

BATTLEFIELD WALKAROUND

1. SANTA MARIA INFANTE

1.1 Locale—The battle for Santa Maria Infante was important in the opening of the Allied offensive toward Rome on 11 May 1944. Strong Allied forces were concentrated on the west side of the Italian peninsula to renew an effort stopped by the winter and heavy German resistance. Eighth Army was poised for attack through the Liri Valley along the axis of Highway No. 6; main Fifth Army faced a chain of mountains, in a 13-mile zone from the Liri River to the sea. The forces in the Anzio Beachhead were ready to strike when their opportunity came as a result of progress on the other fronts.

Although Fifth Army's bridgehead across the Garigliano made a dangerous river crossing unnecessary, the Aurunci Mountains, fortified by positions that were part of the enemy's Gustav Line, formed a difficult barrier. On the right were the highest peaks, topped by Mount Majo (940 meters). The Ausonia Valley lying west of this group separates it from another steep mass of mountains, dominated by Mt. Petrella (1,533 meters). Lower hills fronted the army's left wing, but these were known to be heavily defended. The most important formed a triangular wedge at the southern end of the Ausonia Valley; if the Minturno ridge (in Allied possession) is considered as the base, the hill triangle narrows northward to the highest hill of the feature, Mt. del Bracchi (205 meters).

To judge by the disposition of their troops, the Germans considered the higher mountains too formidable for a main attack by Fifth Army. Therefore, Fifth Army's plan was for the French Expeditionary Corps, employing highly trained mountain troops and elements of four divisions, to attack Mt. Majo, where enemy defenses were not extensive and where tactical surprise might be obtained. Simultaneously with the French attack to the north, two fresh divisions of II Corps, the 88th and 85th, would attack the well-defended hills making up the Mt. Bracchi triangle, as well as San Martino Hill to the left of the feature and Hill 413 on the right. Capture of Mt. Bracchi in Phase I of the offensive was essential to protect the flank of French units when they crossed the Ausonia Valley after capture of Mt. Majo.

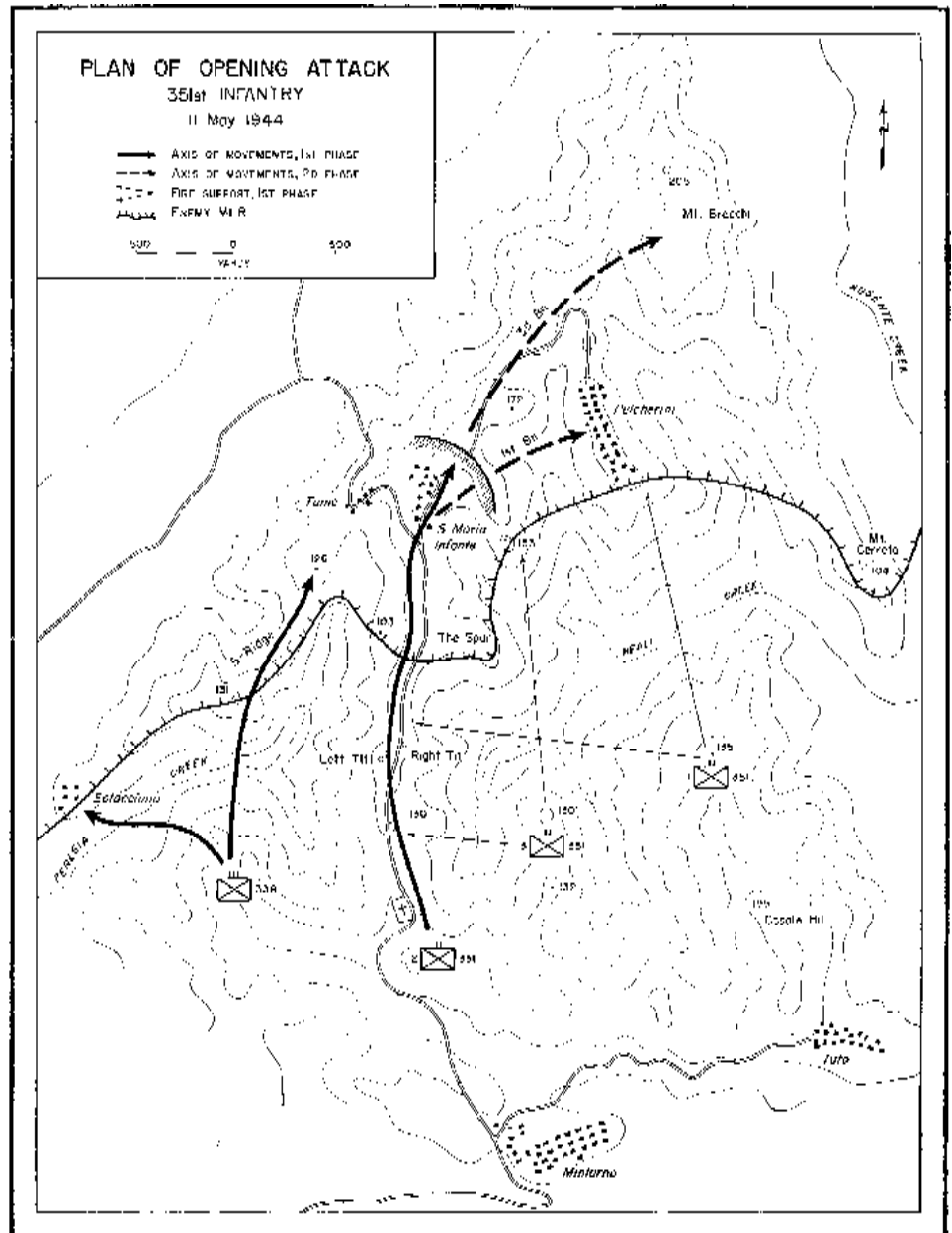
On II Corps' right wing, the 88th Division was to carry the main effort of the corps attack against the wedge of hills dominated by Mt. Bracchi. The 351st Infantry would fight the most important

battle in this zone, with its main objective Santa Maria Infante, a small town near the top of the hill triangle, which would undoubtedly be tenaciously held. Santa Maria Infante commanded the main German lateral route of communications in the Ausonia Valley, and once our troops gained the town they could easily advance north to Mt. Bracchi and make untenable all the enemy's positions in the valley to the east. The 88th would be assisted on the left by the 85th Division, which was assigned a few hill objectives on the western edge of the Bracchi triangle, as well as San Martino Hill lying in the valley west of the feature. On the right of the 351st, the 350th Infantry was ordered to break resistance in the hills southwest of Castelforte.

The most difficult terrain on Fifth Army's front confronted the French forces, but the battle in the smaller hills facing II Corps could be slow and bloody. In the past campaigns, Fifth Army had

often found it easier to advance in mountainous terrain, where enemy observation and fields of fire had numerous blind spots. In the lower hills, rolling countryside and even slopes afforded superb positions for German machine guns, sited to cover all avenues of approach.

To reach its objective, Santa Maria, near the north tip of the Bracchi triangle, the 351st Infantry had to attack over difficult terrain. From east-west Cemetery Ridge, rising above Minturno and forming the base of the triangle, a connecting ridge extends 1,950 yards north to Santa Maria and then on to the apex of the triangle at Mt. Bracchi. This connecting ridge, running through the whole hill mass parallel to its western edge, was to be the axis of attack for the 351st. The crest averages a little more than 125 meters and is followed by the Minturno-Santa Maria road; beyond a double curve at the Minturno cemetery the road winds along the ridge line to a fork a few yards south of



Santa Maria, where one branch goes northeast through the town and then into Pulcherini, and the other runs northwest through the tiny hamlet of Tame and down the hills to a junction with the Ausonia-Formia highway. The sides of the north-south ridge are cut by draws into small spurs, which, stubbornly held by the enemy, turned out to be the most troublesome obstacles to the 351st's advance. Six hundred and fifty yards beyond the cemetery, small knolls known as the Right and Left Tits, 150 and 146 meters high, jut out on either side of the road. Three hundred yards beyond the Right Tit the steeply sloped side-hill called The Spur extends 750 yards east from the road.

From its slightly curved crest (157 and 146 meters at the highest points) The Spur commands both the ridge road and the valley to its east. West of The Spur, Hill 103 dominates the slope on the left side of the road.

East of the main ridge, Reali Creek had cut a small valley along its course east through the hill mass. North-south spurs with sharp slopes jut into this valley on both sides, and made any flanking attack toward Santa Maria more difficult than a direct approach along the road. West of the road, a much more narrow valley formed by the Perglia Creek separates the Santa Maria ridge from the feature forming the west side of the hill triangle, the S-Ridge running northeast from Solacciano, to Tame. Its crest is marked by a series of knobs (131, 109, 126, and 128), with a long saddle separating the first two. Its steep slopes reaching a gradient of 33 percent at places, the S-Ridge was key tactical ground in the coming battle, for it commanded the main advance along the Minturno-Santa Maria road as well as the lower end of the Ausonia-Formia road. Its capture would pave the way for a breakthrough into the Formia corridor and an advance toward the Aurunci Mountains.

The ridges in the hill triangle are extensively cultivated by use of terraces. At the time of the attack, vegetation was sparse and what there was stood less than ankle-high. Some of the hills, notably the forward slope of The Spur, are almost bare. Even where there are scattered trees, by 11 May most of them had been sheared off at half length by artillery fire. Sunken roads that are little more than farm trails wind their way across the ridges; the most important was the sunken road which branches off from the Santa Maria highway, then winds across the forward slope of The Spur and northeast to Pulcherini.

Less than three miles north of Santa Maria and across the Ausonia Valley, the main Aurunci range rises high above the small hills of the Mt. Bracchi triangle and afforded the enemy observation over the entire area. In the lower reaches of the mountains lie the town of Spigno and Mt. Civita, 900 and 1,800 feet, respectively, above the level of the Ausonia Valley.

The Germans had held the Bracchi hills for months; as part of their Gustav Line defenses from the Apennines to the sea. In the offensive that be-

gan on 18 January and netted only minor Allied gains, British 56 Division had captured Minturno and the east-west ridge at the base of the triangle. After this the enemy's main line of resistance ran from Hill 131 to Hill 103, across the road to The Spur, and thence to Pulcherini. South of this line the enemy had scattered machine-gun and sniper positions, sometimes in the houses along the road. On the high ground north and east of Santa Maria were other strongpoints.

Despite the efforts of patrols and aerial reconnaissance, the full extent of enemy defenses was not determined. Although in some cases machine-gun emplacements, minefields, and barbed-wire entanglements were accurately located before the action, many elements of the deeply organized defenses would be revealed only in the battle. Cleverly located automatic weapons, which covered extensive minefields and were in turn supported by mortars and light artillery, made up the principal defenses. Our troops would discover that the machine guns were so placed on forward and reverse slopes of the spurs and flanking ridges that they could bring a grazing cross fire on infantrymen advancing along either side of the road, as well as in the draws between the hills.

Pillbox shelters supporting the machine guns consisted of two main types. The first was a rectangular excavation, five feet by three feet, with pillars in each corner. Across the pillars were large wooden beams topped with three layers of railroad ties and a layer of stone and earth. The second type of pillbox was built into houses by digging three to four feet into the floor and reinforcing the dugout in a manner similar to the first type, except that only wooden beams and earth were used as reinforcement. Holding about five men, each type of pillbox furnished protection against shell fragments and served as a defensive base against infantry attacks. Most of the German emplacements housing automatic weapons also had some form of overhead cover. At many points communications trenches ran from machine-gun positions to individual dugouts and fox holes where snipers were concealed. In some instances the Germans had alternate machine-gun positions to which they could retreat if forced out of the bunkers that formed the first line of defense. A sufficient supply of ammunition was on hand at the front-line positions, from four to six boxes being available at each machine gun.

The Germans often protected their machine-gun positions with mines and barbed wire. The approaches to the S-Ridge, Tame, Santa Maria and the high ground west of it, and Pulcherini all were covered by fields of antipersonnel mines and in many cases by concertina wire. Yet, on the slopes south of Hill 103 and The Spur, where the enemy had set up a strong belt of machine-gun and sniper positions, mines and barbed wire were used sparingly and were found to present no serious obstacle to the advance of the 351st Infantry. Fields of antitank mines were placed along the Minturno-

Santa Maria road between the Tits and The Spur, around Reali Creek in front of Santa Maria and Pulcherini, and along each side of the creek bed that runs east of the S-Ridge.

Defending the sector facing the 351st Infantry was the *94th Fusilier Reconnaissance Battalion (71st Infantry Division)* with an estimated strength of 400-500 men. At the time the Allied drive began, the *94th* consisted of four companies and held a front of approximately 1,200 yards, stretching from just west of Santa Maria to the eastern slope of Pulcherini. Elements of the *267th Grenadier Regiment (94th Infantry Division)*, the strength of which probably did not exceed 300-400 men, defended the S-Ridge. Both infantry units had heavy fire support. Several 88mm cannon and self-propelled guns were situated along the road from Spigno to the Ausonia-Formia highway. Emplaced behind Mt. Civita was a battery of pack howitzers. The major portion of heavier artillery was located west and north of Spigno.

Two regiments were committed in the American attack in the Bracchi hills. The 351st Infantry would attack along a narrow front 100-200 yards wide, astride the Minturno-Santa Maria road. On the 351st's right flank, the 88th Division's reserve regiment, the 349th Infantry, would support the attack by fire of its heavy weapons. On the left of the 351st, the S-Ridge was the objective of the 338th Infantry, 85th Division. The two regiments attacking in the Bracchi triangle were to maintain contact by use of a patrol of one officer and two squads of riflemen; an SCR 300 radio would be used for communication, as well as a lateral telephone line between adjacent battalions of the two regiments.

The 351st Infantry's plan of attack provided that the 2d Battalion, making the main effort, would seize and hold the high ground to the north and east of Santa Maria, then reorganize to beat off counterattacks. The 3d Battalion would support the attack of the 2d Battalion by machine-gun and mortar fire from positions on Hills 130 and 132, about 800 yards east of the road. After the capture of Santa Maria it would pass through the 2d Battalion and seize the portion of Mt. Bracchi within the regimental zone of action. From Hill 135, on the ridge east of the 3d Battalion's supporting position, the 1st Battalion was to give supporting fire and to maintain contact with the 349th Infantry on the next ridge to its right. When the 3d Battalion was ready to move down the Minturno-Santa Maria road, the 1st Battalion would follow and seize Pulcherini.

The 2d Battalion's attack would be aided by tanks and by normal artillery support. After the mine platoon of the Antitank Company had removed mines, the 1st Platoon, Company C, 760th Tank Battalion would fire and maneuver along the Minturno-Santa Maria road. From positions in the Tufo area, the 2d Chemical Weapons Battalion and Company C, 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion would render fire support; 913th Field Artillery

Battalion (105-mm howitzer), the Cannon Company, 351st Infantry from south of the Minturno-Tufo road, and the 339th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. howitzer) near the coast, would also be ready to fire.

The plan for the 2d Battalion, carrying the main assault, provided that two companies would jump off from the forward slope of Cemetery Ridge. Company F on the left of the Minturno-Santa Maria road and Company E on the right would advance in a formation of two platoons abreast with the third in reserve following closely. Each leading platoon would lay a white tape line as it moved forward. Company E's initial objectives were Hill 130 and the Right Tit; Company F's, the Left Tit. Once these were secured Company E would move ahead to capture The Spur and occupy the high ground east of Santa Maria, while Company F took Tame, and then went after the high ground north of Santa Maria. Following one objective behind Company E, Company G would go to the Y-junction south of Santa Maria and advance along the road through the town, closing the gap between Companies E and F and mopping up pockets of enemy resistance left by the assault companies. In the opinion of Lt. Col. Raymond E. Kendall, 2d Battalion commander, and Capt. Carl W. Nelson, Company F commander, only visual contact and radio communication would be required to keep E and F in touch with each other. The time schedule called for the troops to reach Santa Maria less than two hours after the jump-off.

1.2 Land Forms—The US Army monograph presents a fairly complete picture of the SANTA MARIA INFANTE battlefield: terraced; fairly open; excellent terrain to defend; deadly to attack. The Minturno-Santa Maria Road runs along a well-defined ridge, that itself also dips just north of Cemetery Ridge and climbs again just before it crosses the small height known as Hill 130, just south of the two 'tits'. As we follow this road where it enters the southern edge of the map at hex A14, Cemetery Ridge is at Level +30. The 'draw' between it and Hill 130 slopes down to Level +20, before climbing back up to +30, at which height it follows until hex NN16 at Level +40. Along much of its length the Minturno-Santa Maria Road rises even further, with many Level +5 Hillocks along its length raising the road to form the high point of the 'ridge' it runs along.

The Minturno-Santa Maria Road represents the central 'ridge', and the land forms slope down on both east and western sides of this feature, with the low points on the battlefield represented by the Reali and Perglia Creeks in Level -10 terrain, noting the 'bot-toms' of each drop even further, another -10 levels for units 'down' in Creek terrain at -20. Climbing out of the 'hollows' represented by the -10 terrain around the creeks, to the west of the Perglia Creek and the east of the Reali Creek the land begins to climb yet again.

The 'draws' referenced numerous times in the US Army account are the land forms that jut off the central ridge. One such draw leads to Hill 101. Another is the infamous feature known as 'The Spur'. Hill 103 also stands off from the Minturno-Santa Maria

Road, as do the 'tits' (both at Level +40) to a lesser extent. The German defense in this sector was based on defending these draws, as they effectively stood in the path of any progress north to Santa Maria Infante and ultimately the objectives of Pulcherini and Mount Bracchi, situated off the north edge of the game map.

Land forms play an important role on this battlefield. While open in nature, the TERRACED hills create numerous blind zones that created havens, life saving havens it should be emphasized, for many American soldiers that 'rolled' over the nearest terrace to avoid death at the hands of German machine-guns. Review the LOS examples provided below carefully they present the keys to American survival, and success, in this inhospitable place. In brief, an LOS from a higher hill hex, one that crosses a crest line or is continuous, that would otherwise NOT create a blind hex, does so in any hex that is adjacent to a hex that is one or more levels higher than the target unit. That is unless the firing unit is ADJACENT, in which case an LOS is always possible.

1.3 Terrain Forms—While the SANTA MARIA INFANTE battlefield is fairly open, there is still quite a few different terrain types on the game map. A handful of very small copses, such as the small woods in hex F21, are on hand. Orchards (e.g., hex D4) are also used to represent sparsely wooded hexes. Brush (e.g., hex C3) is the most prevalent foliage, representing small trees sheared off by artillery.

A small Grainfield hex is found in hex J17, seemingly out of place on this battlefield. It really represents a haystack, as will be noted by sharp-eyed readers of the US Army monograph. What might the Germans hide here? Paths (e.g., hex HH5) wend their way across the battlefield, likely used by farmers and their mules before StuGs began prowling the area.

1.3.1 Buildings—There are two kinds of buildings on the SANTA MARIA INFANTE map: small ones that only have a GROUND level location (and rise to obstacle height of +10 levels), and rubble ones (that rise to the height of rubble, +5 levels high). Note that in some rubble hexes (RR16-SS17) the rubble goes across the hexside between adjacent hexes. In all cases any LOS that touches the rubble art is affected. There is no additional movement cost to cross a hexside that otherwise has rubble crossing it; the effect is one on LOS.

1.3.2 Other Man Made Terrain—Some hedge hexsides (e.g., G4/G5) are found, and separate the battlefield into fields that can be dominated by one well-placed machine-gun. Walls are also found (e.g., B12/B13), like those around the graveyard (e.g., hex A13) that gives Cemetery Ridge its name. Note the Gate in the wall along the B13/C13 hexside, allowing personnel to move between these hexes without paying the cost to go over the wall. The Path (e.g., hex A14) also allows movement for personnel from A14-B13-C13 without paying for movement through the graveyard in B13 or the aforementioned wall hexside. The Sunken path in hexes Y19-AA25 played an important role in the battle and units 'down', in a hex like Y20 are -10 below the rest of the hex.

1.4 Terrain Rules—The following rules are provided in addition to the terrain rules presented in the main rulebook and apply ONLY to the SANTA MARIA INFANTE mapsheet.

1.4.1 The Culvert—Hex PP13 contains an entry to

a 'culvert' that runs under the road in hex QQ14. Treat hex QQ14 as a normal Ravine hex with the following exceptions. The ONLY LOS to QQ14 is from down in the location of PP13, i.e., QQ14 does not represent a continuation of the LOS along the Ravine artwork.

1.4.2 Building With Road—The road on the OO16/OO17 hexside allows units to move from NN16 to PP16 without entering either building. The road/building combination in PP16 allows a unit to move from NN16-OO16 (or OO17)-PP16-QQ17 WITHOUT ENTERING the buildings in OO16, OO17 or PP16. For example, a personnel unit could move at the cost in Movement Points of 1-1-1 (total of 3) down the road. A unit in PP15 has an LOS to a unit moving along the road from NN16 to PP16.

1.4.3 Terraced Hills—The hills on the SANTA MARIA INFANTE map are Terraced. See below for LOS examples. When TERRACED, Hill (not Hill-ocks) contours create a Blind Hex to and from the first lower hex behind a hill contour level change unless the firing and target hexes are ADJACENT.

1.4.4 Swamp—Hex T4 is an example of the Swamp hexes found on the map. These are treated normally, using the Swamp terrain rules.

1.4.5 Shellholes—Numerous shellholes dot the map. These are treated normally.

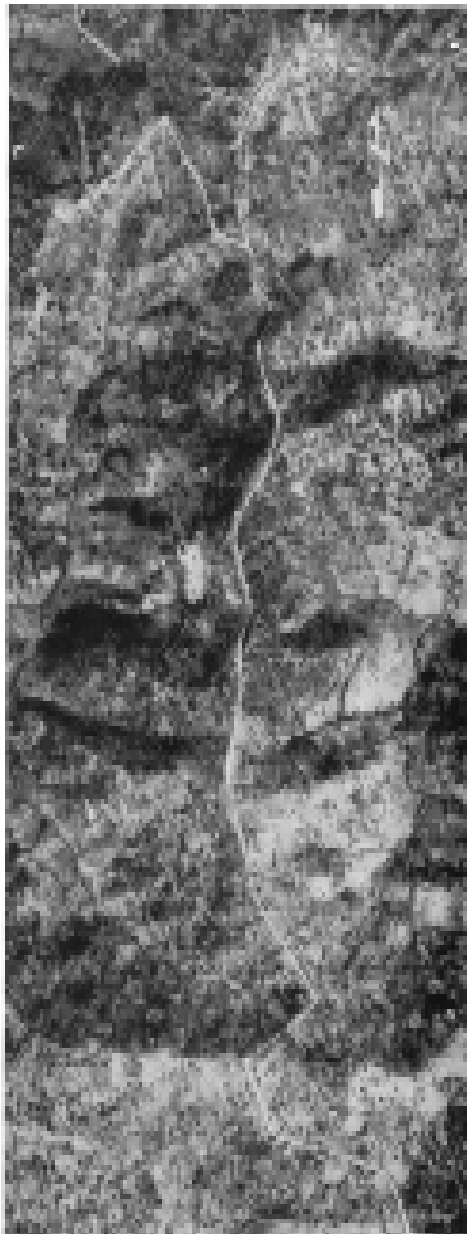
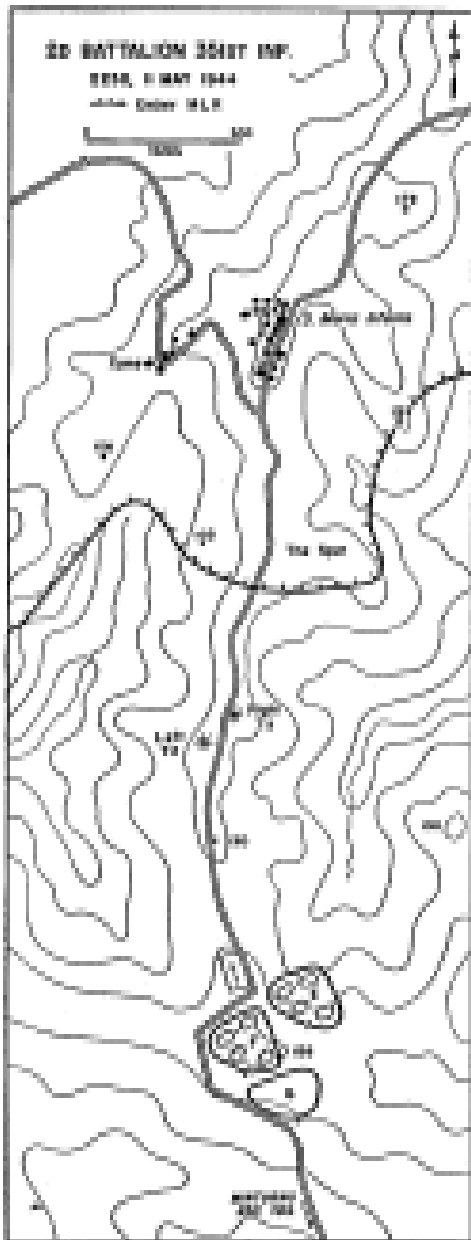
1.4.6 Precipitous Terrain—There are numerous Precipitous Terrain hexes created by the combination of Hillocks and terrain level changes of greater than ONE level (e.g., moving from hex S7 to S8 [but NOT from S9 to S8]; moving from S17 to S16). A unit moving from HH4 to GG4 pays for Precipitous terrain since it is NOT moving along a road or path and the Hillock hexside HH4/GG4 created a 1 1/2 level change for this move.

1.4.6.1 Ravine and Sunken Path Created—Note that moving along (i.e., from 'down' to 'down') the Ravine in hex V6 to W7 is NOT precipitous as the unit is making a cumulative +10 level change, moving up as the Ravine rises. A unit moving from 'down' in R3 to hex S3 IS treated as a Precipitous Terrain move. A move from Y21 to Z21 is also precipitous.

1.4.7 Ravine Terrain—Both the Reali and Perglia 'creeks' are treated as RAVINE terrain on the SANTA MARIA INFANTE mapsheet (i.e., NOT Creek terrain). The water at their bottoms was very low and additional crossing difficulties are created with Swamp terrain.

1.4.8 Hillocks—The artwork to depict Hillock hexsides is a bit more subdued on the SANTA MARIA INFANTE mapsheet. Hexside S13/S14 is





At left is a map of the entire area (and then some) represented by the SANTA MARIA INFANTE mapsheet. At right is an aerial photo corresponding to the map area shown.

an example of a Hillock hexside.

1.4.9 Map Labels—There are numerous labels for buildings, and named hills on the map. These are used for reference purposes only.

1.4.10 Cemetery Ridge—There are three Graveyard hexes, A13-B13-B14, on ‘Cemetery Ridge’.

1.4.11 Hedges—Where Hedge hexsides abut a higher AND lower level terrain hex, they are ALWAYS considered to be on the HIGHER terrain unless even a tiny amount of LOWER level terrain can be seen on the ‘higher’ side. For example, the Hedge along hexside RR8/RR9 is at Level +10 (i.e., the lower level); the one along the P9/P10 hexside is at Level +20 (i.e., the higher level), whereas P9/Q1 is lower, as is P9/O10. In this case the hedge follows the lay of the land up, and then back down. A unit in P10 being fired on from O9 pays for the Hedge; as does on in P10 being fired on from P8. A unit in P9 will NOT get the benefit of the Hedge from P10.

1.4.12 Sunken Path—The LOSs created by Sunken Path (and Ravine) terrain is a bit tricky. It is impor-

tant to remember that crestline contours are created where higher terrain looks down ‘along’ a Sunken (or Ravine) terrain feature. Same with a Wadi or Creek, although the latter two are not found on this mapsheet. The key is that the LOS may continue ALONG the lower terrain (e.g., Sunken path [or road]; Ravine) as long as it does not leave the unique artwork used to depict the lower terrain feature.

1.5. LOS Examples—The following examples clarify Lines-of-Sight on the SANTA MARIA INFANTE mapsheet.

a) A unit in J7 firing at one in H3 is unaffected by the intervening Hedges and Brush along the LOS, since these are all at lower levels; a unit in J7 firing at one in I7 also IGNORES the hedge hexside, thus the hedge only serves as a movement impediment in this case; a unit in J6 firing at one in I8 DOES pay for the hedge along its LOS.

b) There is no LOS from K14 to H17 due to the terrace effect created on the Level +10 hex in H17

by the adjacent Level +20 hex I17; there is an LOS from K14 to G18.

c) There is no LOS from K13 to K15 due to the ‘flapjack’ effect of hills; there is an LOS from L13 to J14 since the LOS crosses a contour hexside in its hex before being traced to lower level terrain.

d) Normally, there would be an LOS from N14 to N16 as this is an example of a Continuous slope. However, since TERRACED hills are in effect, N16 is a blind hex from N14. There is an LOS from N14 to N17.

e) There is an LOS from V6 to T5, along the bottom of the Ravine, due to the LOS not leaving the Ravine artwork. Note that the Swamp terrain along the LOS is applied although it is not technically ‘touched’.

f) A unit in X3 cannot see one in AA5 due to the intervening hedge hexside in Y4/Z4.

g) A unit in Y5 CAN see down, along the Ravine, into hex Y7 (and could continue to see along the Ravine as a form of Continuous crestline.

h) A unit in UU19 cannot see one in WW19 due to the rubble crossing the VV18/VV19 hexside.

i) A unit in Y18 can see all the way to Y24 along a Continuous crestline LOS that does not leave the Sunken Path art. A unit down in Y19 can also see to Y24. A unit in X23 can see down to AA25, and indeed out to BB25 and CC26, i.e., as long as the LOS does not leave the Sunken Path artwork the LOS that leaves X23 to Y24 is considered to have a crestline contour in it (since the Sunken Path is Level -10 LOWER than the terrain in X23 a de-facto contour is created here. Hex Y23 cannot see Z24 since the LOS leaves the Sunken Path artwork. The only other LOSs down into the Sunken Path are from adjacent hexes.

j) A unit in Z8 can see one in S5; a unit in Y9 cannot see one in Y6; a unit in U13 can see one in U10.

k) A unit in GG16 cannot see one in II13; one in FF16 CAN, due to the Hillock hexsides the LOS crosses leaving (or entering) FF16.

l) A unit in JJ11 can see one in FF9; one in FF9 cannot see one in DD8.

m) A unit in JJ6 pays for the Grainfield in JJ7 when firing at a unit in JJ15; it does NOT pay for the JJ14/JJ15 Hedge hexside as this latter feature is LOWER than both firing and target units. A unit in JJ6 cannot see one in JJ14 due to the intervening Level +30 hex in JJ7. If the unit was in JJ7 it COULD see JJ14 since the LOS from JJ7 crosses a contour as it leaves the hex (i.e., it is the first higher hill hex along the LOS between the units).

n) A unit in SS16 cannot see one in VV17 due to the intervening Wall along the LOS.

o) A unit in EE13 can see one in Y13, ignoring the Hedge hexside Z13/AA13 since the firing unit is up on a Hillock.

1.6 ATS BRIEFING—The first issue of the new magazine for ATS enthusiasts, ‘ATS Briefing’, will include material for SANTA MARIA INFANTE owners.

CREDIT: Historical text, maps, and scenario historical summaries from “Small Unit Actions”, CMH Pub 100-14