

SECOND CROSSING
OF THE VOLTURNO
BY 34TH DIVISION

18-20 OCTOBER 1943



GERMAN FORCES



43RD DIVISION AREA



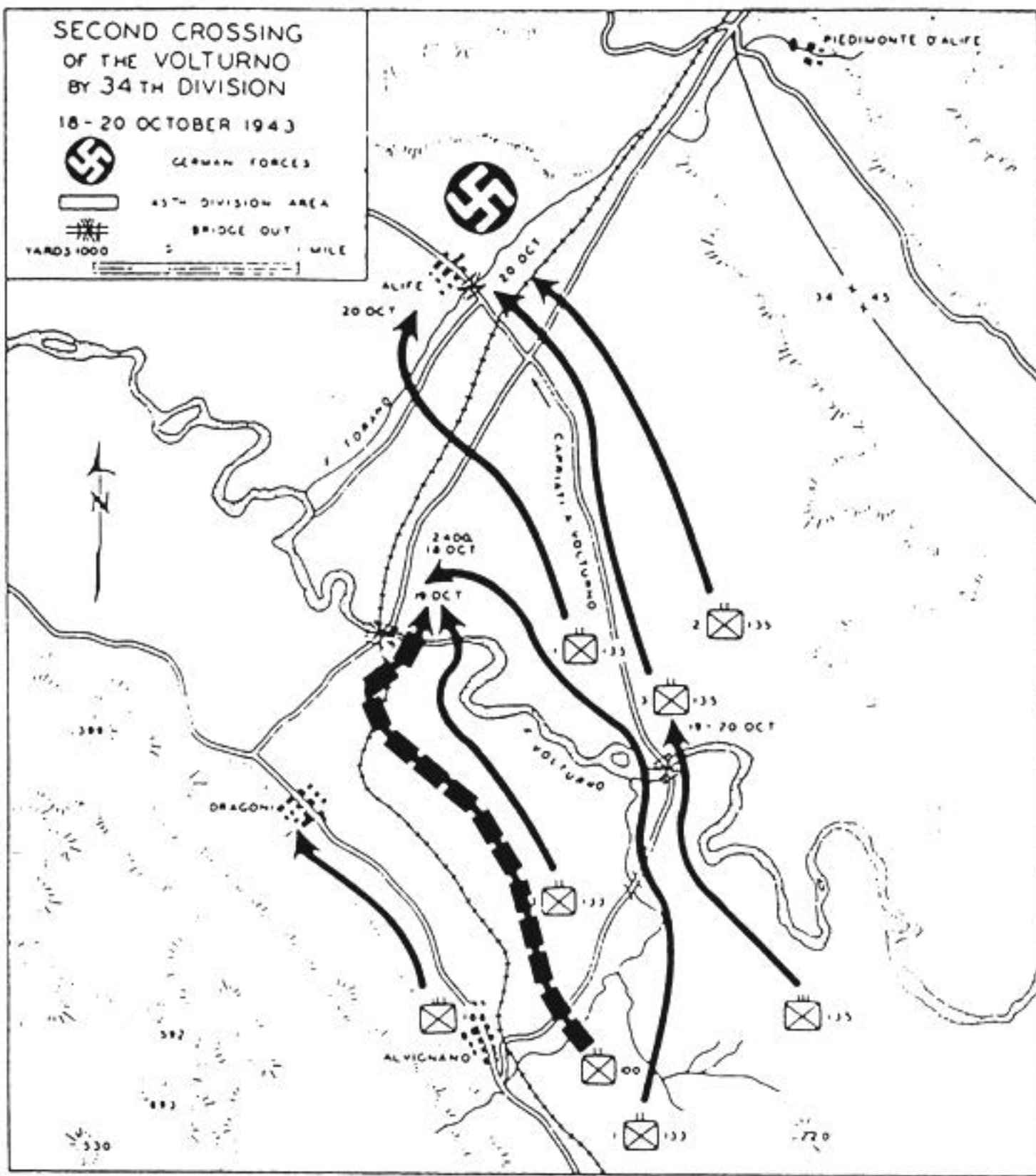
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2nd Crossing of the Volturno - N.E. of Dragoni

The First and Second Crossings of the Volturno

The battle action up to Benevento was a tough and weary one. The constant rain and mud were hard to get used to. The Germans always had the highest defensive positions because that's the way they planned their well-executed retreats.

There was a brief respite for the men before the next assault. The 34th Division was in an assembly area and its 133rd Regt. was camped about 10 miles southwest of Benevento, near the village of San Martino. But the 100th was moved north to Montesarchio for its rest period. The 100th suffered three killed and 23 wounded from Salerno up to this point. In addition, 13 were injured in accidents. Some of the men recalled that Montesarchio was a dirty place with human excrement all over the place. Apparently, the German Army did not issue shovels.

The 133rd began its advance northward on October 15 after eight days in Montesarchio. It moved through Airola and San Agata, ending up in Bagnoli. At this stop, the 34th Division headquarters distributed 100 copies of its news bulletin to the 100th. In it was the report from Gen. Mark W. Clark to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander of American forces in Europe, in which Clark praised the 100th for its commendable military behavior on the advance from Montemarano to Montefalcione. It was heartening and spiritually uplifting to see the commander of the Fifth Army send those words of praise to the Supreme American Commander in Europe. The men appreciated General Clark's effort in spreading the word of their exploits in the rain and mud to the higher authorities.

During this brief interval, Gen. Ryder, 34th Division commander, also showed his growing esteem for the 100th by distributing the Red Bull shoulder patch to the men. The 100th had not only measured up but was now accepted as full-fledged

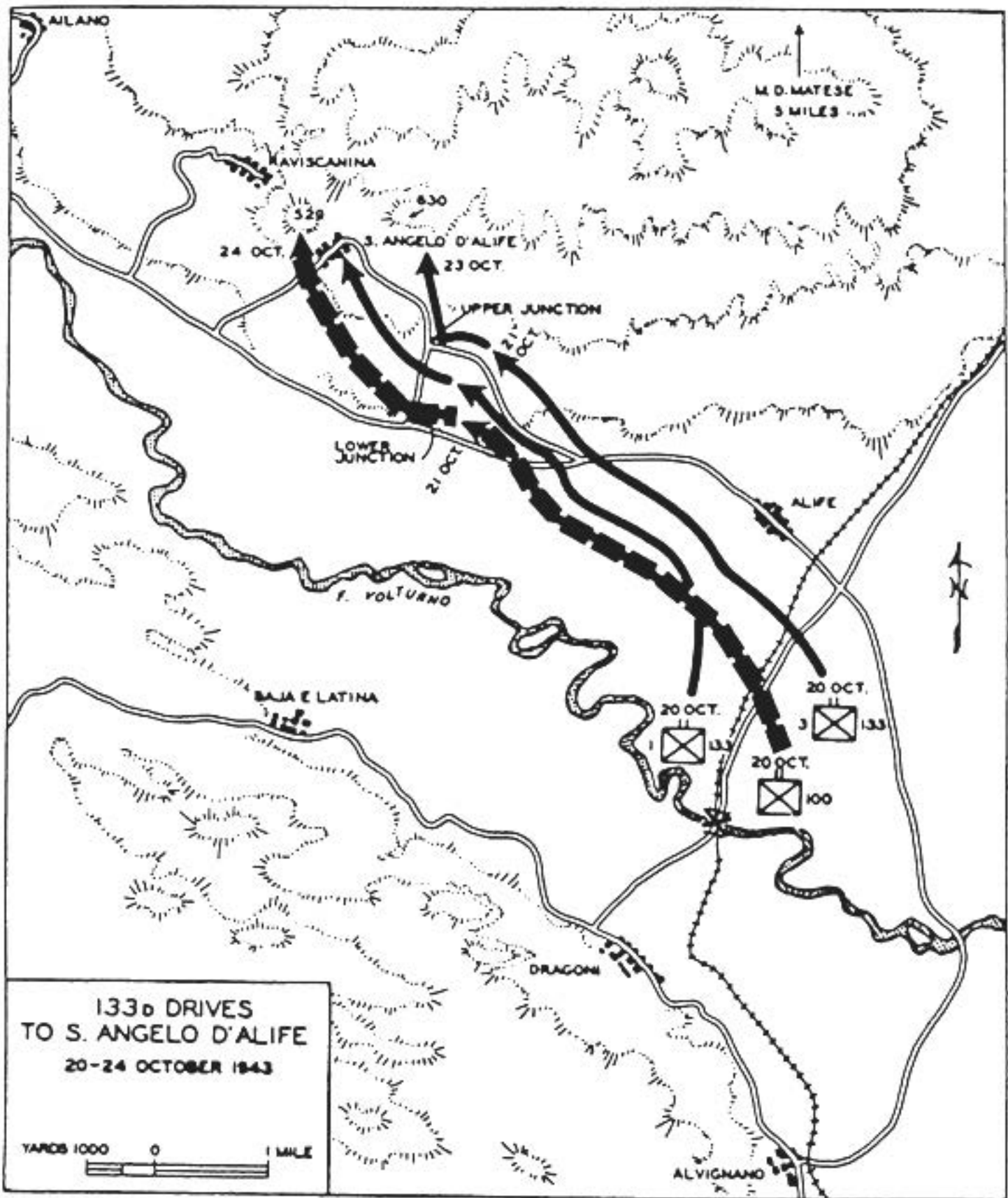
Red Bulls. Gen. Ryder also considered the 100th to be one of his crack units.

Continuing its push northward, the 133rd reached the Volturno River at Limatola, where it made its first crossing of that river during the afternoon of October 18. Then the 135th and 168th Regts. crossed the river and prepared for the move toward Caiazzo, Alvignano and beyond to Dragoni. But both units found the going tough, for the Germans were putting up a spirited defense. The enemy needed time for their heavy equipment to cross the Volturno and escape a possible Allied trap. It took two days to get to Alvignano and then another day for the 168th to fight its way to Dragoni. Following behind the two battalions of the 133rd, the 100th cut across the field past Alvignano toward the Volturno. The 1st Bn. was trying to reach the bridge that spanned the Volturno on the Dragoni-to-Alife road before the Germans blew it up, but it lost the race. The 100th reached the river and worked its way westward on the south bank all the way to the Dragoni-Alife road and dug in there. Meanwhile, the 135th forded the river at the point where the Alvignano Bridge had been blown up and advanced toward Alife. The town had been destroyed and abandoned by the enemy, who retreated further north into the hills above San Angelo d'Alife.

The 100th made its second crossing of the cold, waist-deep waters of the Volturno in darkness, shortly after midnight on October 20. 1st Sgt. Takashi "Kit" Kitaoka of B Co. and a Maui native, described the crossing as anything but easy.

"We came out of an olive grove and made our way across the muddy bank of the river," Kitaoka said. "In single file we stepped into the ice-cold water with our back pack and weapons. At certain





Alife - S. Angelo d'Alife

points the water came up to our chest and the current was strong. In the darkness, the sudden explosions followed by the concussion from enemy shells were frightening."

The 100th then joined in preparation for the attack on San Angelo d'Alife seven miles away on the north side of the Volturno. Patrol reports said the Germans were well entrenched in high ground with pill boxes and observation posts that could pinpoint artillery, mortar and machine gun fire on anything that moved in the valley. But the most awesome were the "Screaming Meemies," as rocket after rocket pierced the air with their horrible wailing sound. The men were well aware of that enemy capability by now. And there was the constant danger of mine fields all along the way.

With the 100th in the lead, the advance into the valley of certain danger began at 7 that evening. Co. A led the way, the men slowly feeling their way in the dark. There was the ever present danger of mines. Coming to a farmhouse several hours later, the company was surprised and hit by enemy machine gun fire which killed 10 men and wounded 20. Pfc Thomas Yamanaga won the unit's second of many Distinguished Service Cross medals during this action. He covered his squad's withdrawal and wiped out a machine gun nest, but was killed during his heroic stand. Other courageous actions during this battle brought Silver Stars to several men. But the 100th was forced to pull back with such heavy casualties that it had to be relieved by the 1st Bn. which took over the attack.

In the early morning hours of October 22, the 100th and the 3rd Bn. headed out again. Men of the two units were entrenched along the slopes and soon were bogged down by superior numbers. Eleven enemy tanks were spotted along the river bank, posing a big threat. C Co.'s Pvt Masao Awakuni, who grew up on Maui, positioned himself and fired his bazooka. He destroyed the lead tank,

and the division artillery got five more with the aid of an air spotter plane.

The following day, the 3rd Bn. of the 133rd Regt. captured Hill 630 above San Angelo. The 100th advanced to the northwest and attacked Hill 529 for two days to force the well entrenched Germans to evacuate their summit positions. On the 24th, the 1st Bn. moved through San Angelo without opposition, since the Germans had abandoned the town. But the 100th was having difficulty with the stubborn enemy defense of Hill 529. At nightfall, LTC Turner sent E and F Cos. to relieve Cos. A and C. Cos. E and F had just rejoined the 100th after extended guard duty at the Salerno airfield and supply depot. The following day, E and F Cos. made an end around to hit enemy summit positions from the rear with support from the 1st Bn., which pounded the enemy from the northeast. The 100th dispatched a barrage of mortar shells and the enemy finally began withdrawing from the hill. For all its success, the 100th suffered heavy casualties.

The 133rd was put in reserve for five days until October 31. During this period, the 100th's commander, LTC Turner, was ordered to the hospital for a rest. The handwriting was on the wall. The brass wanted a younger officer who could better withstand the rigors of the rugged terrain and the strains of battle. For the men, it was a sad farewell to an islander of haole descent who believed in the Japanese-Americans from the beginning and fought for their rights. Maj. Lovell, the second in command and also a highly respected officer from Hawaii, was recuperating in the hospital from wounds. Appointed to succeed Turner was Maj. James J. Gillespie, who was the executive officer of the 133rd's 3rd Bn.

