked their way close to the Camp area while the snow continued to fall. By the morning of the 9th October, in view of the severe weather conditions, our inability to resupply the Camp and the enemy pressure on the remaining platoon, it was apparent that the position was no longer tenable. Therefore, the garrison evacuated des Fourches this date after destroying the heavy equipment and supplies that could not be taken out on foot.

6. A thirty man patrol (1st Platoon of Company "C") left Restefond the morning of 10 October for Camp des Fourches. Reaching their objective late in the day, the patrol observed evidences that an enemy patrol had been in the Camp earlier in the day or the preceding night. They decided to remain overnight and were shelled after they had been there for several hours; one man was wounded. This same date one man was wounded in Fort Tournoux as a result of an enemy artillery barrage.

7. Company "A" relieved Company "C" at Fort Tournoux on the 15th of October. One platoon of Company "C" moved into Chalanette (52.8 - 42.4), having taken over this position from a French Senagalese Company which had formerly occupied this area. About 2000 hours, an estimated enemy platoon with two machine guns moved down from Cugaret (53.5 - 47.5) apparently attempting an attack on the blockhouse at (53.1 - 47.1). This O.P. was at the time held by four infantrymen, an artillery O.P. party and six members of the F.F.I.. An infantry platoon (3rd Platoon Company "C") was rushed to the position while our artillery and mortars laid a heavy barrage on their defense fire lines on Tete de Cugaret, The action lasted for about three hours; daylight patrols the following morning found no German casualties though traces of enemy activity were seen in the snow. On the 17th October two men of Company "A" were killed and another wounded by enemy artillery fire in the Condamine Valley. Another casualty in Company "A" occurred on the 18th in Fort Tournoux, also as a result of enemy artillery. Two very young Germans surrendered themselves the afternoon of the 19th to the Company at Fort Tournoux. During the interrogation of these prisoners, they stated that our artillery had in past weeks obtained hits on German artillery and that the harassing effect of our fire on German morale was considerable.

8. During the period 14th -18th October plans had been made to effect the relief of the 550th Infantry Combat Team by the French 1st Algerian Rifle Regiment. Reconnaissances of the Barcelonnette Sector having been made in detail by staff officers of this French Regiment during this period, the first portion of the relief was accomplished late on the 18th October when Company "A" was relieved from their position at Fort Tournoux by French infantry. This relief continued until the 23rd of October and was completed on that date. The 550th Infantry Combat Team was then dissolved and the Battalion was ordered to Lantosque, France, to relieve the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion.

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A part of Headquarters and Headquarters Company and Company "C" moved to Lantosque on the 21st of October by truck. The initial move was preceded by a portion of the Battalion Staff which reconnoitered the 509th Infantry Battalion positions in the Lantosque Sector. The shuttling movement by truck was completed for the remainder of the Battalion by the 23rd of October, the new Battalion Command Post having gone into operation at 0800 hours, 23 October. Initial dispositions of the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion on 23 October in this new area are shown on attached overlay # 2. (Map coordinates hereinafter used refer to Map of France; Scale, 1:50,000; Sheet No. XXXVII-41.)

9. Lantosque is an ancient mountain town located on a bluff above the Vesubie River. The present 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion sector is located along the river as it comes from the North. The Battalion Command Post is located in a hotel three hundred yards North of the French Military Barracks of Lantosque which is located on the right flank of the Battalion Sector. The character of the terrain is extremely craggy and mountainous although the average elevation (3000 feet) is lower than the Barcelonnette area. The dominant terrain feature is the deep valley (several hundred yards wide on the average) running generally North and South, cut by the Vesubie River. Roads in this sector are for the most part in excellent condition and are made of tar and gravel.

10. Daily contact patrols were sent out during the period 23 October - 31 October to contact the 551 Parachute Infantry Battalion at St. Martin Vesubie (60.7 - 20.5). Reconnaissance parties ranging from six to twenty man patrols were sent out during this period by Company "A" and Company "C" from their respective positions to contact enemy groups to the East but for the most part such contact was limited to distant observation of enemy patrols. Enemy artillery occasionally and then only lightly shelled various observation posts maintained by this Battalion in the Sector. Our 81mm Mortars and a platoon of Tank Destroyers located at Roquobillièrre (64.0 - 14.0) replied with unknown results. By the 28th October after light snows had fallen in the surrounding mountains, it became apparent that the enemy had withdrawn his forward outposts towards the East and contact with the enemy became increasingly more difficult, even by visible means. One such reconnaissance patrol sent out by Company "C" on the 31st of October discovered many mines laid by the enemy, a definite indication of a general enemy withdrawal along the line. One officer (1st Lt. John T. Pickett) the patrol leader of this latter group, and another member of the patrol were seriously injured by these mines.

11. Our positions as of the 31st October 1944 are shown on attached overlay No. III. (Blue lines indicate patrol routes attempting contact with the enemy to the East).

For the Commanding Officer:

  
WALTER E. GRISCTI  
Captain, Infantry  
Adjutant.

5 Incls:

- Incl 1 - 1 Map France, Briancon - Gap Sheet 15-0; 1:00,000.
- Incl 2 - 1 Map France, Sheet XXXVII-41; 1:50,000.
- Incl 3 - Overlay #1
- Incl 4 - Overlay #2
- Incl 5 - Overlay #3