

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: INFANTRY BATTALION, ATTACK OF A RIVER LINE.

SCOPE: This Military Monograph covers the actions of an infantry battalion in the European Theatre of Operations during the months of October and November 1944, with particular attention to the following details:

1. Flexibility of command and control.
2. Employment of organic heavy weapons.
3. Employment of reserves.
4. Intelligence methods.
5. Weather and terrain conditions.
6. Necessity for leadership at all echelons of command.
7. Conclusions.

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## INTRODUCTION

This Military Monograph deals with an Infantry Division river crossing action. As back ground information, two preliminary attacks are also included.

During the months of September and October, 1944, the 80th Infantry Division had been engaged primarily in what amounted to local attacks. These were exclusive of the Moselle River crossings during the first half of September. Local attacks are never allotted a great deal of space in after action reports, but to the immediate units concerned they are very important. In addition, they are important to the commander as his plans for a large scale attack may depend on the results of numerous local attacks. Many small unit commanders never knew what part they were playing in the commander's plan but if there is no danger of a violation of security regulations, as much information as possible should be disseminated to these people. When they have an understanding of the mission as a whole, it enables them to see that the actions of their unit may be a key in the success or failure of the entire operation.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE ATTACK AT BOIS de MANCHE SEILLE

In late September and early October, 1944, the 1st Battalion, 318th Infantry, was fighting east of the Moselle River, in the Nancy sector. It had been attached to CCA of the 4th Armored Division and had accompanied this unit in the crossing of the Moselle and subsequent actions from Sainte Genevieve to Fresnes-en-Saulnois. The battalion later worked with units of the 4th Armored Division again at Bastogne. During the short period of time that the battalion was with CCA, the remainder of the 80th Division was engaged in heavy fighting at the Moselle River bridgehead and requested that the battalion be returned to division control. The battalion, accompanied by one company of medium tanks and under the command of Major Kimsey of CCA, returned to the 80th Division area, taking Sainte Genevieve from the rear. As this was one of the key points in the German Moselle River defense system, it relieved the pressure on the 80th Division bridgehead.

During the latter part of September, the battalion occupied positions in the Bois de Manche Seille, northeast of Landremont. The Germans occupied one part of the Bois and also the Farme de Manche Seille on commanding terrain just to the northeast and east of the battalion positions. Movement during daylight hours was restricted because of observation from a German OP at the Farme de Manche Seille. A few casualties were suffered daily from harassing artillery and mortar fire.

The Seille River, running generally northwest and southeast, would be the next major obstacle in the Division's path and as they would be moving to a general line along the river in the very near future, it was decided that the high ground in the vicinity of the Farme de Manche Seille would have to be taken first. One company, supported by a platoon of heavy machine guns, 81mm mortars and artillery, was given the mission of reducing the German positions in the woods and at the Farme de Manche Seille. To obtain the maximum amount of surprise, the company commander assigned the mission decided upon the following plan of action.

As there was a break of approximately one hundred yards in the woods at this point, two platoons were to hit the small salient held by the enemy from the flank, attacking almost due east. The other rifle platoon was to attack and take the Farme de Manche Seille. The artillery was to fire a two minute preparation on the enemy positions in the woods and the 81mm mortars were to fire on the Farme for the same period of time. The heavy machine guns were to fire on the woods for two and one-quarter minutes. Due to the proximity of the enemy positions, none being at a greater distance than approximately three hundred yards, careful coordination of all supporting fires was an absolute necessity. Organic crew-served weapons of the rifle company also supported the attack. No reserve was constituted due to the proximity of other battalion units.

At H minus two minutes on the morning of the attack, the artillery, mortars and machine guns opened up and due to the small target areas, kept enemy fires to a minimum. The 81mm mortars, firing unobserved due to the darkness, completely blanketed the target area and shells could be heard going through the tile roofs of the Farme. Projectiles breaking in the target area, kept any enemy personnel away from the doors and windows. When the artillery and mortar preparations ceased, all three rifle platoons started for their objectives at the double. The right platoon reached the Farme and cleared it with very little difficulty. The two left platoons, having a distance of approximately one hundred yards of open terrain to cross, made it without difficulty to the edge of the wooded salient held by the enemy just as the machine gun fires of the heavy weapons company ceased. The action here was short in duration but fierce and bloody. Although groggy from artillery fire, enemy troops came out of their holes fighting. The action was close and the only time to the writer's knowledge when bayonets were used to good advantage. In less than an hour, all objectives had been taken with a loss of one killed and nine wounded. Enemy losses amounted to twenty killed and forty wounded and captured. A well planned and coordinated attack had been completed with a minimum of casualties.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ATTACK ON CLEMERY

The situation remained substantially unchanged for approximately a week and then the battalion was given the mission of taking the town of Clemery as part of the regimental plan to move to the Seille River. Intermediate objectives were to be Renaissance Farme, les Quatre Fers and Benicourt. The battalion, at this time, occupied the northwest half of the Bois de Bauzard. The battalion commander planned to use two companies in the attack, keeping one in reserve and using the the fires of the heavy weapons company and the artillery to support the attack.

Able company on the left was to attack Renaissance Farme and after clearing it to bring fire on les Quatre Fers to assist Baker company in advancing from their attack positions and taking les Quatre Fers. The heavy weapons of Dog company and the artillery were to concentrate on both places initially. Charlie company in reserve, would follow Baker company. After the above intermediate objectives had been cleared, Able and Baker companies would attack abreast. Baker company would be responsible for clearing the town of Benicourt and Able company would clear the woods southwest of Clemery. Both companies would then attack and clear Clemery simultaneously. After Renaissance Farme and les Quatre Fers had been secured, both machine gun platoons of the heavy weapons company would become attached to Able and Baker companies. The 81mm mortars, being able to support the entire attack from their present positions, and the artillery would lift their fires to Benicourt and Clemery successively, on call.

H-hour was set for 0630 and the attack moved out as scheduled. A particularly heavy fog overhung the area on this particular morning and with the smoke from fires, shortened visibility to a few hundred yards. However, the first two intermediate objectives were taken without too much difficulty and the attacking echelons moved on to their next objectives. Enemy artillery fire was heavy but due to the poor visibility, mostly unobserved. Benicourt was heavily defended and, as Able company had been meeting light resistance, they were able to give Baker company some assistance in clearing it. About this time, the fog began to lift and Able company started to receive heavy fire from the woods to the southwest of Clemery, their next objective. Baker company supported them from the vicinity of Benicourt and Able succeeded in reaching the woods, except for one platoon which was pinned down by heavy fire from Clemery. As the platoon leader had been wounded, it was not possible to get them moving immediately and enemy mortar fire murdered them where they lay, at a range of approximately 500 yards. This more than proved the point to the majority of the battalion that it is much better to keep moving in the open rather than to remain in an exposed position. The majority of the day's casualties were suffered in this area.

A slight change in plan was made at this point due to the amount of enemy fire being received from the town of Clemery. Instead of attacking simultaneously, Able company would bring fire on Clemery from their positions in the woods while Baker company moved from the outskirts of Benicourt into Clemery. Able company would then move out, hitting the town from the flank. This move was successful and the town cleared except for about fifty SS troops who had barricaded themselves in a chateau. The walls of this chateau were about eight feet thick and the windows were equipped with heavy, steel shutters. As this area was surrounded by an eight foot wall, supporting tanks were brought up to fire on the chateau and after firing some twenty or thirty rounds through the steel shutters, caused the last resistance in the town to fall.

The battalion commander, by keeping well forward, by keeping abreast of the situation, having a simple but flexible plan of attack, and by using part of his attacking echelon in support was able to push the attack to a swift and successful conclusion in a minimum of time, with a minimum of casualties.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE SEILLE RIVER CROSSING

For a period of approximately a week following the attack on Clemery, the battalion occupied defensive positions in this area and then moved into regimental reserve in the vicinity of Lixieres. Although the battalion was resting and refitting, very little of the time spent in reserve was wasted. Many replacements were received during this period and at least half of every day, regardless of weather conditions, was used for intensive training in river crossings, village and woods fighting. The purpose of this training was to correct costly errors noted in past actions. The flow of men in the replacement pipeline was slow and this training also served as a refresher course for the new individuals in the organization. It was quite difficult for many of the personnel to realize the importance of this but it is a well known fact that if men are occupied, their morale remains high. Many of the principles stressed here, were proven to be of value later on. It also afforded an opportunity for new men in the units to be integrated into their particular organizations and to obtain many helpful bits of information from the more seasoned individuals.

After approximately a week in reserve, the battalion moved to positions on the Seille River, to the east of Clemery about four thousand yards, in the vicinity of la Borde Farme and due south of Nomeny. The battalion was in a very exposed position and as the weather was miserable, constant rain and cold, it was difficult to maintain a high state of morale. In addition, any movement during daylight hours was sure to draw enemy fire. The battalion was later brought back into regimental reserve for a four day break and then, just prior to the 8th of November, 1944, moved back into their former positions in front of Nomeny. Shortly after moving into position, the battalion commander received a warning order to prepare for an attack across the Seille River.

The battalion commander immediately instituted a detailed map and visual reconnaissance of the probable area of attack and had all officers and a few of the key non-coms make detailed reconnaissances from the edge of the Bois dit le Bouras, to the south and east of the battalion's present position. The best observation in the area could be obtained from this position. Some of the enemy's dispositions across the river had been previously located by visual reconnaissance, patrols, prisoners, information obtained from higher intelligence echelons and from a detailed study of an excellent aerial photo obtained for the battalion by regiment. Gradually, a fair idea of the enemy's defensive dispositions began to take shape.

On 7 November, 1944, the battalion commander was called back to regiment and issued the regimental attack order. The zone of attack allotted to the battalion by regiment was approximately one thousand to fifteen hundred yards east of their present positions and consisted of a salient extending into our positions, caused by a large bend in the Seille River. This salient was approximately fifteen hundred yards wide at the point nearest our positions and narrowing to approximately five hundred yards at the shoulders. The initial objective was the town of Maily sur Seille, a distance of approximately thirty-three hundred yards. An intermediate objective decided upon by the battalion commander was the high ground in the vicinity le Height de Colia.

In the remaining hours of daylight, the battalion commander made a thorough reconnaissance and examined all available intelligence reports for any possible additional information. The river was fast approaching flood stage and this was a very disturbing factor. After comparing past and present intelligence items, battalion objectives, possible attack positions, enemy strong points, possible avenues of approach into the enemy positions, positions and targets for supporting weapons and location of the line of departure, the battalion commander decided to issue his attack order at his CP, due to the time element involved.

All company commanders and all officers of the heavy weapons company were called to the battalion CP. A tentative plan had been formulated by the battalion commander and he discussed this in great detail with the members of his staff and the unit commanders. After completing his estimate and reaching his decision, orders were issued orally to all unit commanders concerned.

The general situation was given, including all information pertinent to the enemy that was available. All pertinent information of friendly troops was also disseminated at this time. Elements of the Sixth Armored Division, with the assistance of dismounted troops, had the mission of clearing the town of Nomeny, a critical point on the battalion's left flank.

Missions were then assigned to each subordinate unit within the battalion and details of coordination and support discussed. The attitude of the battalion commander, his insistence as to intensive patrolling thereby resulting in detailed enemy information and his proven ability helped to instill confidence in his subordinate leaders. No information was withheld that might be of value to his unit commanders.

Charlie and Baker companies were to cross simultaneously at the nose of the salient, Baker company on the left and about two hundred yards downstream from Charlie company. Both companies would use rubber boats obtained from the engineers. The battalion commander did not want to cross at the nose of the salient but had been ordered to do so by the regimental commander. Able company would be in reserve originally. The 81mm mortars of the heavy weapons company would support the attack from their present positions, about one thousand yards south of la Borde Ferme. The heavy machine guns of the heavy weapons company, one platoon in support of Baker company and one in support of Charlie company, would use overhead fire during the initial stages of the attack. They would then cross on foot bridges prepared by the engineers to support their respective companies from positions on the other side of the river. The battalion anti-tank platoon would revert to regimental control at the time of the attack and until such time as they could cross and rejoin the battalion. After crossing, Baker company was to continue along the left flank of the battalion zone and cut the roads leading out of Nomeny. Charlie company was to continue straight through to the high ground to the front and then on to the town of Maily sur Seille. The 81mm mortars of the heavy weapons would displace forward by section as soon as new positions had been selected on the other side of the river.

All personnel would carry one days field ration, type K, and as near double their basic load of ammunition as possible. The drivers from the heavy weapons company would, as soon as the crossing of the river was established, set up an ammunition supply point on the far side of the river. Communication would be by voice radio, radio silence being maintained until the attack jumped off, the battalion commander being at his OP initially.

The unit commanders returned to their units and alerted them for the move to the attack positions. Final plans of coordination were prepared by the machine gun platoon leaders of the heavy weapons company and the company commanders of the units they were to support. Each had confidence in the other as they had previously worked together many times.

On too many occasions during the past war, it was proven that many battalion commanders did not know how to exploit fully the supporting weapons within his own organization. Many times their value was lost through attachment to rifle companies when they should have been employed in support. Their use is definitely limited when pinned down with front line rifle platoons.

Through experience, the heavy weapons unit commanders had found that by making some minor changes in equipment within the unit they could better support the rifle elements of the battalion. With the consent of the battalion commander and through the ingenuity of the battalion supply and communications officers, the following changes had been made. SCR-300 radios were obtained for each platoon in the heavy weapons company and four light machine guns were obtained for each machine gun platoon. The machine gun platoon leader, by staying with the CP group of the rifle company he was supporting, could leave his platoon generally one terrain feature to the rear. If the rifle company was pinned down, the machine gun platoon was far enough to the rear so that they could maneuver into a position to assist them. The platoon leader, by using the rifle company commander's SCR-300 radio could call his platoon sergeant, equipped with the platoon's SCR-300, and have him move into a supporting position. The platoon leader could observe and control his fire and generally ease the pressure on the rifle company. This was found to be a very effective method of employment but was unreliable when using SCR-536 radios. With proper maintenance the SCR-536 radio can be utilized with good results but time, equipment and personnel are not always available.

The light machine guns were requisitioned for use in the attack as it was found that, due to the condition of the ground caused by weather, it was almost impossible for men to hand-carry heavy weapons and maintain the same pace as rifle elements in a fast moving situation. By improvising in this manner, close and continuous support was always available to the rifle company commander and it is believed that units in other divisions also improvised in the same manner with excellent results.

The artillery forward observers with the battalion had, through constant prior observation, plotted many possible enemy targets and assigned concentration numbers to them. In addition, all officers in the battalion had been thoroughly schooled in artillery methods of adjustments and would be able to call for fires if necessary.

The supporting engineers reported to the battalion commander and details of the crossing sites were discussed. A bridge across the river would be of vital importance after the initial crossing. A flooded stream can cause an operation to fail due to lack of proper logistical support.



During the early morning hours of 8 November, 1944, units prepared to move to attack positions. A hot meal was brought up as far as possible by quarter-ton truck and then hand carried to company areas by carrying parties. At the same time, a complete field ration, type K, was issued to each man. Individual rolls were brought to the rear by each man as the units moved out and there tied into squad bundles and left in platoon piles. Ammunition distributing points for each company were set up in this area and as each platoon filed through, they were issued as much additional ammunition as they could carry. Heavy weapons machine guns were placed in the weapons carriers and each squad obtained it's light machine gun from It's vehicle. All had been checked and test fired by the armorer and artificer at battalion rear during the previous twenty-four hours. All units arrived in their attack positions without incident in time to make a last minute check before moving out and were met at that point by the engineers, equipped with assault boats.

The machine guns of the heavy weapons company were set up in previously prepared positions and laid by compass, the azimuth and range having been previously determined to targets by map. This is not the most accurate method but guns could not be laid during daylight hours due to the exposed position. Mortar observers were already in previously selected observation posts.

At H minus 10, it seemed as though all the artillery in the world opened up at the same time. For miles to either flank in the battalion's rear, the sky seemed to be aflame. The same situation seemed to exist on the enemy or north side of the river where our fires were landing.

The assault companies crossed the line of departure at H-hour and soon were ferrying across the river, now swollen far beyond it's normal size. Ropes were used for drawing the boats back and forth across the stream. After approximately fifty percent of the assaulting companies had been ferried across, enemy artillery and mortar fire became intense but both companies managed to get across with only minor casualties. As soon as their crossings were complete, overhead machine gun fire was lifted. Both machine gun platoons then moved out to make their crossings, the platoon supporting Baker company using boats and the platoon supporting Charlie company moving upstream to cross on the engineer's footbridge. The left platoon's crossing was successful but the right platoon had difficulty, due to the fact that the engineer's attempt to get the bridge in had been unsuccessful. The platoon leader exercising his own initiative, moved downstream and succeeded in locating Charlie company's boats, even though it had not become light enough to see more than a few feet and made his crossing at this point.

Baker company and it's supporting machine gun platoon managed to move to the left and then proceeded along the left flank of the battalion zone for a distance of several hundred yards against light resistance. Their advance was then halted by very heavy fire from the left flank, in the vicinity of Fallicourt le Fauberg and Nomeny, both of which were out of the battalion zone. From this point on, their advance was slow but they did manage to reach and cut the routes leading east and north out of Nomeny. In this action they suffered considerable casualties, including two platoon leaders.

The machine gun platoon supporting Charlie company, after making it's crossing, had been unable to contact Charlie company who had already moved out. The platoon leader divided his platoon, sending one section under the command of the platoon sergeant over the nose of the high ground formed by the salient in the river. Taking the other section, he proceeded around the right flank formed by the salient in the river. As soon as it became light enough for observation, he was brought under heavy fire from the high ground to the north, in the vicinity of the road running east out of Nomeny. This forced him to withdraw around a small shoulder of ground where some cover would be provided

No contact had as yet been made with Charlie company by the platoon leader but very heavy enemy machine gun fire could be heard from the high ground immediately to his left and towards the center of the battalion zone. Leaving the section concealed in a brushed over trail or dry stream bed and accompanied by the section sergeant, the platoon leader made his way to the high ground to his left, coming out directly behind an enemy machine gun position, which was immediately destroyed by the section sergeant and the platoon leader. Three other machine gun positions in the area were destroyed in a like manner, relieving some of the pressure on Charlie company. They had been receiving considerable enemy machine gun, mortar and artillery fire while trying to advance through the center of the salient. Charlie company continued the advance taking considerable casualties, including all but one platoon leader. Reaching a point due east of Fallicourt le Fauberg, Charlie company was halted again by heavy fire from the above named town and from pillboxes in the vicinity of le Height de Colia. At this time, if a counter-attack had been received, it is quite possible that the battalion would have been forced to retire to the south bank of the river. The machine gun platoon supporting Charlie company had gone into position and opened fire on the pillboxes but were immediately brought under heavy and accurate mortar fire and forced out of action. Baker company, heavily engaged, were running short of ammunition.

The battalion commander who had crossed the river, accompanied by the S-3, the heavy weapons company commander and the artillery liaison officer in an attempt to get the battalion moving again were caught in a heavy mortar barrage and the heavy weapons company commander was wounded. Enemy resistance had so depleted the attacking force and room for maneuver was so restricted that the battalion commander decided to commit his reserve. The situation was so serious that even though a direct flank attack would not be possible, the reserve company could possibly be committed between Baker and Charlie companies. Attempts to re-supply Baker company with ammunition from the ammunition supply point on the north or enemy side of the river had been partially successful. Evacuation of wounded was almost impossible and some men had been hit a second time while lying in exposed positions. Approximately fifty percent of the aid men had been wounded but the remainder were continually busy taking care of the more seriously injured.

The reserve company managed to cross without too much difficulty and by staying close to the river to the left of the zone, made their way forward to positions from which they could attack the lower section of le Height de Colia, and relieve the pressure on the assault companies. The reserve company was successful in its mission, taking considerable casualties in the process. The company commander and one other officer were wounded. They did succeed in reducing one pillbox.

Charlie company was able to reorganize and provide some support for the reserve company in their attack. The reserve company then provided support for Charlie company to move out and secure the road running east out of Nomeny. All units were running short of ammunition but were unable to resupply at this time.

The artillery forward observers managed to get artillery fire on le Height de Colia. Elements of the reserve and Charlie company launched a coordinated attack and managed to clear the high ground and reduce the remaining pillbox. The artillery had been placing fire on the enemy strong points all day but they were of such strong construction that they had stood several direct hits. Smoke was not used due to the direction and velocity of the wind. If conditions had been favorable, it no doubt would have influenced the action to a great extent.

At 1700, the battalion held the high ground along le Height de Colia and were immediately counter-attacked by an enemy force approximately a company and a half in strength. This counter-attack was repulsed and as darkness was falling, the battalion commander requested and received permission from the regimental commander to organize his present position for defense and continue the attack the next morning.

By 1800, a coordinated defensive plan had been put into effect. Nomeny, which elements of the 6th Armored Division and the unit on the battalion's left had been given the mission of clearing, had not been taken so Baker company continued to block the routes leading east and northeast out of the town, their right flank being completely exposed. Able, the reserve company, would extend from Baker's left, along the high ground northeast in the direction of le Height de Colia. Charlie company would extend from Able's right, organizing leHeight de Colia and cutting the road running south from the town of Mailly sur Seille. The total frontage covered by the battalion was approximately twenty-two hundred yards with about fifty percent of it's normal strength, the remainder being casualties. To constitute a reserve, one section of heavy machine guns were withdrawn and emplaced just north of the road running east out of Nomeny. From this position they could cover the withdrawal of the units occupying the high ground overlooking Mailly sur Seille in the eventuality of a severe enemy counter-attack. A small reserve but something with which the battalion commander could influence the action in event of a counter-attack.

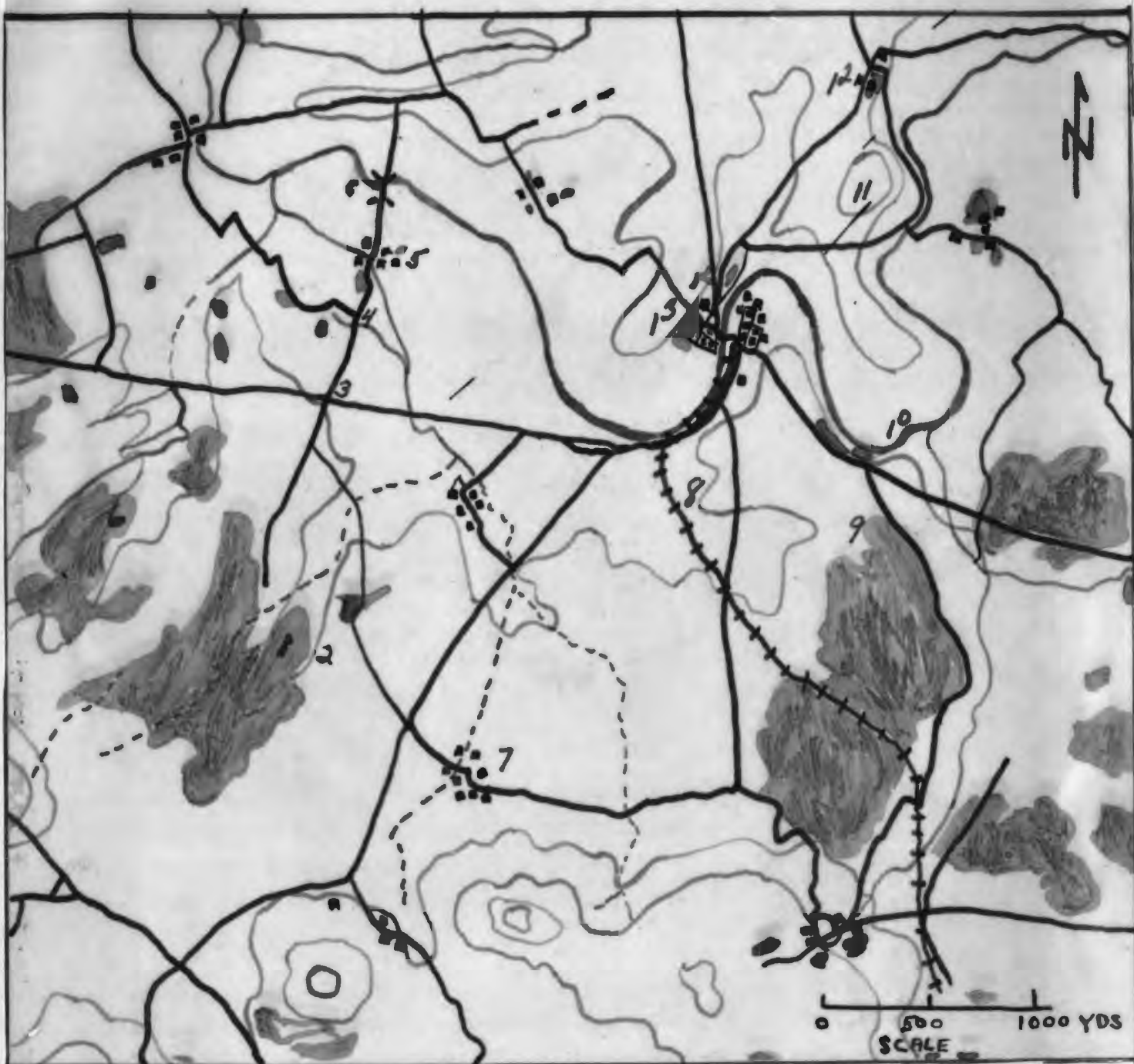
The night passed without further incident except for heavy but unobserved enemy artillery and mortar fire. The next morning the battalion continued the attack against fairly light resistance. Nomeny was not cleared until the afternoon of 9 November 1944.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS

A grave tactical error was committed in not allowing the battalion commander to attack at the shoulders of the salient rather than attacking at the point of deepest penetration. Had crossing sites been closer to the neck of the salient, fewer enemy defenses might have been met, the length of time to reduce the salient shortened and fewer casualties sustained. When an attack loses its forward momentum and is threatened with failure, the commander and members of his staff must get forward and influence the action. A plan of attack must be flexible to meet unexpected situations. Timing is important in considering the committing of the reserve. Intelligence estimates of enemy strength and morale must be accurate. Frontal attacks against strongly held enemy positions must be avoided, when possible. Non-commissioned officers must receive thorough leadership training. Officers often become casualties early in the action and non-coms must be prepared to assume command. All personnel must be imbued with the will to continue the attack, even against seemingly insurmountable opposition.





1. Bois de Manche Seille
2. Ferme de Manche Seille
3. les Quatre Fers
4. Benicourt
5. Clemery
6. Bois de Bauzard
7. Lixieres

8. la Borde Ferme
9. Bois dit le Bouras
10. Crossing site
11. le Height de Colia
12. Mailly sur Seille
13. Nomeny





