

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING DIVISION
GENERAL INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT
THE ARMORED SCHOOL
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ADVANCED OFFICERS CLASS #2

DATE 16 April 1948

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: 2d Armored Division in the Ardennes

SCOPE The operation of the 2d Armored Division in the Ardennes Offensive to include the following:

1. The movement of the Division on 21 December 1944 from the Roer River defensive line to Eastern Belgium.
2. The battle of Humain and the Celles Pocket.
3. The drive on Houffalize and the joining of the First and Third Armies in that city.

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2d ARMORED DIVISION IN THE ARDENNES

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By
Captain Howard E. Bressler

The beginning of the Ardennes offensive on 16 December 1944 found the 2d Armored Division in defensive positions along the ROER River in the vicinity of JULICH, Germany. On 20 December 1944, the entire division had been relieved of responsibility for the ROER River defensive line by the 29th Infantry Division. By order of the Commanding General, Ninth U. S. Army, the Division reverted to Army reserve where it could be readily available to oppose possible enemy attack in that area.

MOVE TO BELGIUM

With three hours advance notice, the entire Division turned south to become a part of the VII Corps of the First U. S. Army. The 2d Armored Division was directed to begin its movement prior to midnight of 21 December 1944. Despite the shortage of maps and the lack of time to make a route reconnaissance, the Division was ready to begin its move at 2300 on the date indicated in the directive from higher headquarters. All combat elements of the Division completed the road march of approximately 75 miles in 22 hours, extending through 21 and 22 December 1944, from the vicinity of BAESWEILER, Germany to the vicinity of HUY, Belgium. At this time, elements of the German Army were already threatening LEIGE, DINANT, and NAMUR, Belgium with their armored spearheads. The Division moved on two selected routes which were posted with guides from the 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion and the Division Traffic Control.

Hazardous road conditions due to ice, snow and mud, the adverse weather conditions and the problem of driving at night under complete blackout, made the march very unpleasant. Despite all of this, the Division made a very successful move except for several vehicular casualties due to breakdowns, collisions and slipping off the icy roads.

CC "A" closed in its new assembly area in the vicinity of LES AVINS, Belgium at 1830 on 22 December 1944. CC "B" closed in its new assembly areas in the vicinity of CLAVIER, Belgium at 1600 on 22 December 1944. CC "R" closed in its new location in the vicinity of BENDE, Belgium at 2150 on 22 December 1944. The Division C.P. set up in a chateau in the vicinity of HAVELANGE, Belgium.

Immediately on arrival in their new locations, all units established outposts and sent out patrols to the south, southeast, and southwest of the Division area to establish contact with friendly troops to our front and flanks and to probe for any possible enemy movement to the north or west. Road blocks were maintained at critical points in the Division area.

ENEMY CONTACT

The first enemy contact was reported by Company D, 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion at 1130, 23 December 1944 in the vicinity of HAID, Belgium when an armored car was destroyed by two enemy tanks. The crew of the knocked-out vehicle managed to escape.

Upon hearing of this, the Commanding General of the Division ordered CC "A" to move immediately to the vicinity of CINEY, Belgium where it was to destroy any enemy troops heading west and northwest toward DINANT and NAMUR

Belgium.

A task force of CC "A" began to move at 1420 on order of Commanding General of CC "A" from the vicinity of LES AVINS to the vicinity of CINEY. A medium tank company was immediately dispatched at full throttle to CINEY where no contact was made and the town was occupied at once. The task force immediately launched an attack from CINEY, on the town of BUISSONVILLE. Enemy contact was made at 2100 when it received anti-tank and automatic weapons fire from the vicinity of GEIGNON. This was soon overcome and the attack was resumed again at 2345.

The task force of CC "A" attacking southeast toward BUISSONVILLE encountered an enemy column of the 2d Panzer Division advancing northwest on the same road. The task force commander immediately deployed his forces off both sides of the road and waited in ambush until the enemy column was a choice target for his guns. Every weapon of the task force opened up and soon the whole area was illuminated by the burning of enemy vehicles. The enemy, caught by complete surprise, was soon destroyed except for a few vehicles and personnel which had escaped destruction during the confusion of the battle. The enemy losses were very high while the casualties to CC "A" were very light, during this engagement. CC "A" then coiled up until daylight and the attack was again resumed at 0630 on 24 December 1944.

Another task force of CC "A" joined in the advance on BUISSONVILLE. The two forces advancing in three columns cleared the town of HAID at 0930 and the advance was continued southeast. After encountering several enemy tanks, one task force of CC "A" entered the town of BUISSONVILLE at 1430.

The other task force attacked through the area northeast of the town and after a fight with tanks and other enemy vehicles, most of which were destroyed, contact was established with troops on the flanks. CC "A" then made preparations to attack the town of HUMAIN, an enemy strong point south-east of BUISSONVILLE.

CC "B" was directed to occupy CINEY to secure it from enemy attack, thus relieving elements of CC "A" to rejoin their own combat command. A build-up of enemy troops and materiel was reported in the vicinity of CELLES and in the wooded areas east and north of the town. It was quite apparent that the enemy, after making contact with CC "A" to the east, had shifted his forces to the west and again started his advance to the north, in an effort to seize crossing on the MEUSE River. The 4th Cavalry Group (Mecz) which had been attached to the Division earlier, was assigned the missions of providing a reconnaissance screen along the LA LESSE River between DINANT and HEROCK, to establish contact with the British 29th Armored Brigade on the right of CC "B" and to maintain contact between CC "A" and the 84th Infantry Division on the left flank.

Early on Christmas day, 0130, a reinforced troop of the 24th Cavalry Squadron of the 4th Cavalry Group (Mecz) attacked southwest from JANCOINE to seize the town of HUMAIN and outpost it, which they successfully did at that time. At 0700 the enemy launched a strong counterattack with tanks and infantry which forced the cavalry troop to withdraw. At 1300 another attack was launched to recapture the town, but to no avail. The 24th Cavalry Squadron was then reinforced with four platoons of tanks and one platoon of tank

destroyers and at 1600 launched a third attack on the town of HUMAIN from the northeast and south. The enemy resistance was very strong and the town was not taken by dark. The squadron halted their attack and consolidated their positions for the night.

At 0900 the same day, CC "A" launched two attacks from the vicinity of BUISSONVILLE with HAVRENNE and ROCHFORT as their objectives. The right column attacked along the southwest edge of BOIS de ST. REMY then southeast to the high ground northwest of ROCHFORT. The left column launched its attack over the CINEY-ROCHFORT road. Both forces met stubborn enemy resistance and, at dark, were forced to halt and take up positions for the night. The enemy launched three counterattacks against the forces of CC "A" but all were repulsed with heavy losses in enemy vehicles and personnel. CC "A" losses were comparatively light.

THE CELLES POCKET

At 0800 Christmas Day, CC "B" on the right of CC "A", attacked from the vicinity of CINEY in two columns which successfully blocked the German penetration toward DINANT, and from crossing the MEUSE River in the vicinity. The task force on the right attacked through ACHENE and reached its objective in the vicinity of BOIS de HUBERMONT at 1700. The task force on the left cleared CONJOUX at 1130 and at 1430 had continued its attack, seized SOINNE and the high ground southeast of CELLES. The two task forces launched attacks together and at 1745 had secured the town of CELLES and completed the encirclement of the enemy forces trapped in BOIS COREUS and BOIS des PRIESSES. Many enemy losses resulted in this action.

In the meantime, reconnaissance elements of CC "B" had been sent to the south to prevent any other enemy from advancing to the north. These units knocked out seven enemy vehicles in the vicinity of the HOUYE bridge over the LA LESSE River southeast of CELLES. At 1200 the same day the artillery of CC "B" engaged an enemy column north of CELLES and destroyed seven Mark IV tanks and ten other enemy vehicles. During the same period, the 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, which was attached to CC "B", cleared the enemy from SORINNE and FOY NOTRE DAME, destroying and capturing nineteen vehicles, seven which were American, and one S.P. gun.

At 0900, 26 December 1944, CC "B" attacked to clean the enemy from the CELLES Pocket. The attack progressed steadily, although enemy resistance was heavy, especially on the north. The task forces destroyed or captured a number of enemy tanks, AT guns and other materiel in this vicinity. The Combat Command repelled two counterattacks by the enemy, one a tank-infantry team, which resulted in the loss of seven enemy tanks and a number of infantry killed.

The next morning at 0450, the enemy attempted to break out of the encirclement formed by the forces of CC "B". The attack was quickly repulsed, and 50 enemy were captured in this action. At 1000, CC "B" launched an attack to clear the remaining enemy troops from the woods, which was completed at 1130. During this action, many prisoners were taken and about 80 vehicles including three tanks, 12 artillery pieces and several American vehicles. CC "B" continued clearing the enemy from the vicinity of CELLES and after completing the clean-up, a task force was sent to the south to seize the high

ground overlooking the LA LESSE River. As a result, the Combat Command had established a continuous line from the vicinity of HOUYE where contact had been established with British elements, to a point where contact had been established with CC "A".

BATTLE OF HUMAIN

At 0800, 27 December 1944, CC "A" with CC "R" attached, launched its attack with HUMAIN as the objective. The attack was preceded by artillery fire during the night and a one-hour preparation prior to 0800. One tank company took up positions on the west edge of town and assisted, by fire, the attack of CC "R". Another task force enveloped HUMAIN from the south while elements of an infantry battalion attacked from the north. The town was defended by an estimated reinforced battalion of the 9th Panzer Division. These troops put up stubborn resistance until 2330, when the last enemy strong point, a well-defended chateau, fell to the attacking units of CC "A". Upon seizing objectives on the LA LESSE and L'HOMME Rivers, all units of CC "A" were consolidated, contact was established with CC "B" on the right, and defensive positions were maintained. As a result of the combined operations of CC "A", CC "B", and CC "R", the Division now held a line along the LA LESSE River, from HOUYE, where contact had been established with the British, to a point east of ROCHFORT. At this time the Division was ordered to halt, organize its positions, and await relief from this sector.

RELIEF

Beginning 28 December 1944, the Division was relieved of its responsibility in this sector, which was taken over by the British 53d Division, the

U. S. 83d Division, and the 4th Cavalry Group (Mecz). The units of the 2d Armored Division were completely assembled by 30 December. One task force of CC "B" was placed on the alert with the mission of meeting any hostile attack in that area. The Division continued rehabilitation and getting prepared for future operations which was expected at any time.

A NEW MISSION

On 2 January 1945, the Division's combat elements moved from their assembly area in the vicinity of HAVELANGE to the new assembly areas in the vicinity of SOY and GRANDMENIL, a distance of approximately 28 miles. The Division moved in two columns over very icy and hilly roads, which made the march very difficult. However, by 3 January all elements had completely closed into their respective areas and were ready to resume the offensive.

On 3 January at 0830, the Division launched an attack with five task forces abreast on a 9-mile front from the vicinity of HOTTON, east to MANHAY and GRANDMENIL. CC "A" on the right with three task forces abreast and CC "B" on the left with two task forces abreast.

The weather was so bad it was almost impossible for the heavy armor to advance in the deep snow and on the icy hills. The mission assigned to the Division, for this phase of the operation, was to clear all enemy strong points from the line of departure to the L'OURTHE River in the vicinity of HOUFFALIZE.

The three task forces of CC "A" jumped off on the right of the Division's zone of advance. After bitter fighting against both a determined enemy and the worst weather conditions possible, one task force of CC "A" had reached

the outskirts of BEFFE. The second task force consolidated positions west of DEVANTAVE after a strong counterattack by the enemy had been repelled. The third task force seized its objective without too much difficulty. Here CC "A" consolidated its position for the night and prepared for a continuation of the attack the next day.

CC "B" attacked in the left of the Division's zone of advance with two task forces. One task force attacked south through GRANDMENIL where it met stubborn resistance and together with the advance weather conditions, the advance was slowed considerably. This force consolidated its positions for the night in the vicinity of COROLE and LA GROSSE HAIE. The second task force of CC "B" attacked at the same time through LA FOSSE and also met stubborn enemy resistance. The village of FREYNEUX was seized and consolidated about 1700. Another part of this task force entered LAMORMENIL, but due to the late hour, it withdrew from the village and consolidated its positions outside of town.

On 4 January the enemy launched three counterattacks northwest of DEVANTAVE. The first one came at 0450, the second at 0615 and the third at 1030. All three were repelled by elements of CC "A", inflicting heavy losses in tank and infantry on the enemy. One task force of CC "A" attacked southeast at 1535 and after meeting stubborn enemy resistance on the outskirts of DEVANTAVE and knocking out four enemy tanks, the positions were consolidated in the woods west of town. Another task force of CC "A" encountered a strong concentration of tanks in the vicinity of MAGOSTER and BEFFE and were unable to gain much ground in its attack launched at 0900. The force attacked again

at 1030 after being reinforced with infantry. The infantry mopped up the village of BEFFE, consolidated its positions and set up road blocks. The road to MANCOURAY was blocked southeast of BEFFE. At this point, CC "A" stopped for the night and prepared for further attacks the next day.

CC "B" launched its attack at 0830 and immediately met heavy artillery, rocket and anti-tank fire. One task force attacked along the LE BATTY-ODEICNE Road, continuing the attack until 2100 and occupied positions on the north and east edges of ODEICNE. The other task force of CC "B" attacked from positions north of LAMORMENIL and seized the town at 1155. They continued the attack to seize the high ground west of town which they did and consolidated their positions for the night. Contact was established with CC "A" on the right and with the 3d Armored Division on the left by Reconnaissance elements of CC "B". CC "R" was attached to CC "B" at this time and moved into an assembly area in the vicinity of LE BATTY at 1845.

The Division continued the attack on 5 January. The weather conditions were still very bad with visibility extremely poor and the roads very dangerous due to the hilly terrain and icy conditions. CC "B" launched their attack at 0900 with one task force to seize the village of ODEICNE. The left element attacked the town from the northeast while the element on the right entered the town from the west. The town was entered at 1120 and both elements of the task force continued the fight throughout the afternoon. At 1800 the town was completely occupied and positions consolidated except for the south edge. CC "R", which was now attached to CC "B", relieved the other task force of CC "B", which assembled in Division Reserve. CC "R"

attacked southeast from positions west and southwest of LAMORMENIL with the town of DOCHAMPS and the high ground south of LAMORMENIL as its objectives. The task force was slowed down by mines and intense enemy fires and by nightfall, had gained approximately 1500 yards, where positions were consolidated for the night.

CC "A" launched their assaults at 0930, being delayed by near-zero visibility. The main objectives were the town of DEVANTAVE and the village of CONSY. The enemy had felled trees, making very effective road blocks, put in minefields and the buildup of tanks and infantry, delayed considerably, the advance of CC "A". The enemy resistance was very stubborn, with tanks, infantry, artillery and mortar fire being thrown against the attacking elements of CC "A".

At 0330 on 6 January, CC "A" launched a night attack in the direction of CONSY. The attack continued until 0530, against an estimated battalion of infantry reinforced by Mark V tanks. At this time, the attack was halted and at 0830 another task force resumed the attack on CONSY. The village of DEVANTAVE was seized about noon and also a small town to the southwest. After these villages had been mopped up, CC "A" consolidated their positions for the night.

CC "B" started their attack at 1030 with DOCHAMPS as the objective of one of the task forces. The stubborn enemy resistance stopped the advance about one half mile from the village, where the line was organized for the night. Another task force cleared enemy resistance in their area and established contact with the 3d Armored Division along the MANHAY-HOUFFALIZE

Highway. The road conditions got so bad, it was directed that all tank companies replace all steel tracks with rubber.

CC "A" continued their attack at 0830 on 7 January with the mission of seizing DOCHAMPS and the commanding ground southeast of the town. After encountering intense enemy anti-tank fire and mines, the forces of CC "A" entered the village at 1700. Mopping up of the town continued throughout the evening and the town was secured.

In the meantime, CC "B" cut the enemy's main east and west communication and supply route, the VIELSALM-LA ROCHE Highway. Another task force was attached to CC "B" from the Division Reserve which attacked southeast from the vicinity of ODEIGNE with the mission of cutting the highway at other points. However, the tanks of the task force found the woods in their zone of advance impassable and were forced to halt and organize their positions north of the highway for the night.

On 9 January the Division coordinated the assaults of both combat commands on the heavily defended key town of SAMREE. At 0730, CC "A" attacked with two task forces. Meeting very stubborn resistance throughout the day, the force of CC "A" consolidated positions one mile north of SAMREE at 2125.

CC "B" attacked along the VIELSALM-LA ROCHE Highway with two task forces. This area was heavily defended and numerous road blocks were encountered. The road blocks were mined and booby trapped and covered very effectively by anti-tank and mortar fire. The forces of CC "B" spent all the day deducing these obstacles, as was necessary before the advance could be continued. The forces regrouped and prepared to continue their attack on SAMREE the next day.

CC "A" forces attacked under the cover of darkness from their positions just north of town and in a fifteen minute assault, the leading elements entered the town of SAMREE. The enemy was caught by complete surprise and by 0900, CC "A" had occupied the high ground southwest and east of town which was the commanding terrain in that area.

CC "B" resumed their assault toward SAMREE on the morning of 10 January along the VIELSALM-LA ROCHE Highway and at 1045 turned south to clear the wood southeast of town. At 1330 a task force was relieved from assignment of CC "B" and attached to CC "A". Upon completion of the organization of SAMREE and the clearing of this main highway, both combat commands of the Division began regrouping for further attacks to the south and the main objective of the Division, the town of HOUFFALIZE on the L'OURTHE River.

Both combat commands continued their attacks to the south on 12 January, still encountering a determined enemy. During the day's operations, CC "B" had seized two villages on each side of the main highway to HOUFFALIZE. CC "A" had eliminated a fierce enemy strong point southeast of SAMREE, capturing many prisoners including a battalion commander and his staff.

The next day, both combat commands made considerable progress in their attacks to the south over very rugged and wooded terrain completely covered with snow and ice. CC "A" made gains up to about 5000 yards on the left of the Division zone. CC "B" on the right encountered considerable resistance but by the day's end, had advances along the HOUFFALIZE Road to a point approximately six miles north of the town.

The Division advanced about three miles in their attacks to the L'OURTHE

River on 14 January, where positions were consolidated and preparations were completed for the assault on the Division's final objective--HOUFFALIZE.

However, the next day units of both combat commands succeeded in driving within one mile of the town where they consolidated for the night. Patrols were dispatched into HOUFFALIZE to determine the enemy dispositions in the town. The patrols of CC "B" entered the town at 0100, 16 January without making enemy contact. Patrols were also sent to the L'OURTHE River east of town and found enemy positions vacated.

Contact was established with Third U. S. Army patrols at 0930 that day, marking the juncture of the First and Third Armies in the Ardennes offensive.

For the next three days the Division held a defensive line of about four miles along the L'OURTHE River. A minimum of troops were used in holding the line, with the remainder of the Division engaged in the maintenance and rehabilitation. The sector was turned over to the 4th Cavalry Group (Mecz) and the Division assembled its units in preparation to moving north to an area south of LEIGE, Belgium which was completed 22 January, thus completing the Division's participation in the "Battle of the Bulge."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The contents of this monograph is based entirely on After Action Reports of the 2d Armored Division, dated June 1944 to April 1945.