
Section III

THE 442ND COMBAT TEAM
ROME TO THE ARNO - "AIRBORNE"

Several days after the 100th Battalion had been attached to the 442d Combat Team, the two merged in a bivouac area a few miles from the port of Civitavecchia. The Red Bull Division had been pulled up short for a rest in this area while the 36th Division took up the chase of the retreating enemy. Here the troops trained until 21 June, when they entrucked and moved to another bivouac area southwest of Grosseto. From here, reconnaissance was instituted and final preparations were made to take the unit into combat. Five days later, on the 26th, the regiment was committed to action in the vicinity of Suvereto. The 2d Battalion passed through the 142d Infantry. The 3rd Battalion passed through the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The 100th Battalion was being held in reserve. The regimental objective was a key road junction beyond the town of Sassetta. On the left, the 3d Battalion advanced slowly, against stiff small arms resistance, although artillery fire was light. On the right, the 2d Battalion's advance slowed and stopped in the face of murderous artillery fire. At this point, around 1200 hours, the 100th was committed, driving through a gap between the two assault battalions to seize the high ground around Belvedere, and cut the Suvereto-Sassetta road. Immediately, A and B companies swung northeast to seize a hill which the Germans had neglected to cover and which overlooked Belvedere. From here they observed the enemy's defensive positions, and several artillery pieces which had been shelling the 2d Battalion. Company A now launched an attack on Belvedere and Company B swung back to cut the road south of the town.

This assault on their flanks and rear completely demoralized the enemy, and the defenders were quickly chopped up in small groups and annihilated or captured with all their arms and equipment. The bag for the day was one SS battalion completely destroyed.

The 3d Battalion, continuing the frontal attack, had cleared Suvereto at 1500 hours, and the regiment pushed

out along the Suvereto-Sassetta road in a column of battalions — 100th, 3d, and 2d. For the Belvedere action, the 100th Battalion was later awarded a Presidential Citation.

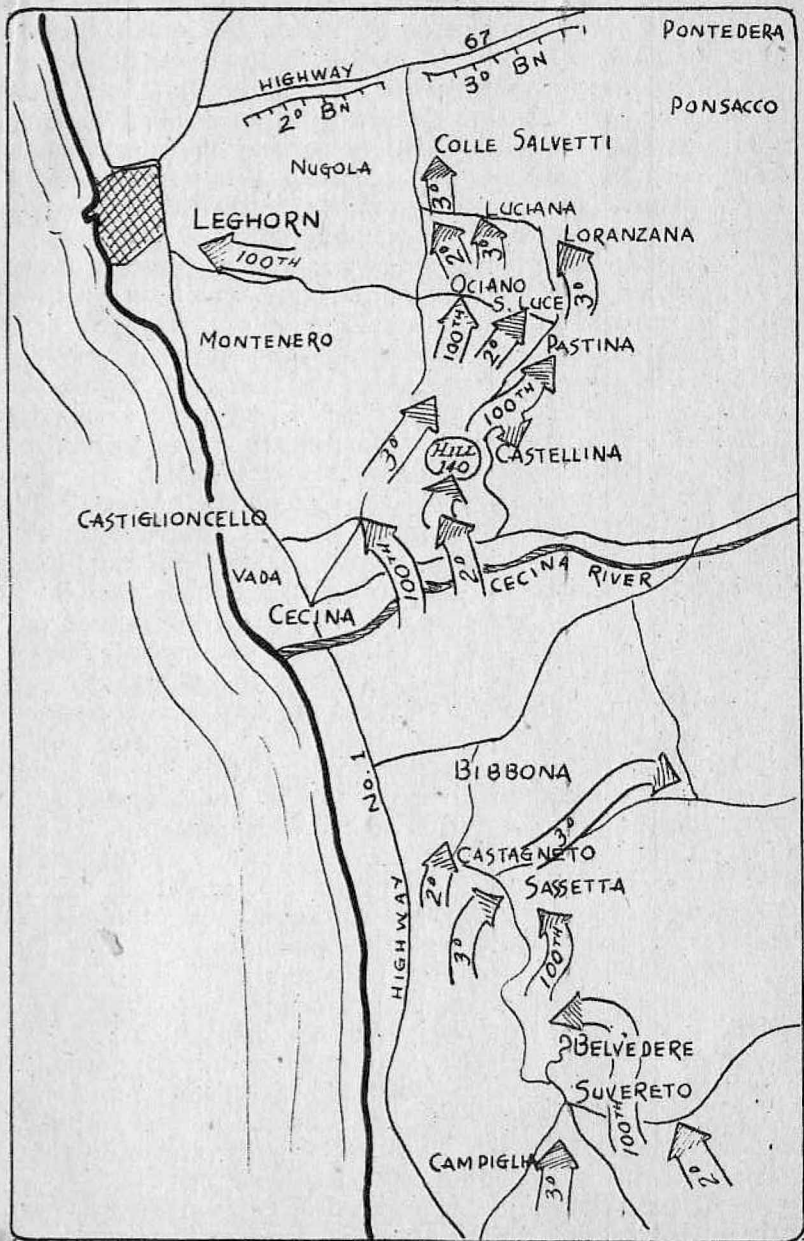
The following day, the 100th stormed into Sassetta, while the 3d Battalion executed a flanking movement and seized the high ground overlooking the town from the north. The 522d Field Artillery Battalion, Cannon Company, and the massed mortars and machine guns of the 100th and 3d Battalions supported the attack, picking off enemy stragglers and nipping one counterattack in the bud.

Following this breakthrough, the Combat Team, less the 3d Battalion, went into division reserve near Bibbona to rest for a day or two and meditate on some of the lessons the new men had learned in their first few days of battle; lessons that proved valuable in some of the bitter days that came later. Probably the most important thing the young regiment discovered, much to everyone's surprise, was the fact that advice, even from battle-wise veterans, was well-meaning but practically useless. A well-trained soldier acquires his final polish in battle, and in no other way. The experience had proved fatal to some, but to most of the men it had been the best teacher of all.

Meanwhile, the 3d Battalion had been swung far to the right of the division sector to block against a possible counterattack from the northeast, where the 1st Armored Division had opened a gap between the two divisions. When this threat failed to materialize, the 3d Battalion rejoined the Combat Team. All three battalions crossed the Cecina River on 1 July with the 2d and 100th in assault, and drove north to cut off an important road junction five miles northeast of Cecina. The objective was secured after the 522d Field Artillery and the regimental Cannon Company poured a paralyzing concentration of fire on the German troops defending there.

The following day, the regiment pushed on to cut the east-west road from Castellina to the sea. Here, however, the enemy elected to put up his most determined stand since his defenses before Rome, and the attackers ran into a storm of fire of all types. Our troops were limited to small gains for the next two days, though they kept up a steady pressure against the enemy.

On 4 July, the 3d Battalion moved in to relieve the 100th; the 2d and 3d Battalions went on to grind out a



costly yard by yard advance against Hill 140 and the ridge line running west from it to the coastal plain. By the afternoon of the 5th, the 3d Battalion had overrun strong enemy defenses dug into caves, and the 2d Battalion, after two days of butting into the enemy's interlocking fires on a hillside that contained little cover and no concealment, stormed and seized their part of Hill 140 in a vicious night attack before dawn of 6 July. Enemy casualties on the positions overrun by the regiment approximated 250.

Here the 100th Battalion swung around the right flank of the 2d, and driving abreast of the 3d, cut the Castellina road and cleared Castellina by the evening of the 7th. Still the enemy gave ground grudgingly, and it became evident that here in these hills and not in the port itself would the battle of Leghorn be fought. Accordingly, the regiment settled down to its task and battled the enemy where he chose to stand, seeking to destroy his defenses.

The 2d Battalion relieved the 3d on the 10th of July, and the 100th and 2d again jumped off abreast with the mission of clearing the hilltop town of Pieve di San Luce. They had advanced only a short distance when they were stopped decisively by heavy fire from their objective and from Pastina, which lay in the hills to the right front of the 100th. Immediately the 100th took to the high ground to clear Pastina, while the 2d Battalion dug in in the valley below and hung on against all the artillery the enemy could muster. After a two-day battle, Pastina fell at 2300 hours 12 July to the combined efforts of the 100th and deadly spot shooting by the 522d Field Artillery Battalion.

Here the 3d Battalion took over again from the 100th and drove north, abreast of the 2d Battalion, as far as Lorenzano, where the advance spluttered and ground to a halt against one of the enemy's inevitable hill positions. On 14 July, the 168th Infantry relieved the 3d Battalion in front of Lorenzano, leaving that battalion free to swing back to the left of the sector and replace the 2d Battalion on the night of the 15th. In the meantime, the 100th Battalion had passed to division control and was driving northwest on the Orciano-Leghorn road, establishing a series of road-blocks to protect the left flank of the regiment and at the same time to threaten the city of Leghorn itself.

The 3d Battalion, 442d, having relieved the 2d Battalion, drove north for the little hilltop town of Luciano,

which controlled the roadnet around Leghorn. At Luciano, the enemy had chosen to make his stand. All through the 16th and 17th, the battle for the town raged. The 522d and other elements of division artillery poured thousands of rounds into the defenders' positions. The 232d Engineer Company, with assistance from the division engineers, worked under small arms fire to clear mines so that the ammunition and supplies could come up. The 2d Battalion had moved up the ridge to the left and rear of Luciano, clearing enemy positions there, and covering that flank. Luciano fell the night of the 17th, and the following day, the 3d Battalion swept on, liberated Colle Salvetti, and occupied the last high ground south of the Arno River. Observation Posts could see the famed Leaning Tower of Pisa in the distance. The same day, Leghorn was entered with little opposition by elements of the 91st Division, followed by the 100th Battalion, 442d.

Both the 2d and 3d Battalions now pushed cautiously out, finally setting up an Outpost Line of Resistance along Highway 67 on the 20th of July, while the 100th occupied and policed Leghorn. One patrol from the 3d Battalion penetrated the southern outskirts of Pisa the night of the 20th and returned 36 hours later with a great deal of valuable information on defenses in the city.

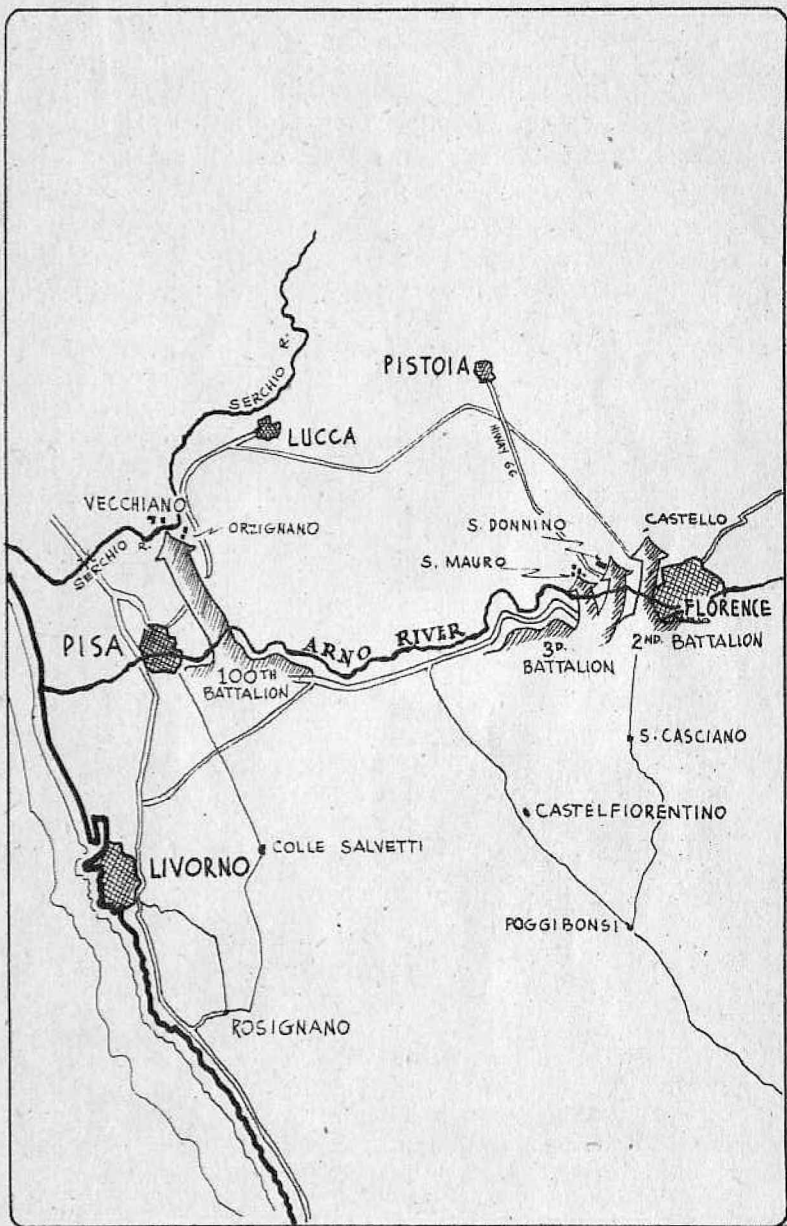
On the 22d, the regiment, less the 100th, was relieved and closed into an assembly area near Colle Salvetti; from there, it moved to a division rest area around Vada on the 24th, being joined by the 100th the next day. In this area the 100th Battalion (Separate) was redesignated as the 100th Battalion, 442d Infantry Regiment, effective 10 August 1944, and was reorganized as such.

After a long, pleasant rest, together with some training around Vada, the Combat Team was detached from the 34th Division and assigned to IV Corps. The 100th Battalion was sent to take up a line along the Arno River four kilometers east of Pisa, while the remainder of the 442d Combat Team moved into the 85th Division sector near Castelnuovo, 17 August, only to be detached the following day and sent to the veteran II Corps' 88th Division. On the 20th, the 2d and 3d Battalions moved into line along the Arno near Scandicci, immediately west of Florence. Now began a period of intensive patrolling and

much activity. Reconnaissance patrols probed the enemy's positions day and night, while night raiding parties forded the Arno River to take prisoners and gain information on the enemy's dispositions. The purpose of all this activity was to give the Germans an impression of great strength and to screen major troop movements elsewhere on the Army front. This fencing and probing continued until 1 September, when the entire Fifth Army front exploded into action. The drive for the Gothic Line had begun. The 2d and 3d Battalions forced a crossing of the Arno in their sector, pushing north astride Highway 66. Many miles to the west, the 100th Battalion also forced a crossing in the Pisa sector. All elements were relieved shortly thereafter, and subsequently assembled at Rosignano. Later the regiment less its vehicles embarked at Piombino for Naples to begin the first leg of the journey to France. On the 26th of September, the men of the Combat Team boarded Coast Guard troop transports in the Bay of Naples and turned their faces toward the French shores and the Seventh Army.

The Anti-Tank Company was detached from the Combat Team 15 July 1944 and ordered to join the 1st Airborne Provisional Division (later the 1st Airborne Task Force) south of Rome. This was effected, and the company was reorganized for glider operations. Training began 28 July and lasted until 14 August, D-1, for the strike at Southern France. Fifteen August, the gliders carrying Anti-Tank Company, newly equipped with jeeps and British six-pounders, took off. Landing was effected on the French coast around Le Muy, and the troops took up blocking positions to protect the paratroops who had landed ahead of them. Here they remained until the 17th when troops of the 45th and 36th Division broke through from the beach to relieve them.

Still supporting the 517th Parachute Infantry, the company then took part in the drive toward the Franco-Italian border, jumping off from Le Muy, 18 August. The drive continued against scattered enemy resistance until the force ran into strong defensive positions around



Col du Braus, overlooking the border town of Sospel. This was reduced by early September. On 11 October, Anti-Tank Company was detached from the 517th, given a rest, and sent back to rejoin the Combat Team. The company returned to regimental control 26 October 1944, in time to assist in the battle to relieve the "lost battalion."



Rifle Squad of the 2ND BATTALION present arms in honor of their fallen comrades in the Cecina area.