

41-1020

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: Another Von Runstedt Blunder--Bastogne

SCOPE: An historical example of the 3rd Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry in the graphic defense of the communications center of Bastogne, Belgium in December of 1944. The information contained herein clearly indicates the value of prior training of subordinate commanders to take over higher positions. In addition the author covers such all important military considerations as the role of the reserve company commander, combat equipment of the individual soldier, and the coordination of withdrawals.

41-102

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Major, Cavalry

INTRODUCTION

Suppose gentlemen, that a state of war exists between the United States and Soviet Russia. Further assume that you are a battalion commander of a combat command in a sector of the line where bitter fighting is taking place. Picture yourself as your telephone rings in your Command Post, the radio operator takes the message, and suddenly you find yourself the commanding officer of the combat command.

Would you be capable of taking over?

We all know that that very thing can happen. Gentlemen, a commander is neglecting his duty if he doesn't train his subordinates to be able to take over his job in case of an emergency.

Today, I will give you an historical example of a unit whose leaders had had it pounded into their heads that they had to be capable of taking over the next higher commander's job whether it be in training or battle. The course of events could have and probably would have been materially altered if all commanders hadn't been schooled in this line of thought.

I feel that you will realize the importance of this training long before the end of the conference. The most important thing though is that you as battalion commanders will remember this vital link when training troops in the future.

In addition we will cover the following points:

1. Combat equipment of the individual soldier.
2. Control of foot columns on roads at night.
3. Airborne anti-tank defense procedure.
4. The reserve company commander's role in a defense
5. Coordination in withdrawals to include:
 - a. Timing.
 - b. Coordination between arms.
 - c. Transportation problems.
6. The effect of terrain on the use of outposts.

This is the tale of a part of the defense of Bastogne, Belgium in December, 1944. It will not in any way portray the story of all the gallant acts of the defenders of the town nor is it intended to take any glory away from other units in the perimeter. We will be concerned with two units. These are the third battalion of the 327th Glider Infantry and elements of the 705th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

The 3rd Battalion of 327th Glider Infantry was in a rest area in the vicinity of Mourmelon, France. The unit had been pulled out of the lines in Holland for a total of ten days. Twenty-five percent of the unit was on pass in Paris. The Battalion Commander of the 3rd Battalion was acting as regimental commander as the Regimental Commander was in England. The executive officer of the battalion was in Paris and as a result the commander of Company B had assumed command of the battalion, this officer being myself.

On the morning of the 18th of December a meeting was held in regimental headquarters. Orders were "Be' ready to move in twenty four hours, combat loaded." The only information about the enemy was that there had been a major break through north of Bastogne, Belguim and the 101st Airborne Division together with the 82nd Ariborne Division were to be committed in that area.

Returning from regiment I briefed my company commanders and the rest of the day was spent in preparing for the move.

The supply situation in the battalion was bad. Our combat load of ammunition and rations was considerably below strength. Some equipment and ammunition was issued as late as two hours before the move to Bastogne was scheduled to take place.

One of the orders to the company commanders was "Carry with you what equipment you came out of Holland with." This is a good point to remember. The move to Bastogne was the only one we ever made minus the usual array of unnecessary items that ordinarily plagued the men at the start of a mission. Bill Mauldin's cartoon well illustrates what happens to a soldier's excess equipment regardless of what some commanders would like to think.



"I see Comp'ny E got th' new-style gas masks."

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(Cartoonist Mauldin took officers to task at times to excess but on many many other occasions hit the nail on the head.)

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1UP FRONT--Bill Mauldin--Page 106--New York--Henry Holt and Company--1945

A march table and final instructions were issued by the S-3 by 1700 of the 19th of December. Our transportation consisted of ten ton tractor trailer trucks. In each of these vehicles were loaded fifty men with all of their equipment and supplies.



----- Fifty men and their equipment-----

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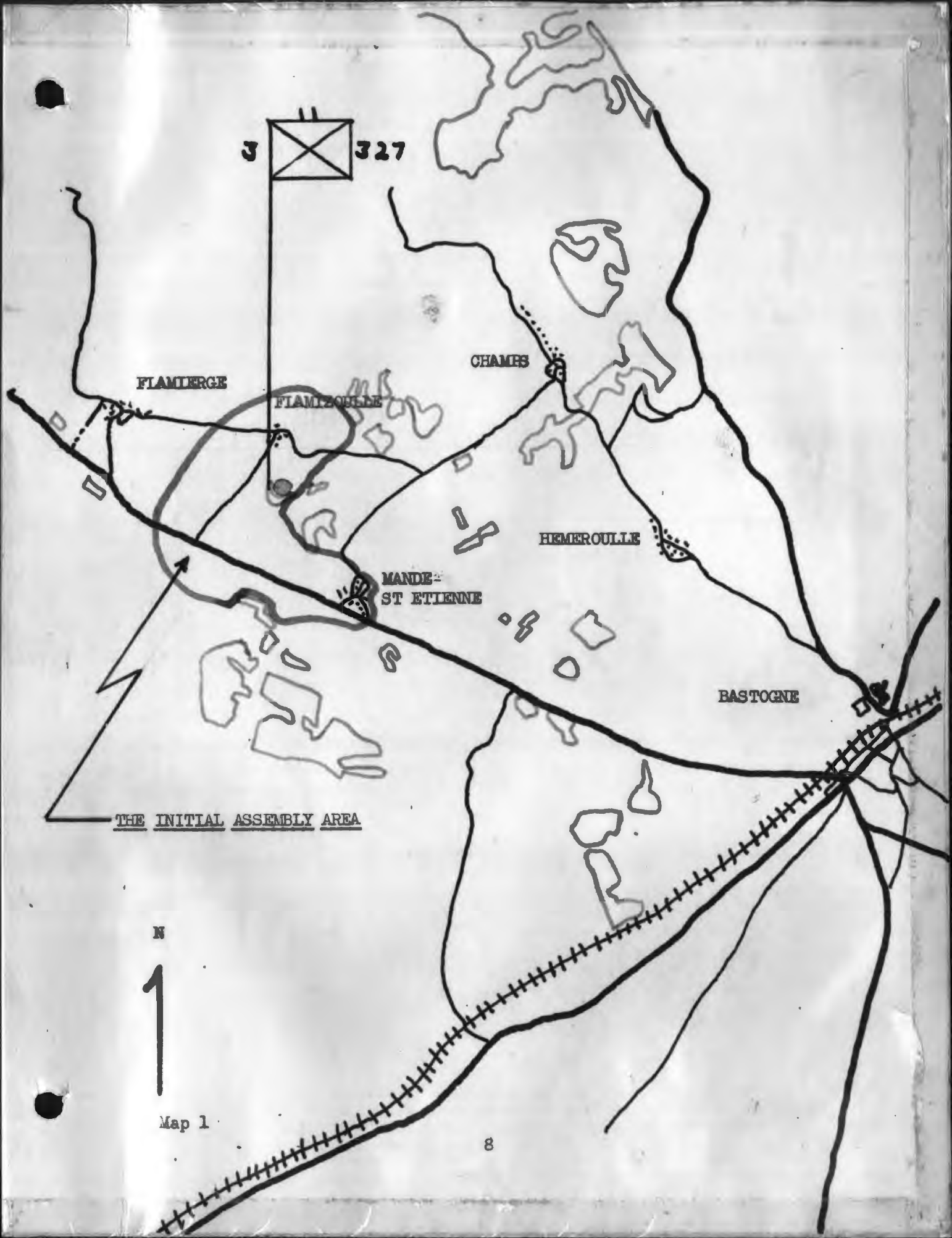
²The Epic of the 101st Airborne—Auxerre, France, 1945

One half hour before we crossed the Initial Point Lt. Colonel Ray C. Allen returned from regiment and reassumed command of the battalion as Colonel Joseph H. Harper had just flown back from England to reassume command of the regiment. Major Hershel E. Angus, the battalion executive officer, rejoined us in route to Bastogne.

The whole trip was miserable. It was foggy, it was cold, and occasionally snowing enroute. The men were so crowded in the trucks that only half of them could attempt to sleep on the floor while the remainder stood and took it.

The battalion was guided to an assembly area in the vicinity of Flamizoulle, a hamlet five and one half miles west of Bastogne. An interesting note here is that the battalion never saw Bastogne until after the break through by the Fourth Armored Division considerably later.

The battalion immediately detrucked. Lt. Colonel Allen when asked what we were to do made the classic statement "Spread the men out in simulated glider loads for a simulated landing." His statement was an indication of how much anyone knew about the enemy situation. The unit initially made an all around defense of the area to which it was assigned. It seemed very artificial to us as the roads running through our area were literally crawling with friendly traffic moving in both directions. (See Map 1.)



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FLAMIERGE

FLAMIZOUILLE

CHAMBS

HEMEROUILLE

MANDE-ST ETIENNE

BASTOGNE

THE INITIAL ASSEMBLY AREA

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Map 1

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The battalion organized to defend from the North West. The primary mission initially was to keep the road open leading to Marche as this was one of the last escape routes of troops being evacuated from the battle area. Peace and quiet prevailed as we dug in deeper to defend our area.

At 2030 hours a Captain and six enlisted men from the 28th Division reported to the battalion command post and informed Lt. Colonel Allen that their convoy had been ambushed. They further related all vehicles had been abandoned by them and consequently were in the hands of the Germans. This information was immediately relayed to division. "Information" came back almost as fast as it was sent to attack the road junction immediately. The most urgent reason to get the road junction under our control again from our standpoint was that the 101st Airborne Division Medical Company was located at the scene of action. It was assumed from the Captain's information that the Medical Unit was also overrun. At 2230 a runner from battalion reported to my command post with a message and a marked map. The order was to move the company out immediately and to recapture and clear the road junction.

2300 saw us on the move towards the objective. When within eight hundred yards of the road junction the company split up. One column went down the left ditch of the road and the other in the right. Guides were kept on the road to control the

speed of the heads of the two columns. There was a reason for this formation. I vividly remembered machine gunning unsuspecting columns of German Infantry in Holland when the enemy was marching and we had the machine guns emplaced. Not knowing exactly where the Krauts were and realizing that each one of the trucks at the junction had a ring mounted 50 caliber Machine Gun on it, it was just common sense to stay off the road when we got close to the objective.

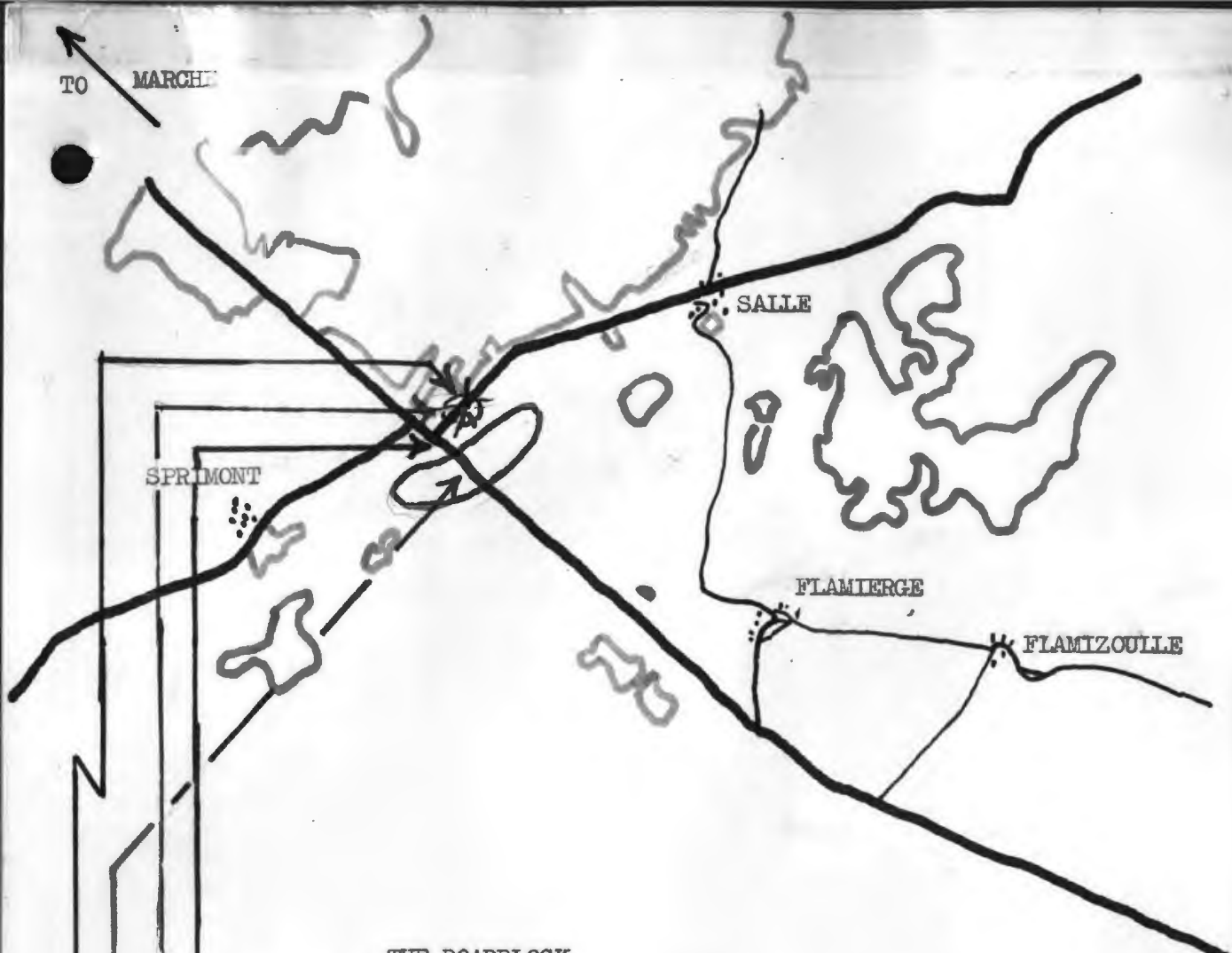
As we approached a high hill overlooking the road junction I could see the reflection in the sky of burning vehicles and hear the lonesome wail of a G.I. horn on one of the burning trucks. These two factors were a dead give away as to the location of our objective. The company went into an attack position seventy five yards in the rear of what I determined would be the line of departure. While we were doing this two men from the company sneaked down to the vehicles to ascertain the proximity of the Germans. Pfc Henry Eddy and T/5 (Now 1st Lt) Lawrence Harris reported to me and stated they were all over the vehicles and there were about sixteen trucks in number. With this information fragmentary orders were issued and the following plan was executed.

1st Lt. (now Ret.--Dis.) Selvan E. Shields platoon established a block down the South West road while T/Sgt. (now 2nd Lt.) Mike Campana established a block on the North East road. This

left a wide gap in the center of the zone of action in which was placed our base of fire. This consisted of the weapons platoon under command of T/Sgt Robert Dunnigan and the 1st rifle platoon commanded by 1st Lt. (now Capt.) John T. O'Halloran. The company headquarters under 1st Lt. Clarence J. Ryan stayed with the 1st platoon. When Sgt. Campana was in position on the right he fired two quick shots. This was the prearranged signal for the remainder of the company to open up on the Germans. One hundred percent surprise and success was ours and in a matter of minutes we had the situation well in hand. Many Germans were killed running into our roadblocks and those remaining left in wholesale route in the direction of Marche. This action was completed by 0445 the 21st of December. We made a hasty defense and I radioed back by SCR 300 through a relay set that the road junction, vehicles, and hospital were ours. Lt. Colonel Allen said to dig in and hold the road junction at all costs. The division hospital had been badly overrun. Medical tools and equipment were scattered all over the area. Not a sign of a doctor or aid man was to be found.

By 0800 we were dug in and prepared to carry out our mission as ordered. In this position we were over four thousand yards from the closest friendly troops with no artillery support until an observer from the 333rd Artillery Group reported to me. This officer was not in contact with our division artillery but offered his services in any way he could help. (See Map 2.)

TO MARCHÉ



THE ROADBLOCK

The convoy was recaptured here (28th Division)

The 101st Airborne Division Medical Company was here when overrun

The company defended the position from this relatively high ground

The enemy convoy was destroyed here on the road heading South West

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After such a humiliating counter-ambush it was only natural that the Germans were scheming a plan to recapture the road junction. By 1000 fog came in so thick that visability wasn't over thirty feet. Two Mark-V tanks rumbled towards our position from the direction of Salle. They stopped fifty yards from the road junction, pulled off the road, fired all their machine gun ammunition over our heads, waited, turned around, and left. Still we had no casualties. Apparently the Kraut tankers weren't too anxious to find out whether we were still at the junction or not after taking such a sound shellacing the night before.

Dawn brought forth a dirty grey misting day. It would be another one without the P-47's we all knew. Some men were moving about and others merely stayed in their holes cooking their K rations. I was in the Command Post when all in a sudden Hell broke loose. All the shooting was taking place in the area of the third platoon. I ran to a spot where I could see what was going on. It was a good sight--the best my eyes had seen in a long time. Those men had trapped a German convoy of nine flak wagons towing artillery pieces moving across their front. They were literally cutting it to ribbons as it sat there helplessly seventy five yards directly ahead of them. They had battle wise non-comms and they were all experts at their business. They had initially knocked out the lead vehicle and the last. The rest of them couldn't move so they picked them off one by one--at their leisure! When the last vehicle had been demolished

I notified Lt. Colonel Allen what had taken place. He was jubilant as was General McAuliffe when he got the news. Incidentally, we felt pretty good about it ourselves. (See Map 3.)

One hour later two tanks approached from the direction of Marche. A very unique anti-tank defense was worked successfully by two bazooka teams of the company on these tanks. It went something like this: The leading tank would shoot up the road toward our position. The instant that the shell would explode one rocket launcher team would rush out on the road and fire at the tank. As soon as they had fired they would rush back off the road. The tank would again fire and then the second rocket launcher team would double time out on the road and shoot. Considering that they were firing at a range of two hundred yards, I think it is quite an amazing feat that they knocked the leading tank out on the third round.

Shortly after 1200 we repulsed another probing infantry tank attack with severe losses to the enemy infantry. At this time we were ordered to pull back to the battalion perimeter some three miles to the rear. This was accomplished in thirty minutes by using the transportation we had captured at the road block.

Gentlemen, up to this time B Company had been fighting its' own miniature war with little or no concern for the welfare of the rest of the battalion or division. From a company commanders' position up to this point I frankly could see no sane reason for our having

Two rocket launcher teams
covering the road from
here

Enemy convoy knocked out
at this area

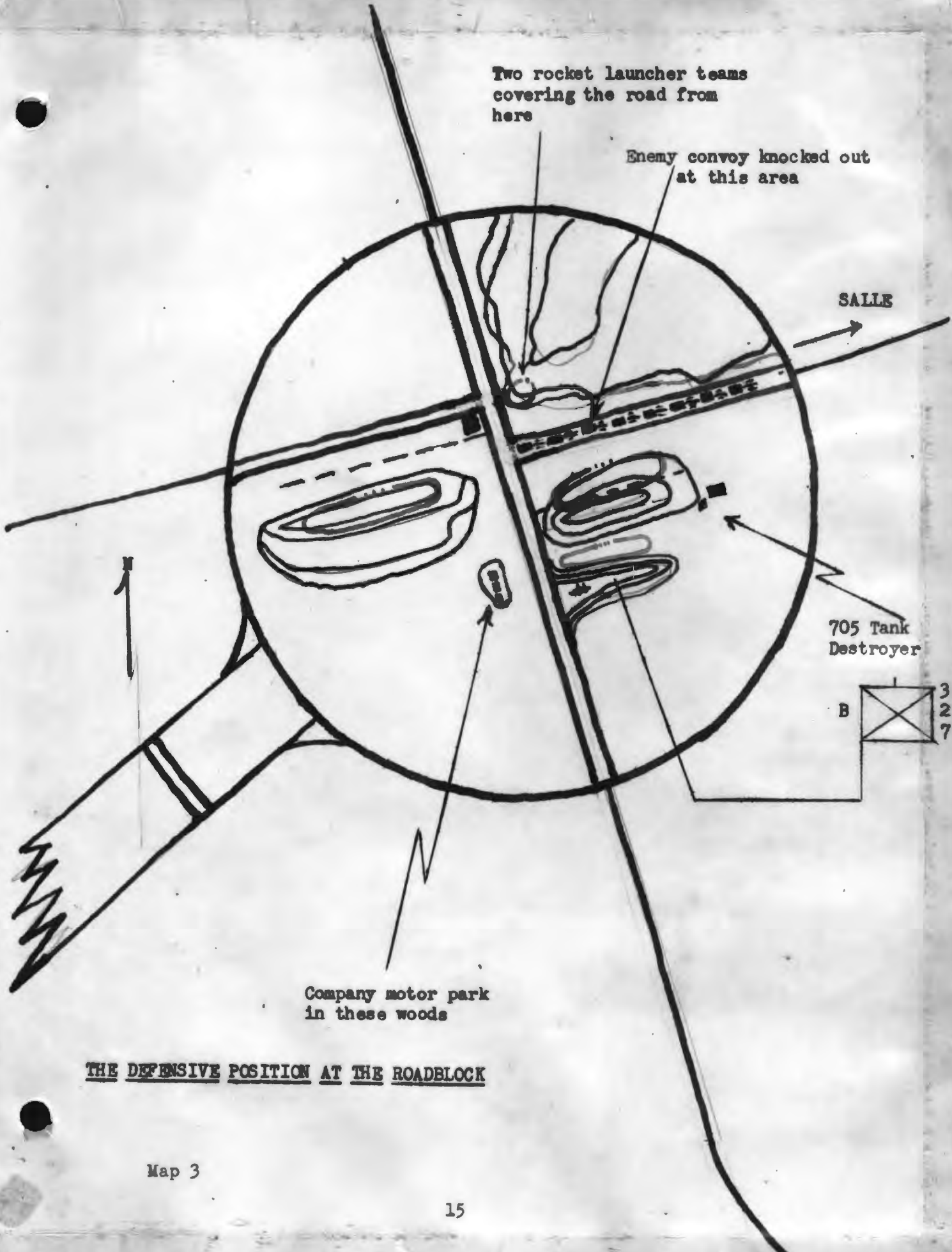
SALLR

705 Tank
Destroyer

B 3
2
7

Company motor park
in these woods

THE DEFENSIVE POSITION AT THE ROADBLOCK



been out on the mission that we had just completed for such an extended period of time. This is a dangerous state of mind for any commander to be in. It can be prevented by the senior commander telling the subordinate officer the "Why fors" of his mission. As soon as the company had closed into the reserve position I reported to the battalion commander. Lt. Colonel Allen soon enlightened me. Our company had been the furthest outpost of the division for the whole period we were there which resulted in our battalion being the only unit yet to be pushed back to the predetermined division Main Line of Resistance. Little did we realize that we had held up the 2nd Panzer Division with our company at the roadblock.³ All other units were far to our rear. Both of our flanks were exposed as well as our front. The new mission was to stay in our present positions as "long as tenable" and delay the on-slaught of the Germans from the Northwest to allow the rest of the division the maximum of time to prepare for what was to come. The Colonel issued withdrawal plans to be executed only on his order. I'd like to point out here from experience that the time to issue them is when he did--well ahead of time. So much confusion normally results during a forced withdrawal that a battalion commander has little or no time for issuing plans like these immediately before they are to be executed.

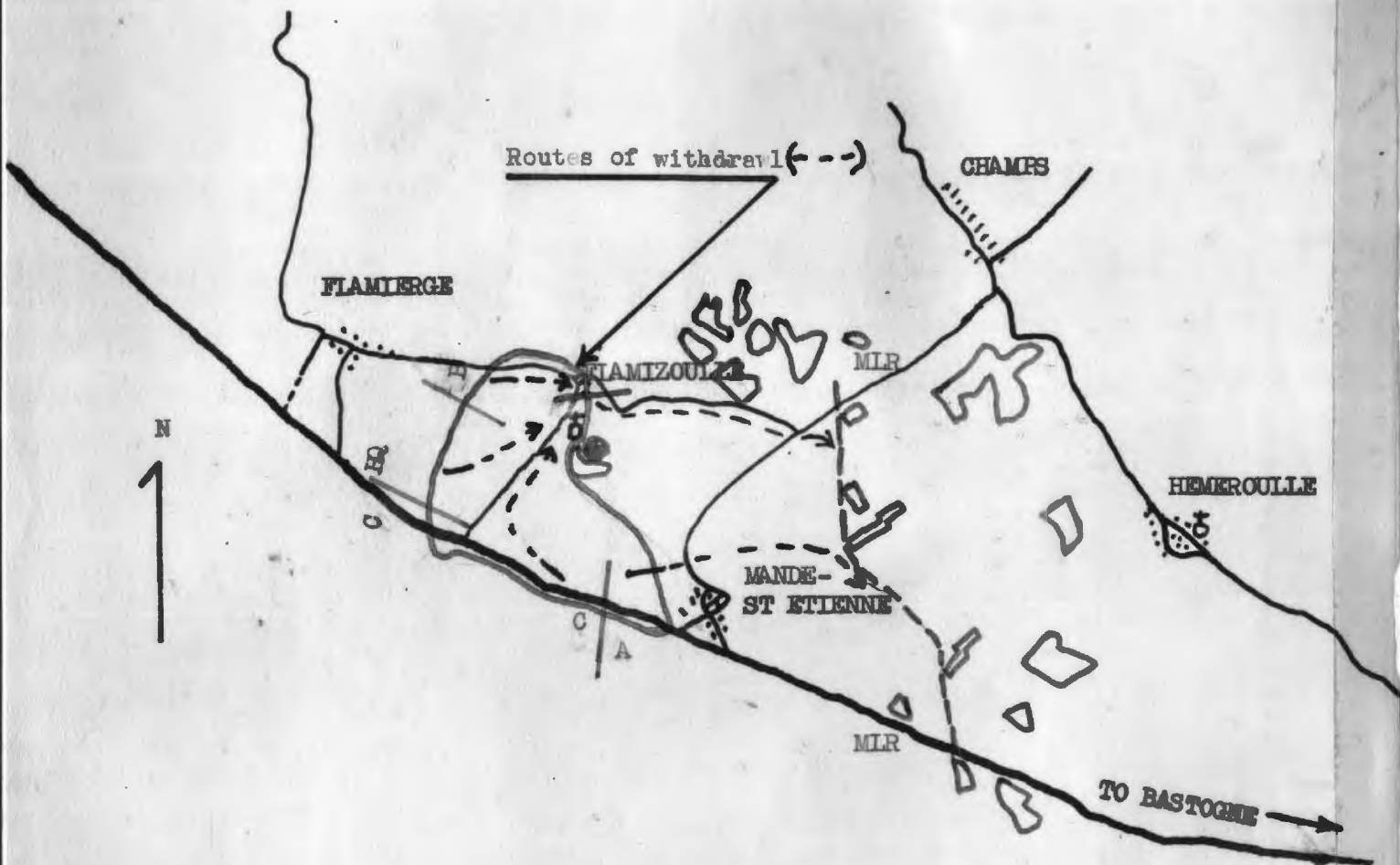
³Bastogne--The First Eight Days--SLA Marshall P.194--Infantry Journal Press--1946.

The company stayed in reserve until the next morning when we were ordered to defend strong points in the vicinity of Flamizoulle. Half of the company remained in battalion reserve. I remained with the battalion commander at the battalion command post. This is another important point for future battalion commanders to remember as by being with him I was well abreast with the situation at all times.

By dusk of the 23rd the withdrawal plan that had been issued to all commanders was put into effect. We moved back to our predetermined positions and prepared them for a lengthy stay. (See Map 4).

Remember this about withdrawals:

1. In the withdrawal an extreme amount of coordination was necessary. The plan called for B Company to be the rear guard of the battalion. A Company took a separate route independent of the rest of the battalion. Battalion Headquarters, the Heavy Weapons Company, Company C, and scattered attachments all withdraw through Flamizoulle. As German tanks had overrun a part of the C Company position they had trouble disengaging and pulling out of their area. The Heavy Weapons Company had been partially over-run also by German armored elements. The heavy machine gunners in particular had been hit very hard. These



THE WITHDRAWAL PLAN

All units withdrew through FLAMIZOULLE except Company A due primarily to the pressing enemy situation and the difficult terrain. This resulted in a dangerous bottle neck in the town.

Map 4

factors had a considerable amount of bearing on the smoothness of the execution of the withdrawal. As the troops streamed back through Flamizoulle it was necessary to exercise rigid control to prevent a rout. From this experience I will never forget the effectiveness of armor against infantry. Enemy tanks can put mortal fear into most men when they have little or no means to fight back.

2. Coordination was difficult between the different arms due primarily to lack of knowledge of various commanders on the art of using unfamiliar units. We had M-8 armored cars and a tank destroyer with us. It was hard to tie in their withdrawal with ours as we had worked very little with this type of unit. This brings up the necessity of more training in employment of combined arms to prevent what we went through on the evening of the 23rd of December.
3. Movement of supplies from one area to another was a great problem. We didn't even have the bare minimum of transportation to move the supplies with. This forced us to abandon some of the equipment and scuttle the rest.

The 24th was spent in digging in. We coordinated the fires of the Tank Destroyers with our own. All avenues of approach were

covered. The tank destroyers were kept in covered positions to prevent them being sniped at by roving Germans S-P (Self Propelled) guns. However, they did actually drive up to all firing positions, cutting trees where necessary, to assure rapid mobility when they would be called on to attack enemy armor. These routes were numbered and were made well known to all men in the company. Company A likewise used a similiar procedure. This type of use of tank destroyers was found to be most efficient and economical from our standpoint. Another advantageous feature of it was that the tank destroyer crews concurred with our plans. Feeling this way they naturally worked harder for us.

A point to remember on the 24th concerns outposts. We placed two outposts consisting of three men each on roads leading into our position. The outposts were attacked by light armored elements soon after being emplaced. The men fought as long as they could and then started to pull back to the Main Line of Resistance. The route back was barren of trees and flat as a table top. Results of this action: Loss of six men. The moral of the story is: Don't send out outposts when it is impossible for them to get back to your lines by way of a covered route of withdrawal.

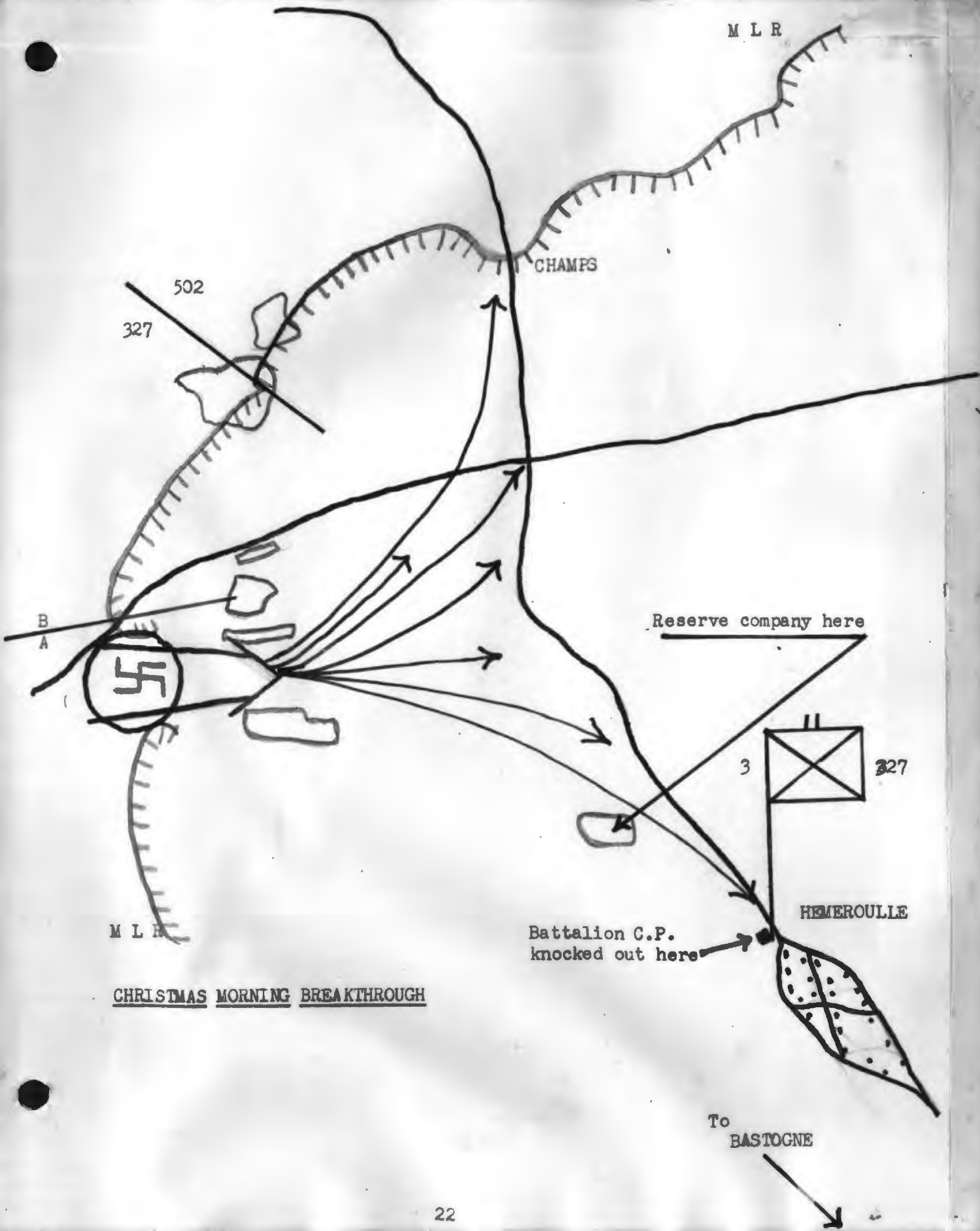
Christmas morning 1944 came peacefully. This quiet lasted for two hours. T/5 Edward Garnett, my radio operator woke me up at 0200 saying "The Krauts are attacking with lots of tanks to our left front."

It was a crystal clear wintry night. We could hear the Germans in the draw to our left front move into their attack positions. We could also hear the leaders give them the last minute "Do or Die" orders as only SS officers could do it. Then up the draw they would come. Their gas masks clanking, other equipment rattling, and all of them screaming at the top of their lungs. Attack after attack was repulsed by a small group of men under 1st Lt. (now Capt.) John Adams of A Company who had a 50 cal. machine gun as his main line of defense.

Other parts of A Company were being attacked by similiar forces. Many tanks broke through and continued on toward Bastogne.⁴ (See Map 5.) Adams was finally driven from the position he occupied adjacent to our company due to the action of flame thrower troops in conjunction with tanks. The three men who were left joined our company. Adams related to me what had happened. Captain Howard G. Bowles, the Commanding Officer, stopped all the enemy infantry but the Kraut tanks continued in their penetration of the line. The situation was becoming extremely grave for the 101st as well as our battalion.

I called Lt. Colonel Allen and told him the battalion had been penetrated as there were now about four hundred Germans in the woods formerly belonging to Company A. He ordered me to call Captain Preston E. Towns and to tell him to counter-attack in that

⁴Bastogne--The First Eight Days--SLA Marshall--P.163--Infantry
Journal Press Washington--1946.



CHRISTMAS MORNING BREAKTHROUGH

sector as he could not reach him with his SCR 300. Towns "rogered" my instructions and I heard him call Lt. Colonel Allen a minute later and inform him that he was on his way to help us. He warned the Colonel that tanks were right near his Command Post. To put it in Towns' own words "If you'll open your back door you'll be looking right down the muzzle of an 88!"⁵ The Colonel heeded Towns advice and sure enough, there they were--about fifty yards from the building.

How the Command Post group got out of that house alive is a story in itself but the spine chilling fact was that as of now our Battalion Headquarters ceased to exist. Luckily I could hear all of this scrambling taking place over the radio. I knew now that we were on our own. Having the only SCR 300 that could contact all units I took command and notified the companies what had taken place.

Captain Towns commanding Company C had made a prior reconnaissance of the penetrated area and when given the order to move into it knew exactly where and how to get there. We immediately moved our HMG's and 2½ ton truck with 50 Cal. gun over to our left flank to assist Towns. In addition the 81MM observer was putting observed fire on the front of the woods. In affect we had bottled up the Krauts. Towns was coming up from the rear, the 81's were plastering the front, and we were pouring in plenty of lead from the flank.

⁵Bostogne--The First Eight Days--SLA Marshall--P.163--Infantry
Journal Press Washington--1946.

A typical act of unrewarded heroism was when a man from C Company walked along the north edge of the woods to identify the front assaulting elements of his company. Our flanking fire was ripping up the woods 20 feet in front of this soldier all the way up to the original Main Line of Resistance.

As Towns' company forced the Germans back they ran into the 81 fire in the edge of the woods. Finally, as dawn broke the enemy panicked and attempted to cross the 300 yards of open ground to our front. They never had a chance. We had our whole front well covered with mortar barrages and as they would move from one concentration area to another we would merely shift the fires. The machine gunners were having along awaited for dream comes true. The riflemen were standing out of their holes bracing their rifles against the fir trees for better aim. Even "the old man" got a few shots in. It was a terrible bloody massacre for the German army opposite our battalion on this beautiful sunny Christmas day.

The tanks that had gone through to battalion and knocked out the Battalion Command Post were accounted for by the division 75 Pack Howitzers point blank; in fact one tank surrendered and was driven to Division Headquarters by men of the 463rd Parachute Field Artillery as a Christmas present to General McAuliffe.

It was almost noon when Major Angus called us and found out the situation. Battalion Headquarters feared the worst and was delighted and relieved when we told them we were still "in the

same damn holes." A short time later the rest of the command group was rounded up and normal command channels were reconstituted.

The rest of the day was spent in mopping up the remaining Germans in the area. The Krauts were through for the time being and spent the next twenty hours licking their wounds.

The most important thing to remember about the action on the 25th of December was that the battalion didn't fold up when the battalion command post was knocked out. One of the main reasons it didn't was that our commanding officer Lt. Colonel Allen in training us always stressed responsibility in the next higher command. If he hadn't trained us to make instantaneous sound decisions of our own who knows, perhaps some German Major would be writing this document.

We know that if subordinate commanders are trained to take over bigger jobs ahead of time units can continue to function normally under extremely adverse conditions.

By not overloading the soldier with excess equipment we know we will get a higher coefficient of performance out of him. In addition Cartoonist Mauldin has well told the story in pictures of what happens to excess items of equipment.

Controlling columns at night on roads presents a problem that can be approached by having two men actually on the highway and the remaining troops walking in the ditches with comparative safety.

The anti-tank defense procedure isn't in any Field Manual but it might be of value to you sometime. Pass it on to your company commanders in the future.

Remember gentlemen, the role of the reserve company commander is important because he can turn the tide of battle in both the defense and the attack. Don't "sell him short." In conducting successful withdrawals especially when under enemy fire much thought must be given to coordination, control, operating with unfamiliar units and the movement of the supplies.

Outposts are excellent warning systems and in many cases indispensable, but don't put them out when they have no way of getting back to the Main Line of Resistance. Let me reemphasize gentlemen, that you as commanders must realize your responsibility in the training of your subordinates to assume command in higher jobs. It will definitely have to be one of your "musts" when training troops in the future.

Every action that took place during this seven day period, gentlemen, is a barometer of what American troops can and will do if they have knowledge of tactics, confidence in their commanders and last but by no means least, an unsurpassed pride in their unit.

-----And here are some of the men that helped make
Von Runstedt's Campaign a failure.

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B/SGT L. A. HARRIS (now 1st Lt.) and 1st SGT HAROLD B. REED
Both invaluable in the operation of the Company




The "Brains" of the Third Platoon---
Platoon Sgt RICHARD GILL and Platoon Leader MIKE CAMPANA (2nd Lt.)



SUPPLY SECTION of "B" Company
PFC GEORGE MISNY, PFC AL LAWRENCE, T/5 JOHN SMITH

A black and white photograph of a soldier standing in a snowy forest. The soldier is wearing a heavy winter jacket, trousers, and a helmet. He is looking directly at the camera. The background consists of several tall, thin trees, likely birches, with snow on the ground and branches. The photograph has a white border and two punch holes on the left side.

GROVER T MILLER, PVT. COMPANY ROYNER



S/SGT KING, PFC A. F. JONES, AND SGT. KERMIT NEWSOM
1st Light Machinegun Squad, Company "B"



CAPT ROBERT J MAC DONALD, Commander of "B" Company



"They've got us surrounded, the poor bastards!" That's what a trooper of the 101st Division like these had said around Christmas Day. There doesn't seem to be much worry in these men's faces!
T/4 RALPH GARROW, PFC FLOYD SWYERS, CORPORAL JOHN F. HOTSINPELLAR,
and PFC HENRY EDDY