

RGASPI, 545-2/164/68-72

Information on operations in the sector Batea-Calaceite-Gandesa from 30.3. to 02.04.1938

During these operations the Brigade was active in four sectors in accordance with the orders of the division and of the army corps.

- 1) 58th battalion (Lincoln) was active on 31.3. and 1.4. in the sector Cuadret, 7 kilometers to the northwest of Batea.
- 2) 57th battalion (English) was active in the sector to the north of Calaceite.
- 3) 59th battalion and 3 companies of the 60th battalion were active in the sector of Mudefes, approx. at kilometer 294 on the road Gandesa-Alcaniz.
- 4) One company of the 60th battalion was in the Batea sector as divisional reserve.

Apart from that company just mentioned (4), I would like to give a description of the three independent actions:

1. In Sector Cuadret
2. In Sector Calaceite
3. In Sector Mudefes

Concerning the activities of the battalion 57th, 59th and 60th operating in the Gandesa Sector on 2 April under the command of Captain Dunbar I enclose his report on same.

1. Operation of the 58th battalion (Lincoln) in Sector Cuadret

On the night of 30-31 March I received an order from the Chief of Vision to move 58th battalion to the Sector Cuadret with the task of assisting the 11th Brigade and establishing links with the battalion of this brigade operating to the north of Vall den Cuadret and with the battalion operating in Sector Valbona. The Lincoln battalion completes this task very successfully. The intention of the enemy to pass in this sector was thrown back successfully by the battalion. Prisoners were taken and, demonstrating good initiative, contact was made with the battalion of the 11th Brigade.

The Political Commissar of the 11th Brigade, Comrade Blank, has given a high estimation of the work of this battalion and at dusk on 31 March declared that the Lincoln battalion had worked better than those of the 11th Brigade and that he envies us having such a battalion. The Lincoln battalion stayed in position for the whole of 31 March, and up to 4PM on 1 April, when it received the divisional order to retreat after the fascists had taken the village of Massaluca, positions in Mudefes and Horta. When the battalion was retiring the fascists were occupying the Batea-Gandesa road and also Villalba de los Arcos. The battalion was encircled and being attacked by the enemy, losing in consequence in wounded, killed, captured and missing 450 men. The Brigade Commissar Doran who was with the battalion was killed and the Chief of Staff taken

prisoner. About 100 men of the battalion fled over the mountains to the Ebro, some were on foot between 10 and 14 days.

2. Operation of the 57th battalion (English) in the Sector Calaceite

At 2.30 in the morning of 31 March the 57th battalion received the order from 5th Army corps to move to the north west of Calaceite to link up with the left flank of the 11th Division in Sector Barcelonet, with the right flank of the 100th Brigade (11th Division) in Moret

L.69

Having to direct the operations of the 58th battalion in Sector Cuadret, the 57th battalion was accompanied by Capt. Dunbar, Chief of Brigade Operations. While the battalion was being led by a liaison officer of the 11th Division sent by Corps in direction of Sector Moret that place was already occupied by the fascists. Battalion units were surrounded by enemy tanks and infantry. The War Commissar of the battalion was wounded and captured.

The 100th Brigade, along with artillery and tanks, had retired during the night and because of this the English battalion was the only unit in Sector Calaceite. Despite this the battalion fought on during 31 March to hold on to positions around Calaceite and the bridge between Calaceite and Caseres. During the fighting the battalion CO Fletcher was wounded twice, afterwards his replacement Lieut. Walker was wounded. Also Dunbar who took over after Walker had been wounded. During the day the battalion drove back several tank attacks. One can see the enormous pressure exerted by the enemy in the fact that by dusk the battalion consisted of 15 men. At dawn of 1 April they met about 20 other comrades in Mudefes and somewhat later took up positions on the right of the road. The losses of the battalion in wounded, killed, captured and missing amount to about 350 men.

3. Operations of 59th battalion and 3 companies of 60th battalion in Sector Mudefes

At 8PM on 31 March Corps Commander Modesto informed me at the crossroads Gandesa-batea, Gandesa-Alcaniz that I would receive detailed orders for the operation on the morrow from the Commander in the Sector Mudefes Sagnier under whose orders I would remain. I received a verbal order from Major Sagnier after 4AM on 1 April to occupy the heights on the right and left of the road near Mudefes: 473, 466, 440, 460, 480, 509, 484, 506, 476, 525 and 528.

The written order stated that during the night that it would be necessary to carry out a reconnaissance of the territory and until dawn on 1 April we would have to take the positions and I received the order at 10AM on the same day. Immediately on receipt of the verbal order I directed the two battalions and gave the chief of general staff Merriman and Capt. Hernandez the order to bring their battalions as soon as possible into their positions (Merriman 60th battalion, Hernandez 59th battalion). Naturally there was no question of any prior reconnaissance of their positions. The consequence of the

order was seen later when the 60th battalion could not occupy its positions in time and on approaching heights 473 and 466 it was established that they were occupied by the enemy. In consequence of the weak leadership of 60th battalion the enemy continued to hold these heights for his later advance in the direction of Mudefes. The Company Commander who was to take these heights, together with the battalion's political commissar, walked into a patrol and was taken prisoner. The fact that such good positions like the heights 473 and 466 were found to be occupied by the enemy and that the Company CO and the PC were taken prisoner had a quick influence on the battalion. At around 11AM the battalion, at least the majority of it, retreated and those groups that drew back reached the HQ of the Brigade. I mobilized the whole General Staff to stop those retreating and send them back to their positions. I gave the battalion commander the order to counter-attack, which was done. For a period the situation had been stabilized.

There was a feeling of insecurity in all battalions. Individuals and groups were infected by panic and the cowards retreated using the excuse that they had received a brigade order to retire. I had to give orders to the commanders of the battalions constantly that they were to maintain their positions. One such order I also gave to the adjutant of the 59th battalion, Captain (Mark) Millman, and to the adjutant of the 60th battalion Lieut. Schoenberg when they came to see me with information on the prevailing situation.

At around 1PM, together with Brigade Adjutant Kamy, I proceeded to Sector Chief Sagnier in order to inform him of the situation, coming from Chief of General Staff Major Merriman who soon returned. The HQ of the Sector was only about 50 meters from Brigade HQ. I stayed at Sector HQ for about 10 minutes before returning to Brigade. I was horrified to find nobody at Brigade HQ when I arrived there with Capt. Kamy we saw fascists approaching from about 150 meters away. I later learned that Chief of Staff Merriman had given the order for the battalions to retire, likewise the General Staff and the special MG company.

With Capt. Kamy I again went to Sector HQ in order to tell of the commander about the situation. In view of the fact that he had no forces with the help of whom he could have held his position and drive the enemy back, the Sector Chief had decided to retire with the General Staff. I retired with the General Staff of the sector and adjutant Kamy, crossing the mountains in the direction of the crossroads Gandesa-Batea. The enemy pursued us the whole time firing artillery and machine guns during the whole march.

After two hours, with Capt. Kamy and about a dozen comrades (observers and others) we came out above the Gandesa road at approximately kilometer 300. Continuing our path above the road we met Capt. Hernandez, Capt. Garcia, Medical Capt. Balk (14th Brigade), Capt. Millman and other comrades. This was at about 4PM.

To Capt. Hernandez, Capt. Garcia and the others I gave the order to organize at once a front line to the left and right of the road. This was immediately carried out. The line held until the night, up to the point when the division gave orders to retreat to Gandesa because of the enemy infiltration from the north and the south. After I had secured the

organization of the line at roughly kilometer 300 I went to the crossroads with the Adjutant at kilometer 302, where I met the Division General Walter and Comrade Gallo. Major Sagnier was also there. From General Walter I received the order to proceed to Batea to help 58th Battalion (Lincoln) retreat in the direction of Gandesa. At around 5pm General Walter informed me that Pobla de MaselUCA and Horta were occupied by the enemy and that the 58th battalion and the 11th Brigade were in danger of being encircled.

Arriving at Doran's command post (above the road Batea-Nonaspe) I gave him the order for the gradual relief of the 58th battalion and the special MG company of the Division from their positions and bring them to the Batea-Gandesa road. This was done and Doran received the same order from Merriman. After having given detailed orders to Doran on how to organize and secure the retirement of the battalion I went back to the crossroads and met Walter. After leaving Batea I met the second in command of the 11th Brigade, Major Gustav Szinda, who informed me that he had tried to march on the Batea-Gandesa road but was forced to go back because it had been cut by the fascists.

I informed Doran of this and proceeded from Batea to Villalba de los Arcos. A few kilometers from Villalba some peasants informed us that the place had been occupied by the fascists. I gave an order to Com. Ruiz (of the Division Commissariat) to send a horseman to Doran with the news of the occupation of Villalba so that he should head for Gandesa before he got to Villalba.

With the comrades Major Gustav, Captain Kamy, Lieut. Sabino of the Divisional General Staff, as well as about 100 men mainly from 11th Brigade we left after some time (roughly 10PM) for Gandesa. At about 6AM on April 2 we got on the road Alcaniz-Gandesa about 2km from Gandesa. With the adjutant Capt. Kamy we went looking for the General Staff of the Division or the Corps. On the way to Mora de Ebro we met neither the one nor the other and I went to the Commandant of Mora and suggested he place a guard to stop those retreating and I went with Kamy back in the direction of Gandesa. Before I left Mora I met General Walter from whom I received the order to stop all those retreating and to organize a defence at the bridge of Mora until the blowing of the bridge was ready. With some hundreds of men from various brigades (14th, 15, 31st, 129th, 140th) together I organized the defence of the bridge and after its destruction (3 April) I organized the defence on the left bank of the Ebro.

This, briefly, on the operations.

Details on losses I enclose according to commands. As can be seen, the losses sustained by the 57th, 58th and 60th battalions (killed, wounded, captured, missing) totaled about 50%. For 59th battalion were registered 3 wounded. The conduct of the commandants of 57th and 58th was good, apart from one insignificant exception (Lieut. Richardson, 57th battalion). In the 59th and 60th battalion the commanders did badly. Did not act energetically enough, they did not take measures in time to prevent the retreat of the units. Because of this the commandants of 59th and 60th battalion have been removed and reprimanded for bad work, as stated in divisional orders.

Seven officers, two commissars, six sergeants and several corporals were demoted because of conduct during the operations – desertion, cowardice, insubordination etc. One officer and one soldier were shot for desertion. At the same time, however, there were many examples of excellent conduct on the part of some officers and men: The (temporary) commander of the British battalion Fletcher, the commandant of the Lincoln battalion Wolf, Politcommissar of the Lincolns Gates, Chief of Operations Dunbar und some others.

Among the losses we find many have gone missing. The greater number of these missing, especially in 57th and 58th battalion, are likely to be dead or captured, but I have no possibility to determine that figure exactly.

I attach a copy of the order of the 5th Corps to 57th battalion; three notes from Capt. Dunbar; copy of the order issued by Major Sagnier; data on the losses in the battalions and the order on the demotion of officers and sergeants. Finally, the order for the execution of Lieut. Perez Montagud and the soldier Paul White.

Signature: V. Copic

Commander of the 15th Brigade

9.5.1938