

: AUTH: C.O., 550th Inf.:
: DATE: 17 October 1944:
: INIT: *WCS*

HEADQUARTERS 550TH INFANTRY AIRBORNE BATTALION
Office of the Commanding Officer

L-1034

APO 512, U. S. Army,
17 October 1944.

SUBJECT: Report of the Operations of the 550th Infantry Airborne
Battalion for the Period 1 September to 30 September 1944.

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

1. On 1 September 1944 the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion, less Company "A", 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 "A", 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion, was on duty in Grasse, France, with the mission of providing local security for the Division C.P. and also of providing M.P. patrols in the city of Grasse. Unit dispositions of the 550th Infantry Combat Team in and around Barcelonnette are shown on the attached overlay # 1.

2. The period 1 September to 3 September 1944 was devoted mainly to reconnaissance patrols of Condamine and the valley leading northeast of Condamine (50.9-49.2); Reference Sheet 15-0, France, Scale: 1:100,000. All references hereinafter made will be on this map. Much difficulty was initially encountered in obtaining artillery O.P.'s and the majority of patrols sent out had this latter mission to accomplish. By 3 Sept. 1944, enemy artillery, believed to have been located around St. Ours (55.8-51.8) had already begun to fire on our positions at (50.2-48.0). One of our men was killed by enemy shelling in this area 3 September 1944. Company "A" moved from Grasse to Nice, France, on special duty with the First Airborne Task Force Headquarters also on this date.

3. Patrols returning from Condamine reported that the enemy had mined and booby-trapped that evacuated town to a considerable extent. Preparations were begun on 4 September 1944 to send a mixed combat patrol of Infantry and Engineers to the town of Larche on the Franco-Italian frontier with the mission of mining enemy flank positions and setting an ambush. This patrol left Camp des Fourches (32.2-52:5) 5 ~~Sept~~ 1944 with 20 Engineers and 20 Infantrymen with a British Officer of the Inter Allied Mission acting as a guide. However, strong enemy patrols were encountered almost at once on high ground immediately northwest of Camp des Fourches (Pelousette) and at the village of Bouziefyas. The patrol then decided to remain at Pelousette and Camp des Fourches as the intended route to Larche was now obviously too strongly defended by the enemy.

4. On 6 September 1944, a twenty man combat patrol from Company "C" killed or wounded six enemy (including an officer) in a fire fight at (54.3-49.9). Returning via Condamine, two enlisted men and a French guide were injured by a mine at (51.5-49.9). A section of 81mm Mortars, a section of .30 caliber Heavy Machine Guns, a platoon of 4.2 Mortars, and one Rifle Pla-

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35.4-54.9
 toon of Company "B", together with a force of 150 F.F.I., this same date moved into Camp des Fourches, the fort at Pelousette, and the town of Bouziéyas, and prepared this ground for defense. Excellent observation of the valleys running northeast and east are obtainable at Camp des Fourches as well as domination of the important pass leading into France from Italy, the Col de Pourriac (33.0-52.7). The Engineer-Infantry patrol at des Fourches was relieved by this latter mentioned force. On 7 September 1944, two enemy were taken and two enemy killed in the Camp des Fourches area, while on the 8th of the month Company "C" moved into positions occupied by Company "B", the latter company reverting to reserve. On 9 September 1944, a Company "B" patrol with attached F.F.I. left Camp des Fourches for an enemy O.P. located at (33.6-55.0) where as a result of this action 3 enemy were killed and 7 taken prisoners.

5. At this time, contact having been made with the 2nd D.I.M. (a French North African Division) which had a regiment in and around St. Paul (50.0-55.0), it was decided that the latter mentioned force together with the 550th Infantry Combat Team would make a concerted drive on enemy positions at Larche. According to plan, the 550th was to move forward in an easterly direction and assist the D.I.M.'s advance southeastward from their positions south of St. Paul. The American Infantry mission was to gain the crests of the ridge known as Cotes d'Abries (running from (53.0-48.0) to (33.0-55.0)) and assist the southeasterly advance of the D.I.M. by fire from this ridgeline. By 1600 hours, 10 September 1944, patrols of F.F.I. and Americans (Company "B") from Camp des Fourches had moved to the Col de Quartier d'Aout (32.5-58.0) and to the Petite Cuvale (32.7-53.7). Units of the 550th Infantry Combat Team made up of Artillery liaison parties and F.F.I. were on high ground at (53.5-47.5), (54.1-48.1) and (57.3-45.3). Nineteen Company "C" men had assisted the F.F.I. in reaching ground to control both passes near Tete Rouge on this same ridge. The D.I.M. attack did not take place but notice of this did not reach the 550th force until they had completed their mission. In this action 13 enemy were killed and three captured. These positions were given up when the D.I.M. attack failed to materialize. Enemy artillery shelled Camp des Fourches severely that afternoon.

6. A contact patrol from the 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion, arriving from St. Etienne de Tince reached our positions at Camp des Fourches on the 11th. The platoon of Company "B" at Pelousette was relieved by another of Company "C". Approximately 65 enemy artillery shells landed in Camp des Fourches on the 12th of September, effecting one casualty. Details for periodic liaison patrols between the 550th Infantry Combat Team and the D.I.M. to the north were arranged on 13 September 1944.

7. From the period 16 September to 25 September 1944, little of major importance took place. The Camp des Fourches area received daily shelling from enemy artillery and mortars (2 men wounded 21 September). Rifle and Heavy Weapons units exchanged positions between the Jausiers-Condamine and the des Fourches sectors. The roads from Restefond to Camp des Fourches, always in need of repair due to heavy rains and landslides, was worked on by the Engineers Platoon. Reconnaissance patrols were active in the Condamine Valley and the valley northeast of des Fourches. New artillery O.P.'s were taken up and considerable fire was placed on suspected enemy gun positions. Mines and booby-traps were laid by Engineers and Infantry groups for close-in protection of defensive areas in the two main sectors.

8. Early the morning of 26 September 1944, an F.F.I. group of approximately 10 men was driven down from Tete de Cugaret (53.4-47.8) by an enemy combat patrol armed with automatic weapons. At approximately 1000A, an Artillery and Infantry patrol tried to regain the heights of Cugaret but were driven back down to La Condamine (53.0-48.6). Later in the day, the 1st Platoon of Company "B" moved from Jausiers and attacked Cugaret from the last mentioned coordinate but they in turn were driven back by severe automatic fire. On 27 September 1944, a 12 man patrol from Company "C" departed from Le Pra (33.7-51.2) with the mission of reconnoitering the Col de Fer (36.0-51.0) which pass was thought to be occupied by enemy infantry and quite possibly by several artillery pieces. Just as two men succeeded in reaching Col de Fer, the patrol was observed by the enemy and a fire fight ensued. Our mortar fire enabled the patrol to withdraw. Two enemy were believed killed while we suffered two wounded. One man of our patrol was wounded and believed to have been captured by the enemy. By 30 September 1944, Company "A" had relieved Company "B" at Barcelonnette; the latter company taking over Company "A"s mission in Nice, France.

9. The position of our forces and friendly troops as of 30 September 1944 are shown on the attached overlay # 2.

For the Commanding Officer:

WALTER E. GRISCTI,
1st Lt., Infantry,
Adjutant.

- 3 Incls:
- Incl 1 - Reference Sheet 15-0, France, 1:100,000
- Incl 2 - Overlay # 1
- Incl 3 - Overlay # 2

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By KS NARA Date 01/04/02