

RECOMMENDED

Orders from the 1st Armored Division to attack, with the initial objective as Sened Station, and to proceed rapidly to Mahmassy, were received on January 30th. Colonel Karaist was in command of Combat Command "D" which consisted of the 701st TD Battalion (less "A", "B", one platoon of "C", and one platoon of Reconnaissance Company), 3rd Battalion of the 13th Armored Regiment (less one company), 68th Field Artillery (less one battery), Company "D", 16th Engineers, 1st Battalion of the 168th Infantry, "B" Company of the 47th Medics, and one platoon of "B" Battery, 443rd G (AA). 81st Reconnaissance Battalion went past the IF at Bou Chebka and was followed by CC "D".

The Combat Command was in bivouac about 10 miles east of Gafsa on January 31st. Orders were issued at 0300 hours and all troops were ordered to move forward on a wide front. 81st Reconnaissance Battalion was to move out at 0500 hours on Division order. Combat Command "D" was to follow at 0700 hours in order: 701st TD Reconnaissance Company, 3rd Battalion of 13th Armored Regiment with one platoon of engineers, and one platoon of tank destroyers attached, Command Group, one platoon of tanks, artillery, and infantry with one platoon of engineers and one platoon of anti-aircraft attached.

81st Reconnaissance Battalion actually moved out at 0730 hours and made slow progress. At 0822 hours Reconnaissance Company of the 701st TD Battalion moved out but was held up behind 81st Reconnaissance. The entire column was creeping along the road by 1000 hours when 81st Reconnaissance reported that it was by-passing Station de Sened. Orders were issued to Colonel Crosby, 13th Armored Regiment, and Colonel Patty, 1st Battalion of the 168th Infantry, to carry out the following plans: The infantry would move forward on a wide front in trucks to a point 10 to 11 miles west of the objective, detruck, move forward and attack in column of companies. A guide (liaison officer) accompanied the infantry battalion. The area chosen by the CC "D" Commander, after his reconnaissance of the vicinity, would be attacked. The infantry was to attack south of the road and make a close envelopment of the town. The tanks

RESTRICTED

were to make a west hook to a point just east of the town. Artillery would support the attack from positions north of the road and west of Sened Station.

At 1345 hours, tanks and artillery were in position with enemy artillery and targets of opportunity being shelled. The infantry was slow in coming up and proceeded too far in trucks which were not properly dispersed. Stukas appeared on the scene and bombed the column. The infantry suffered some casualties, but the artillery continued to fire on Sened Station and the tanks were poised for the attack. At 1600 hours, the infantry still was not in position. Forty-five minutes later, 24 Stukas again descended to rain a few bombs down. At 1700 hours, a withdrawal of the tanks was ordered to secure positions after the shaken infantry was unable to make an organized attack. Orders were issued to outpost position along general line Y-42 and prepare to attack at dawn. Colonel Maraist went to Corps Headquarters for orders.

The following day saw orders issued at 0700 hours. Combat Command "D" was reinforced by one battalion of infantry. Colonel Drake was in command of the 108th Infantry, but only a small regimental group and about 60 officers and enlisted men actually arrived for the attack. The 175th Field Artillery and "B" Company of the 106th CA (AA) were also added to the strength of CC "D". A similar scheme of maneuver with a limited objective was ordered. The attack was ordered at 0900 hours to secure a line of departure for the main attack and to allow the artillery to displace forward. The 68th AA was to support the tank action, and the 175th FA would back the infantry. 81st Reconnaissance, now under control of Combat Command, was to protect the flanks and extend reconnaissance activity to the east.

The main attack met with stubborn resistance. The enemy used guns and mortars of all caliber and indulged in profuse sniping. The infantry progressed steadily but the tanks were held up by anti-tank fire, and ordered for neutralization by artillery before advancing. At 1500 hours, the town was reached by the infantry. Forty minutes later, a heavy rain storm set in. It was followed by enemy tanks which drove the infantry out of town. By 1700 hours, the infantry rallied and retook the town. At 1800 hours, the

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

of the town was outposts and the tank harbor was protected to allow the tanks to move in. When needed ammunition was received, they returned to the assembly area and prepared to attack in the morning. Colonel Drake reported that his infantry could hold the town, and "C" Company (less two platoons) of the 701st TD Battalion was sent in on military police duty.

Command Group spent a busy day warding off Stuka bombings and Messerschmitt strafings. There were slit trenches liberally scattered all through the area, and these proved to be very convenient.

Sniping died down, and the night of February 1-2 was spent in getting supplies and consolidating positions in town.

On February 2, orders were issued for an attack on the final objective to start at 0800 hours. Tanks were to precede infantry, and the artillery would support the attack from positions well forward. The 81st Reconnaissance Battalion would protect the north and south flanks.

The attacks progressed rapidly against machine gun fire and light resistance of enemy artillery. By 1000 hours, the first tank elements were reported 1/4 mile beyond the objective. Advance elements of the infantry arrived at the objective soon afterwards, and the infantry occupied the ridge in force at noon. The tanks then withdrew to an assembly position south and west, ready to meet any counterattack. The infantry dug in and the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion occupied positions to protect the flanks. Reconnaissance Company of the 701st TD Battalion extended its reconnaissance to a point five miles east of the ridge.

A bombing in the rear of the front lines by 24 Stukas took place at 2000 hours. Actual damage was slight, but it was a bit hard on morale. Command Group continued to be the object of Stuka and Messerschmitt affections through the day. Many planes, including several of our own, were destroyed, but it could not be ascertained which were brought down by ack-ack fire and which were shot down in dog-fights. Planes overhead had to step lively through the dense anti-aircraft fire and many a pilot was not agile enough to clear the puffs and tracers.

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

At 1700 hours an enemy counter-attack was launched with 15 tanks against the right flank. Five enemy tanks actually penetrated to the rear, causing some confusion, but the tanks and TD's beat off this thrust. The infantry returned to positions on the ridge once more, and tanks and TD's were posted in front. With infantry positions fully re-established, the tanks withdrew to their assembly area and there was no further activity.

As the morning of February 3rd dawned, tanks, TD's, and assault gun platoons moved to positions in front, and the artillery came up to forward positions. There was no activity until 1000 hours when five enemy armored vehicles appeared on the road and were fired upon by the 68th Field Artillery. They hastily moved out of range. Reconnaissance Company of the 71st TD Battalion moved up to a position six miles west of Maknassy. Throughout the afternoon numerous small enemy detachments would appear to the east and be driven off by artillery.

Enemy vehicles and infantry were reported at an olive grove at 1400h. A request for bombing this spot was sent to the Air Corps and at 1530 hours, the Maknassy area was plastered by the U.S. Army Air Force. Some bombs were released 200 yards south of our ground positions, but there was no damage.

At 1430 hours, orders from II Corps to withdraw to Gafsa and beyond were transmitted. 81st Reconnaissance left at 1600 hours. At 1900 hours the main body started to withdraw. Armored elements were followed by the 168th Infantry in trucks, as they, in turn, were followed by a light tank company and a TD platoon to protect the rear. By 0600 hours of February 4th, all was secure. A bivouac area was established at Bou Chebka, and the recovery and salvage crews were in Gafsa.

The casualty report, as of February 5th, revealed: five officers and 46 enlisted men killed, four officers and 111 enlisted men missing - most of whom were listed on the 81st Reconnaissance report as of February 1st. 81st Reconnaissance Battalion was later detached from Combat Command "D" and no further report was given. Evacuated wounded consisted of 14 officers, one warrant officer, and 145 enlisted men.

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