

30 March 2009

Dear Silvio Passalalpi:

The 88th Infantry Division consisted of three regiments, the 349th, 350th, and 351st. In each regiment were three battalions of about 1000 men each, under the care of one doctor. Wherever the Third Battalion 349th Infantry went so did I with my medical detachment.

After the fall of Rome the 88th Division's objective was the Arno River and to the west of Florence.

During the campaign to the Arno River the 349th Inf. met the Germans at their best. They tried to hold tenaciously to every foot of ground. Even when their lines of defense were cracked they viciously fought delaying action. The 349th had 2257 casualties, including 142 officers. Most of the fighting occurred between the cities of Volterra and Palai.

Before engaging in the campaign to the Arno River however, the 349th was sent into a rest area in Albano about 12 miles southeast of Rome. On 23 June we moved to Tarquinia for another period of training. On 5 July all training was stopped and the entire regiment moved by truck about 110 miles north into the town of Lardello about 20 kilometers south of Volterra. Lardello was to be our staging area for the attack on Volterra. In Lardello volcanic steam was harnessed by man but since most of the steam pipes had been broken during fighting geyser-like steam burst hundreds of feet into the air, the sound interfering with our hearing the sound of the German incoming artillery shells.

On July 7 the 349th received orders not to take Volterra but to by-pass it on the right and take the high ground north of the town. The 350th Regiment would by-pass the town on the left. Volterra was perched on a hill dominating the country side for miles around and the Germans occupying it had been able to observe American troop movements as far as 15 miles to the south. Seizing the highground north of Volterra was not easy since high hills rising abruptly out of rolling terrain gave the Germans observation for miles. Fighting was intense

for each hill but finally the 349th successfully enveloped Volterra from the right and was now only about 35 miles from the Arno River.

The next objective of the 3rd battalion 349th was the German occupied town of Villamagna. To take Villamagna was quite a task. There was a ridge of hills running east-west just before Villamagna, strongly defended by the Germans. This ridge obscured observation of German occupied Villamagna. Defense of the ridge consisted of mortars, Nebelwerfers, self propelled guns, 88mm artillery, and machine guns. Apparently each battalion of the 349th was assigned to capture or clear out a definite sector of the ridge. My 3rd battalion was ordered to clear the ridge directly in front of Villamagna and then proceed on to take the town itself. The fighting was fierce and bloody and there were many casualties. The ridge was finally taken on July 14, 1944.

We now went on to take the town of Villamagna. We had pounded it with mortar shells, artillery fire, and self propelled guns for two days.

The terrain approaching the town of Villamagna was still mildly hilly with patches of woods here and there. As my battalion neared the town we were greeted with artillery and mortar fire. Suddenly there appeared to be more casualties, most with leg wounds or feet blown off at the ankle. I suspected that we had entered a mine field and there was nothing I could do about it. I just kept on treating the wounded in spite of the in-coming mortar and artillery fire. As I slowly walked forward I probed each step in front of me with a thick branch from a tree and fortunately no mine exploded. By the time I reached the first house in Villamagna it was pitch dark. I entered a large room and on its floor lay many wounded. I never learned into what kind of building I had entered. In total darkness I bandaged as many wounded as I could. When I had exhausted all my supplies I laid down to sleep in spite of still having heard of much fighting going on outside. When I awoke I was told that the Headquarters Company of my battalion

had settled in a large mansion house and I was expected to eventually set up my aid station in this building. This I did.

The mansion house was a beautiful building in spite of some artillery shell damage. From its entrance to all its floors everything about the mansion looked expensive. All rooms had high ceilings. Most of the rooms however were in shambles. All closets had been ransacked, and pictures were torn from the walls. Any drawers had been emptied and their contents thrown on the floor, including letters and photographs. I felt very sorry for the occupants of this house who had probably fled just prior to the arrival of the Germans. It must have been German troops who ransacked this entire house because American troops had just arrived and had no time to do so. But such are the fortunes of war. When an enemy army passes through a town or village the inhabitants usually experience more hardships than the fighting soldier.

We remained in Villamagna for only ~~two~~^{one} and a half days. We then headed for the town of Palai, where I almost got killed but did not. Nor did I even receive a scratch during all the rest of the fighting in Italy. I now consider myself a survivor. This month I will be 93 years old. The blood coursing through my veins must be good, and as irony will have it, it is neither American or Italian, but German.

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liked it, and had

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Also several years ago the mayor of Villamagna honored Ted Belmont the commander of Headquarters Company, 349th Inf. as the liberator of Villamagna. Ted was a good friend of mine and died in 2008 of Alzheimers disease,

Sincerely ,

Maus H. Hübner