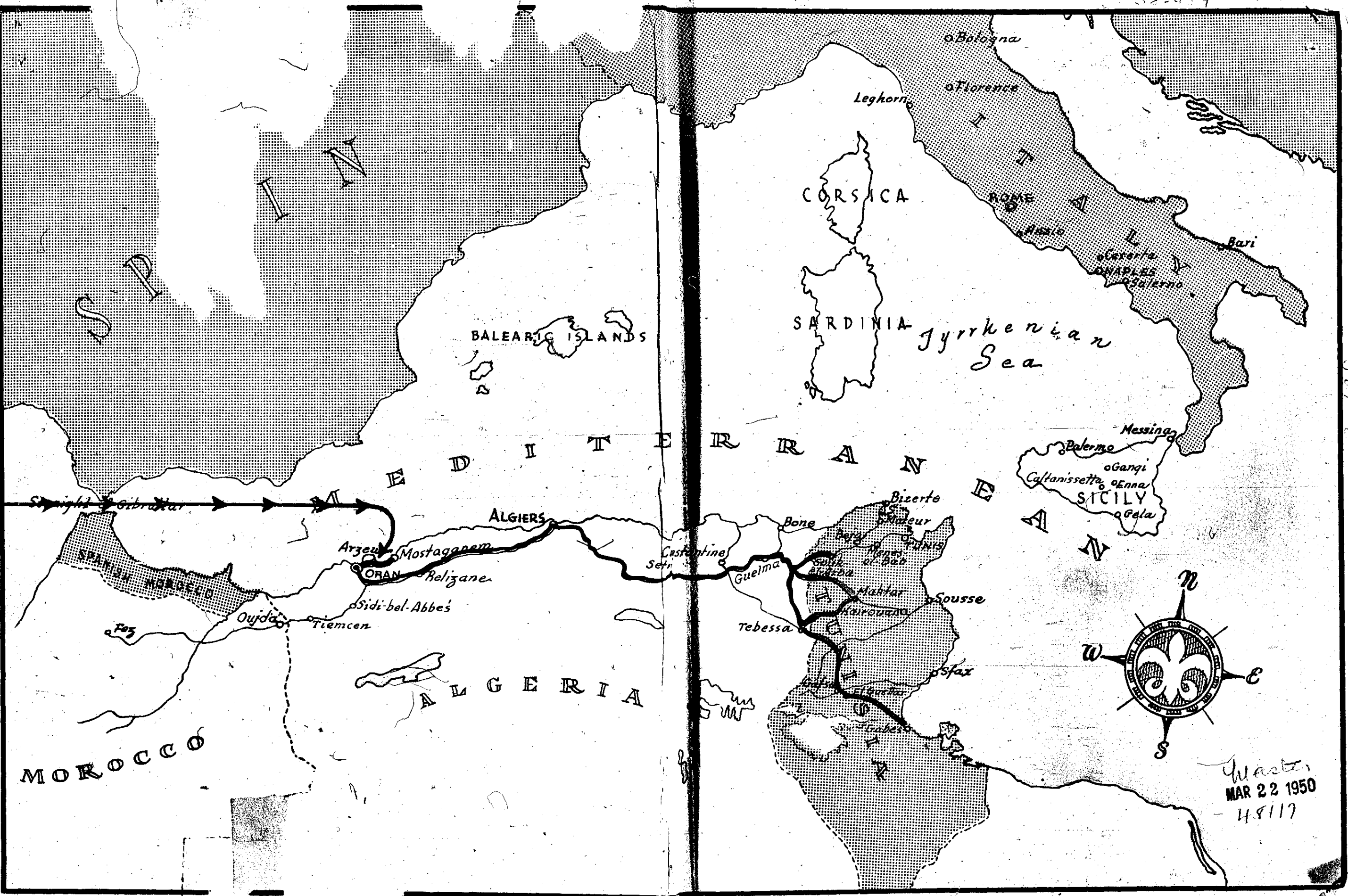




301-0

History "Danger Forward" 1st Inf Div

14 Aug 42 - 8 May 45



All units proceeded on their assigned missions, and the Division's Advance CP was in operation ashore shortly after dawn. Despite some harassment by enemy artillery and aircraft, men and materiel continued to flow onto the beaches in unending succession.

Coastal defense troops overrun by Regimental Combat Team 26 were mostly Italian, from various divisions and regiments including elements of the Asietta Division, the Aesta Division, Livorno Division, Autonomous Coastal Defense Regiments and Bersaglieri. The principal initial beach resistance overcome by Regimental Combat Team 16 included pillboxes and machinegun detachments. Both units reorganized quickly and the advance continued.

The rapid movement of Division Troops across the beach, into the hill masses beyond the Gela-Comiso road, disrupted telephone communications between the enemy divisional headquarters at Caltagirone, and the troops in the Comiso-Ragusa area.

By 11:00 A.M., July 10, Lt. Colonel Darby of the Rangers had reported Gela taken, and by 1:30 P.M. the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 26th Infantry, had reached their initial objectives. By early evening, Regimental Combat Team 16 had reduced an enemy strongpoint at Pina Lupo, which had been defended by some twenty light tanks in addition to Infantry.

Although most landings of the Division went smoothly, in the earlier hours of the initial landings, elements of the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion ran into trouble. LST No. 313 carrying elements of the Battalion were dive-bombed by a single German plane which came out of the sun at 6:30 P.M., just after the craft had beached. A hit was made on the top deck, just above the white diamond painted on her side.

First, a two and one-half ton truck exploded; the entire craft became a raging inferno. Pieces of the ship and shells filled the air with singing death. Exploding small arms ammunition added to the din. Men were burned as they hung to the bow ramp which was down on the beach. Some men jumped to the pontoon dock section, not yet fixed to the beach, breaking arms or legs.

Some men jumped overboard, and only reached the beach when helped by a Captain from Division Headquarters. A Lieutenant,

fully clothed, swam to some struggling men, but was carried away from the beach by a heavy undertow. A human lifeline was formed to bring exhausted survivors ashore.

Many of the personnel were taken off the LST by amphibious landing craft, which, directed by another Captain from Division Headquarters, eased up to the bow ramp. Some of the survivors were taken from the stern of the burning craft by another LST, whose skipper courageously ran his bow to the fantail of the doomed ship.

All the vehicles of Battery A, 33rd Field Artillery Battalion, and one section of Battery D, 105th Coast Artillery Battalion (Anti-aircraft) attached, were lost. Fortunately the howitzers had been brought ashore previously by amphibious craft.

During the whole of D-Day enemy tanks operating against divisional units were held at bay with bazookas, mortars, artillery, and naval gun fire. Fire support by the naval units was accurate and deadly, especially near the western beaches, and directed deep into enemy held territory for harassing effect, was extremely welcome to assault units.

Meanwhile, as II Corps floating reserve, the 18th Infantry Regimental Combat Team, commanded by Col. George A. Smith, Jr., had cruised back and forth off shore, awaiting the designation of a mission. While the Regimental Commander and Operations Officer were ashore looking for an assembly area, orders were issued for the 18th Infantry to land the night of July 10th on YELLOW and BLUE beaches. The first wave of LCI's hit the beach at 9:30 P.M., and all craft reached shore by 3:00 A.M., the morning of July 11th.

Considerable difficulty was encountered by the 18th Infantry in landing, because of surf conditions and the presence of an off-shore sand bar which could not be cleared by the landing craft. Much equipment was lost and one officer and two enlisted men were drowned. The 18th Infantry moved inland to an assembly area on the southern slope of a hill on the eastern side of Gela Plain, and was in position by 6:00 A.M. July 11th.

Although the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion had lost two guns in the rough water, their Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Walter J. Bryde, had his Battalion in action by 6:00 P.M. that night. The