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THE CARENTAN CAUSEWAY FIGHT

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THE CARENTAN CAUSEWAY FIGHT

The attack of the 502ND PARACHUTE INFANTRY across the CARENTAN CAUSEWAY on 9, 10 and 11 June, 1944, broke the back of the German defense of that city. Practically no records were kept by the Regiment or by either of the two Battalions which engaged. Had a reconstruction not been undertaken by means of the Group Interview method, there would have been little of record to memorialize the event. The reconstruction was begun with COLONEL COLE and all of his surviving officers and men present. It was the first time that the attempt was made by History Section to interview an entire Battalion at one time. The nature of the action made this necessary. Such diffusion had occurred during the attack that all of the companies were mixed and scarcely one squad was able to stay together. The interview was begun in a NORMANDY apple orchard near CHERBOURG on 8 July, 1944. It was the first group interview to be held on French soil. When rain broke up the assembly, the Battalion marched one-half mile and the interview was then continued in a horse barn. That night, after a march bivouac, the work was resumed, and it was extended into the next two days while the Battalion was still on march and after it had boarded an LST bound for England. There were two more full Battalion assemblies at CHILTON FOLIAT, ENGLAND. So that in all, it was necessary to form the Battalion six times to complete its portion of the narrative. In the case of FIRST BATTALION, 502ND INFANTRY, however, it was not necessary to hold

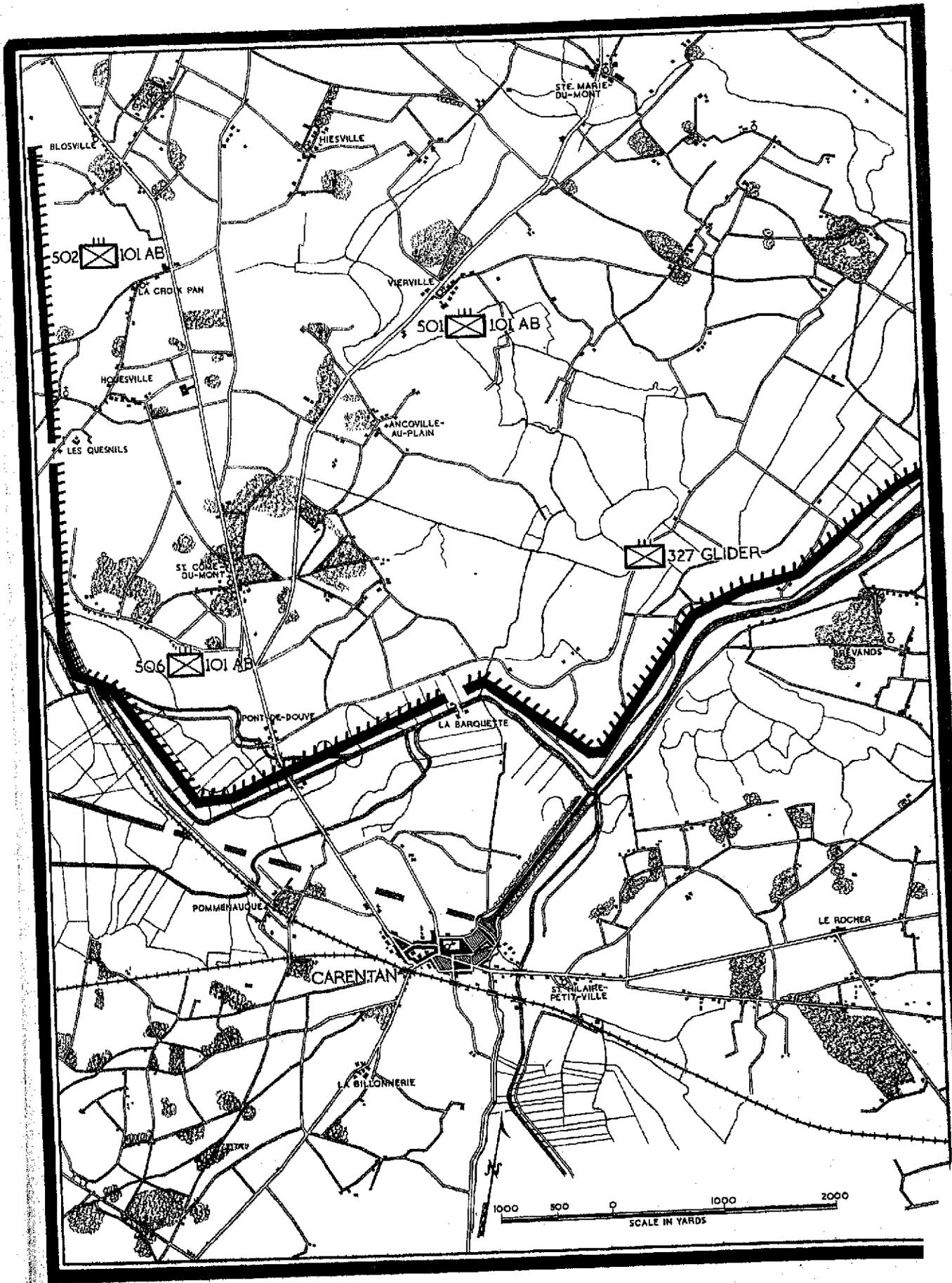
a Battalion formation. COLONEL CASSIDY'S men, coming forward into the action some hours after COLONEL COLE'S THIRD BATTALION, remained fairly well collected according to platoons and squads. The various groups knew very little about the action of any other group and each composed a separate story. They were therefore interviewed as groups and when the work was complete, it became possible to put together the many interlocking pieces in this strange story. Each group interview took place with the Battalion Commander and his Staff present. Throughout the period of these assemblies, it was necessary to check back to the Division Commander and his Staff and the Regimental Commander and his Staff to confirm or correct all such statements of situation or decision as would be more accurately known at the higher levels. It was also necessary to interview COLONEL SINK and his Staff of the 506TH REGIMENT as to the reconnaissance which preceded the advance of the 502ND REGIMENT. While still in France, the Historical Officer went over the ground with COLONEL COLE (Later KIA in HOLLAND.) An additional reconnaissance of the CAUSEWAY and the farm house and fields was made some months later.

S.L.A. MARSHALL
Col, GSC

THE SITUATION

By 2200 on 8 June, 1944, the 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION had completed all of the missions initially assigned it in OPERATION NEPTUNE and was holding a defensive position along the western and southern limits of the area where it had engaged the enemy during the first three days. The 501ST PARACHUTE REGIMENT was assembled in the vicinity of VIERVILLE as Division reserve. The 506TH PARACHUTE REGIMENT held a line from LES QUESNILS along the DOUVE RIVER to LA BARQUETTE. The sector of the 502ND PARACHUTE REGIMENT ran northward from LES QUESNILS and the sector of the 327TH GLIDER REGIMENT extended from LA BARQUETTE to the mouth of the DOUVE. The defensive position had been consolidated and orders had been issued by the Division Commander for the 327TH REGIMENT to cross the DOUVE at 0100 next morning and move to the high ground around BREVANDS. The Corps Engineers brought forward assault boats along concealed routes during the day. (These facts are from statements by GENERAL TAYLOR and his G3.)

This was the beginning of the operation against CARENTAN. On the afternoon of 8 June, however, an Engineer reconnaissance party looked the ground over and reported to the Division Commander that an advance from the north, along the main highway out of ST COME DU MONT, might be possible: it was a first view which gradually changed the whole form of the operation. (From COL MICHAELIS.)

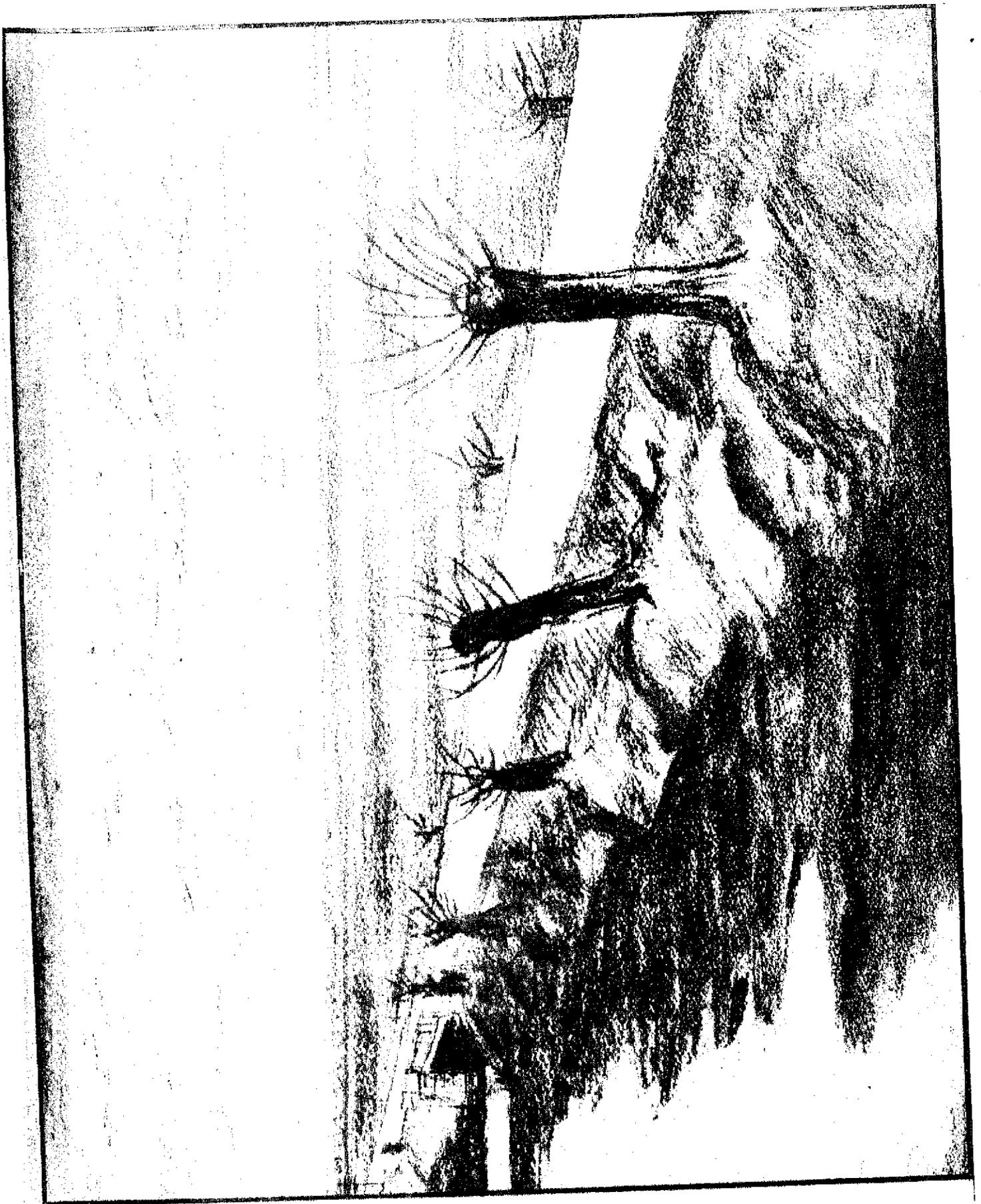


The chief obstacle to attack in that direction was that the highway crossed a wide stretch of marsh just before entering CARENTAN. For more than one-half mile the route was a coverless defile. After pushing the enemy out of ST COME DU MONT, the 506TH REGIMENT had out-posted the eastern abutment and the first two bridges of this CAUSEWAY. On the afternoon of 9 June, COL ROBERT SINK, the Regimental Commander, went up to look things over and found that the lieutenant in charge of the outpost had put his men in the houses at PONT DE DOUVE and left the bridges uncovered. SINK asked why and was told: "The outfit which we relieved kept their men here, so I did the same." SINK replied: "God damn it! You get your men up there now." He then went ahead with his party — 9 men. At first they drew no fire. At the second bridge, which had been demolished by the enemy, they found an old bateau a short way up the stream, took some two-by-fours for paddling and rowed across the stream. There was still no fire. Just beyond the third bridge on the right side of the road there is a 30-yard stretch which is peculiarly barren of trees or any foliage. As they moved from the bridge into this clearing, they drew strong machine gun fire from the swamp off to their right and from the solid ground ahead. SINK "recognized it unmistakably" as the fire of American machine guns. Still doubtful whether the troops were friendly, he put up orange smoke. Promptly, he got orange smoke back from the area ahead. The fire quieted momentarily, then blazed more strongly than ever. SINK then withdrew the patrol, leaving two men on the far side of the ruined bridge.

The bullet fire was so heavy at the gap that half of the party decided to swim for it. SINK and two others went in the bateau; to get out of the rain of bullets from upstream and speed the boat along, SINK used his arms as paddles while the other men plied their crude paddles. There was heavy fire as they ducked across the first bridge. At PONT DE DOUVE, SINK found his lieutenant gone. The men said he had moved out to ask for artillery fire to counter the German machine guns. SINK called Division and told them what had happened. He said: "We put up orange smoke and they raised hell with us. If they're Americans, they ought to be shot." (SINK'S account of what happened to him.) But as this intelligence was relayed to 502ND REGIMENT, its substance was that "SINK put out orange smoke and was lightly fired on. The town seems to be lightly held." (From MICHAELIS and CAPT HENRY G. PLITT, his S3.) That same afternoon, LIEUT RALPH B. GEHAUF, S2 of 502ND REGIMENT, THIRD BATTALION, made a route reconnaissance past CARENTAN in an L-4 plane, looking for the best road to LA BILLONNERIE, which was to be the Battalion objective. He obtained no positive information about enemy dispositions around CARENTAN and there was thus nothing to offset the G2 estimate that CARENTAN was held by less than one Battalion. (GEHAUF and DANAHY, G2.)

THE GROUND

The CP of 502ND REGIMENT was near LA CROIX PANS, about 4½ miles



northeast of CARENTAN. At about 2100 on 9 June, Division ordered Third Battalion to attack toward CARENTAN, moving on such a schedule that it would reach Bridge Number 2—the ruined bridge—at around 0300. The asphalt highway from LA CROIX PANS to CARENTAN is quite straight, about 40 feet wide and with a strong dirt shoulder. It has the same solid character where it becomes a CAUSEWAY crossing the marshes at the confluence of the DOUVE and JOURDAN RIVERS. The road runs along levelly for the entire distance with its crown about 6-to-9 feet above the surface of the water, depending on whether the salt marsh is full or draining. The marsh extends both ways from the road for more than rifle shot distance. Reeds and marsh grasses cover the water surface but the growth is not thick enough to provide more than the scantiest screening cover for men moving along the CAUSEWAY embankment. Out in the swamp to the westward, between the CAUSEWAY and the railroad, there are a few large hammocks of fairly solid ground which might accommodate a machine gun or a few riflemen, who would have fair concealment. On this side, the CAUSEWAY embankment falls away sharply to the edge of the water. A rifleman may walk along this bank, perhaps stumbling and slipping into the water occasionally. But he may not do more than that. There is not enough dirt on the right embankment to permit troops to dig in. The embankment of the left is wider and does not fall away as steeply. A man may burrow in there with a spade, or even cut a two-man foxhole running back into the bank. Even so, the foxholes would be open to flanking fire.

There is no concealment along the road itself: it is naked to fire from any direction. The drainage ditches which run along the embankment are only a few inches deep.

The four bridges along the CAUSEWAY are simple, single-span affairs. The DOUVE, the JOURDAN and the canals all run with fair swiftness and are deep-to-drowning. But all are narrow streams. The Germans had put up roadblocks at Bridges 2 and 4. (Testimony of French witnesses at PONT DE DOUVE.) They were of heavy concrete posts about 4 feet by 4 feet. Iron gates of heavy design and great weight had been fixed to the posts with steel cables. The demolition of Bridge Number 2 had eliminated one of these blocks but on Bridge Number 4, the barrier still blocked the rightofway.

What most threatened the approach by our troops, however, was the complete exposure of the CAUSEWAY. Running straight as a die and standing boldly above the marsh, it was a high-perfect target to the enemy from three directions. Snipers might hide in the reeds on either side. Artillery could put it under fire for its entire length. From the solid ground beyond the marshes, automatic guns could be disposed along the crests and hedgerows where they would be 20 feet above the level of the CAUSEWAY and in line to rake either embankment. (Data from the reconnaissance.)

These were the risks which had to be accepted. The stunted

poplars along the CAUSEWAY banks were hardly leafed at all and were too thin to provide any cover. Bridge Number 2 was still down, and before the infantry could move up, a way had to be found to cross the water. Why the enemy had not destroyed all bridges remained a mystery to our commanders. (MICHAELIS and COLE.)

The mission of Third Battalion was to seize and occupy HILL 30 near LA BILLONNERIE and so cut off the enemy line of withdrawal from CARENTAN. Enroute to this objective, it was to by-pass

THE OVER-ALL PLAN

the city. The over-all plan envisaged that CARENTAN would be taken by 327TH GLIDER INFANTRY which had started crossing the mouth of the DOUVE at 0145 on 9 June and had taken heavy losses from our own mortar fire. The crossing was completed by 0600 on 10 June. The 327TH then went on to within 500 yards of CARENTAN where it came under 88 mm fire, was checked and got no farther. (327TH Journal and interview with COL HARPER.) Too, it was expected that elements of 29TH DIVISION, coming up from the south, would be moving toward LA BILLONNERIE at about the same time and that Third Battalion might meet them there. Such were the prospects as 502ND REGIMENT moved toward its assignment.

About one-half hour before dark on 9 June, CAPT HENRY G. PLITT, the Regimental S3, was told that an alternate route might be required for the advance and that it would have to be specific

by 0300. He took a Piper Cub from HOUESVILLE and scouted the railway line south of the DOUVE. The hour was 2130 and there was just enough light left for his purpose. Flying at 1500 feet, he could see the bridge over the JOURDAN-DOUVE confluence and he noted that the bridge looked passable for foot troops. However, upon circling from southwest to east and coming back along the railway line, he saw that a 10-yard section of the CAUSEWAY and track had been blown out cleanly at 376-855. The plane flew back and forth above CARENTAN for about 30 minutes, but received no fire. On returning to the Regiment, PLITT reported that: (1) The railway line was not a feasible route of advance, and (2) CARENTAN had been evacuated. (From PLITT.) In consequence, it was decided that the whole Regiment would go forward, with the other two Battalions following the Third. They duly reached the assembly area at ST COME DU MONT at about 0530 on 10 June. The Third Battalion was already going forward when PLITT got back. It had no chance to learn that he believed the enemy would not fight for CARENTAN. (COLE)

Moreover, Third Battalion quickly established that PLITT was wrong about the German intentions. The infantry had been told that the 326TH ENGINEER BATTALION would repair the 12-foot gap

THE NIGHT PLAN FAILS

in Bridge Number 2 at around midnight and the structure would be solid when time came for the infantry to go forward. LIEUT COL ROBERT G. COLE moved his men out at 0145. One and one-half

hours previous, LIEUT GEHAUF, having completed his airplane reconnaissance, had taken off on a road reconnaissance. The night was fair and a thin mist partly obscured the full moon. (GEHAUF) With GEHAUF were 10 men under SGT ROBERT P. O'REILLY — six from the regular reconnaissance section and four others from Headquarters Company. They were armed with pistols and rifles.

The party reached the ruined bridge at 0130. There were no Engineers at work but there were bridge beams, ropes and other materiel piled along the bank. Several Engineers were under FIRST CONTACT cover near the bridge. They told GEHAUF'S men that an 88 mm gun had found their range and compelled them to quit work. (GEHAUF and his men.) The infantrymen saw no dead or wounded and heard no fire. Finding a small boat along the embankment, they crossed the stream, three men at a time. As they crossed the 88 opened fire again and dropped 8 rounds in their vicinity. From the far bank, they proceeded single file, five men on each side of the road, past the third bridge and to Bridge Number 4 where the iron gate stopped them. They could budge one end of it about 18 inches and they managed to wriggle through, one man at a time. PFC JAMES ROACH and PVT JAMES R. FACE led the others through, and went on about 50 yards beyond the gate. GEHAUF then got up to ROACH and told him to hold it, and give the Battalion a chance to catch up. Just then a mortar shell landed

came excited and forgot. In the sum total of things, the error did not count. The movement had been called off for the night, already. Battalion had called Regiment, and from there, MICHAELIS had called Division, telling that the infantry was blocked by the Engineer failure. At 0400 the attack order was canceled. Battalion marched back to QUESNILLS and slept for a couple of hours in a field. Trucks had been promised for the withdrawal, but never arrived. GEHAUF wasn't advised that Battalion was pulling out. At 0500 he sent PFC ALLEN W. BRYANT back to learn what Battalion intended. BRYANT took along a sketch showing the probable location of enemy fire positions. Not finding Battalion, he reported back to GEHAUF. In the meantime, ROACH had checked the fourth bridge, found it wired for demolition, and had cut the wires. There was sporadic fire until 0400. BRYANT came back standing up and walking down the middle of the road. That gave the patrol new confidence. They returned to QUESNILLS without drawing fire. But they found the little boat so full of holes that they could not use it and they crossed the water gap at Bridge Number 2 on a 3-by-12 timber. COLE was just preparing to send an officer after the patrol when the men came in.

THE AFTERNOON ADVANCE

About 0930, Third Battalion was told that it would advance again some time in the afternoon. Division said that it would be supported by a substantial artillery. Detailed to that purpose were the 377TH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION—an airborne unit which had lost all but one of its original 75 mms during the jump and had since captured two artillery pieces from the Germans—the 90TH BATTALION, a glider outfit which had come by sea with 12 pack howitzer 75s, and 65TH ARMORED FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION, which had 18 self-propelled 105 mms. The fire positions were in the general vicinity of ST COLME DU MONT, which town occupied high ground fairly dominating the CARENTAN marshes. The mass of the shells were delivered against the enemy left, in and around POITIERANQUE, which was south of the inundated area. By 1200 these dispositions were set and GEHAUF'S information about the enemy positions beyond Bridge Number 4 had been made known to the artillery. COLE and GEHAUF went on down to the CAUSEWAY to see if the road was again solid.

Nothing had been done. So COLE grabbed hold of a rope and told CAPT ROBERT L. CLEMENTS and two of the enlisted men to get plating from the stores which the Engineers had left. Working together, the four men jury-rigged a foot bridge. COLE kept the detail small on purpose to avoid drawing fire. By 1400, the bridge

THE INFANTRY REPAIRS
THE BRIDGE

was complete, though a bit wobbly. (COLE and CLEMENTS.) The heavy fence of iron on the far side of the bridge, which had been part of the enemy road-block, had been torn loose and was used as a flooring. At about 1500, GEHAUF and PVT BRYANT crossed Bridge Number 2 ahead of Company G's First Platoon. The Battalion thus began its move into the CAUSEWAY defile, bound on both sides by the marshes and insecure as to their rear because of the unsatisfactory situation at Bridge Number 2. The men had to proceed single file when they came to the bridge. It could not accommodate more than a single line of men, and if they jammed up at all, an 88 mm gun whizz-banged away at them from up around CARENTAN.

This intermittent pot-shooting by the 88 gun, which had flushed the Engineers the night before, harassed the infantry without stampeding them. The first portion of the advance along the CAUSEWAY was relatively uneventful. Several hundred yards off to the right of Bridge Number 2 there was a patch of solid ground in the marsh, and across the front of it stretched one of the ubiquitous hedgerows of NORMANDY. From behind the hedge, a sniper cracked down on the mortar squad of Company G. He missed. CPL N. F. ELLIS sent PVT CLAUDE A. WILLIAMS out after him along a shoulder of high ground which jutted into the marsh. WILLIAMS crawled along a ditch until he was close enough to arch a grenade over the hedge. Then he waited a few minutes, but he drew no return fire. S SGT A. L. ZEROSKE had crawled along be-

hind WILLIAMS. Both men saw the German move behind the hedge, both fired, and when he went down with a scream, both felt that they had hit him. That was the first casualty on either side. Only one man was knocked out by the 88 fire on the Number 2 Bridge; the blast toppled him over, but his head was clear again in a few minutes. Realizing what a concentrated artillery fire would do if it struck the Battalion while they were still on the CAUSEWAY, COLE moved up and down, swearing at his men and pleading with them not to bunch. But nearly all he said was futile. They kept herding together, and as rapidly as he broke them up, they came back together. However, no penalty was exacted for the time being. The enemy seemed to be paying no attention to the advance. The men of the Battalion began to believe that the operation could be carried off almost without cost. (This was their statement at the group interview.)

In the first three hours all of the Battalion except the last half of Company H crossed the narrow flanking to the far side of Bridge Number 4. LIEUT DAVID IRVIN got Company G across the first three bridges without losing one man. The files moved forward slowly but steadily. The men moved along both embankments right next the water's edge. The footing here was loose and the walking was difficult. This was especially true of the right embankment. When the men there came to any stretch where the reed grasses thinned out greatly toward the solid ground on their front and far right, they sometimes crawled along the

PONT DE DOUVE

ADVANCE OF THE 3^D BATTALION

EVENING OF 10 JUNE 1944

1/2 "H" CO

BRIDGE NO. 2
BLOWN OUT

BRIDGE NO. 3

DOUVE RIVER

BRIDGE NO. 4
BLOCKED

CANAL (disused)

PATROL

M. PISTOL

37AT

81
MM

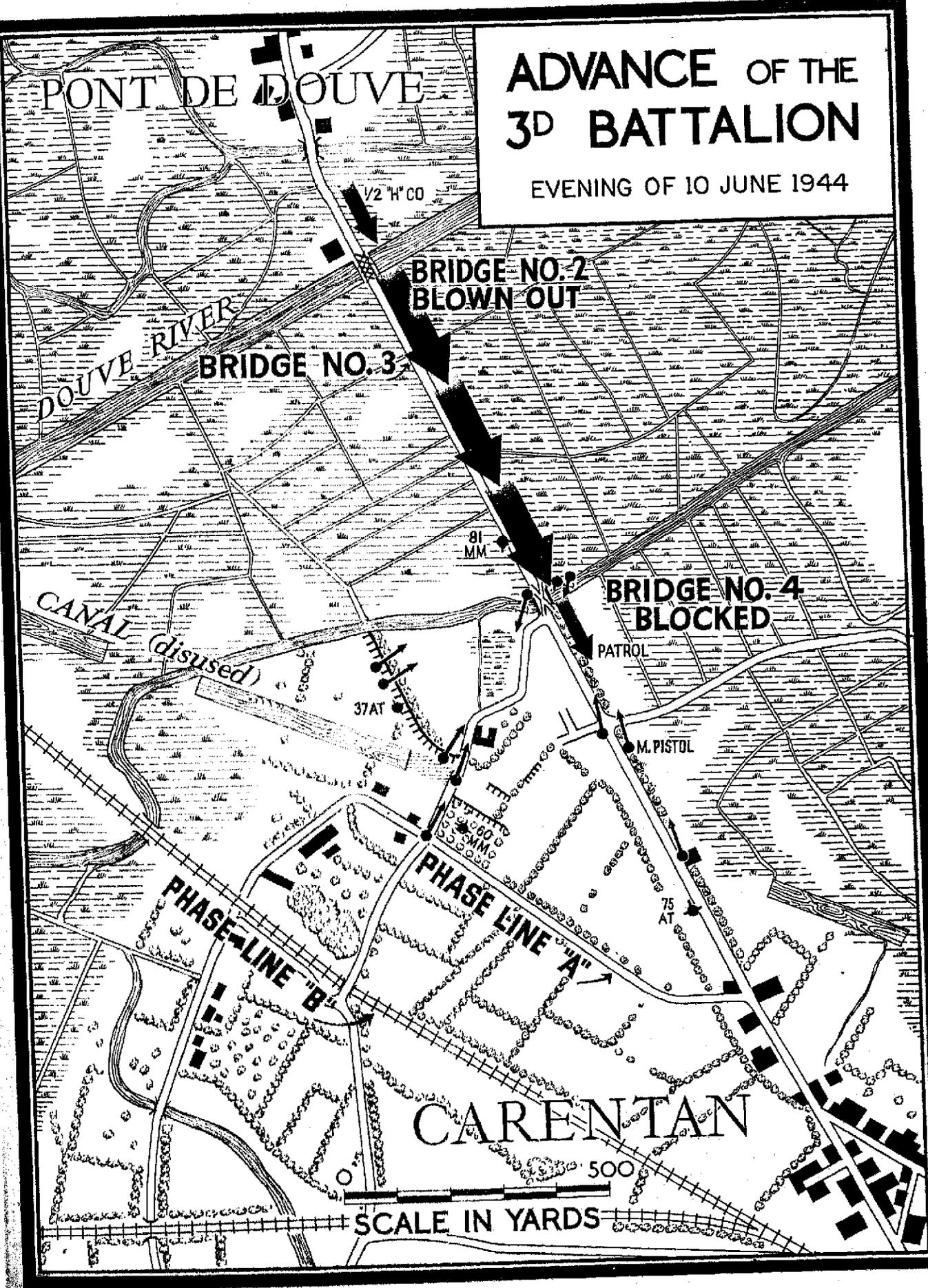
PHASE LINE "B"

PHASE LINE "A"

CARENTAN

500

SCALE IN YARDS



bank and sometimes got out and walked through the water. Running the entire length of the embankment on the right, there was a drainage ditch about 8 inches deep which was approximately a foot above the level of the marsh. Some of the men went forward along this ditch, crouching on their haunches or crawling. This gave them a more comfortable feeling but no real protection.

LIEUT GEHAUF and the Intelligence Section and five men of Company G's First Platoon were on the south side of Bridge Number 4, the other men of the Platoon were between Bridges Number 3 and 4 and the remainder of the Battalion was strung out all the distance back along the CAUSEWAY to the solid ground at PONT DE DOUVE. This was the situation when the enemy opened fire. It was small arms and automatic fire. Most of it seemed to be coming from the high ground forward and on the right, ahead of Bridge Number 4. On this bearing and only about 300 yards in front of the head of the column, a grassy bank rose sharply out of the marsh. In the center of this high ground was a capacious farm house whose landscape, screened all around by hedgerows, gave the enemy ideal cover. The first burst of fire broke all around the leading platoon and the bullets zinged off the pavement. But it was not well aimed. The men who were in the Point went flat in the embankment ditches and in a few minutes resumed the crawl forward on hands and knees. GEHAUF urged the men to keep moving. He told them that motion was their best protection. So they carried on. The enemy bullets continued to search along

behind DE LEON there was a bulge in the embankment which provided them with a defilade. So he told the others to turn about, and they crawled rearward for a few yards. The enemy must have seen this small retrograde movement, for a German came worming along the ditch behind them, occasionally firing with a machine pistol. So far as WASHKO and DEYAK knew, this lone-handed sniper turned back before hitting anyone, though two more men of the Point were hit by machine gun bullets during the withdrawal. The Point had seen enough to make its reconnaissance worthwhile. GEHAUF was now convinced that the real difficulties of the crossing would be met at Bridge Number 4 rather than at Bridge Number 2. The last bridge was right under the brow of the enemy position. Further, the gate across the bridge, which had caused GEHAUF'S detail to defile the night before, was still jammed and unmovable. Only one man could rush it at a time. SGT DELWIN J. MC KINNEY, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Point, had been going through this gate when the enemy opened fire. He had saved himself by jumping into an old enemy foxhole which was on the embankment, right next the gate. He had an idea that the German guns were zeroed-in on the road block. Also, GEHAUF had taken another good look at the enemy fire as well as at our own. He came back to MC KINNEY with the message that the American shells were dropping far beyond the German fire positions along the hedgerows and that the artillery should lower its fire about 200 yards. MC KINNEY yelled the message back to IRVIN who was still

on the high side of the bridge. IRVIN put it on the radio. But it was 2200 before this message finally reached the artillery. (Statement of COLE and supported by the artillery journal.) By that hour Third Battalion had been held in check for somewhat more than four hours. The head of its greatly attenuated column had felt out the enemy fire positions forward. The right side of the column had become badly seared by fire from the flank. The few men who had made the passage of Bridge Number 4 could not go forward. Every man who had run this gauntlet had done so under a hail of bullets. The shattered Bridge Number 2 restricted any withdrawal. On both sides the Battalion was held by the marshes. In this manner the Battalion became largely immobilized through the remainder of the daylight hours, except as it trickled forward painfully a man or a squad at a time, extending the advance toward Bridge Number 4.

COLE remained at Bridge Number 2 throughout the afternoon and evening, jockeying the column forward. But he worked also to get the men to maintain an interval so that they would offer no large targets. (COLE'S statement.) He had realized that the CAUSEWAY would become a dead end for the Battalion if the enemy found it with artillery and that the main chance to keep down losses was to prevent bunching. But he found it almost impossible to get this idea over to his men. Whenever he turned his back they crawled closer to one another as if bound by herd instinct. He noted also that his men would lie in the grasses

along the embankment muttering: "That god-damned sniper!" but doing nothing about it. They did not answer fire with fire unless specifically ordered to do so, though by this time, as COLE saw it, his men should have been sufficiently experienced of the enemy to know that he usually put his fire pits back of the hedgerows and that volleys of fire poured against that line would check him. COLE figured that in his situation the salvation of the infantry would depend pretty much on the artillery. (His statement.) LIEUT SPRUEL of the 377TH BATTALION, a forward artillery observer, was up with Company G. His radio was out, but he was using Company G's radio to relay fire sensings to COLE and to CAPT JULIAN ROSEMOND, the artillery liaison officer. As the slow creep forward along the CAUSEWAY went on, the chief effort of the command and of GEHAUF, who remained in position at Bridge Number 4, was to supply the artillery with as complete fire data as possible. With small arms and machine guns, the enemy positions around the farm house wholly commanded the line over which the American column had to advance. The only available offset of this advantage was an artillery fire which would compel the enemy to keep his head down and reduce his fire in volume and aim. The guns worked over the enemy ground from about 1600 until 2330, when darkness closed the action, though, as GEHAUF noted, most of the shells were going beyond the vital area. The artillery told COLE they could not put over any night fires. They did not explain why and he never found out.

THE NIGHT VIGIL AND STRAFING

The limited protective measures which were taken during the daylight hours proved largely unavailing and the infantry companies suffered quite heavily. The bullet fire from the farm house area continued to build up steadily and to strike deeper into the column. In Company G, the Second and Third Platoons had followed First Platoon across the first three bridges. Upon reaching Bridge Number 3, Second Platoon deployed leftward. A thick dyke about eight feet high confines the canal to the left of the third bridge. Riflemen and machine gunners dug in along this dyke so as to build up a fire position facing forward. A little behind this line, one machine gun was set up on the right side of the road to fire into the enemy positions around the farm house. The guns on the canal line opened fire. Company G then began its move through the narrow opening in the road block at Bridge Number 4. Six men got through. The seventh man, SGT JOE L. CLEMENTS, was hit by a bullet while trying to squeeze through the gate. CAPT ROBERT L. CLEMENTS ordered the rest of the Company to hold up. The men got ropes and levers and tried to force the gate. But it would not budge. So the body of Company G stayed behind Bridge Number 4 and more of the men deployed out to the left where a steady fire from the enemy automatic weapons peppered the muddy ridge along which Second Platoon had dug in. It did not seem to the men that this fire was well aimed but there was enough of it that they crawled around

on their bellies in extending the line along the dyke. They kept their guns working and within less than two hours they had run out of machine gun ammunition and had to send back for more. The riflemen also maintained a fire. They could see little or nothing of the enemy but the tracers from the guns around the farm house gave them a line to the fire positions. The two 60 mm mortars were put up along the dyke and trained on the hedges in front of the farm house. PVT ALLEN EMERY of Headquarters Company, lugging an 81 mm mortar, pushed up to within 30 yards of Bridge Number 4 and put 18 rounds on the enemy ground within the hedgerows around the farm house. He opened fire at 400 yards range, moved up to 350 yards and then back to 400 again. He was almost out of ammunition when a German mortar shell burst within seven yards of him. The blast was muffled in a small defilade just down the embankment. So he moved back 100 yards, set up again, and fired another half dozen rounds into the hedgerows.

At about 1800, COLE left the situation at Bridge Number 2 in charge of his executive, MAJ JOHN STOPKA (Later KIA in BASTOGNE) and worked his way forward through the column to the head of Company G. As he moved along he found the men of Company I hugging the low spots along the grassy embankment on the right side of the road and trying to keep their heads below the level of the reeds. They were doing nothing. (His statement.) He told them: "God damn it, start firing and keep firing." He felt that

any action would give them confidence and build their morale and that inaction might prove fatal. (COLE'S statement in front of the Battalion.) He told their officers to keep them firing and he cursed them also for not taking sterner measures in this direction. He found that the machine gunner up on the left of the road in Company G's position was spraying his ammunition along the hedgerows; COLE told him to keep firing but just tap the trigger and given them two or three shots at a time as he traversed. CLEMENT'S men were dug in around the angle of the canal dyke and the CAUSEWAY embankment at Bridge Number 4. From within this angle, LIEUT IRVIN was putting bazooka fire on the farm house (this fire was at rather extreme range and we could not find positive signs that it did any good). The riflemen in the foxholes along the embankment were firing mainly against the hedgerows in front of the farm house. Intermittently, they took pot shots at any likely places down the road where an enemy machine gun might be nested. All hands by this time were well burrowed in the embankment. Yet the enemy bullet fire took steady toll of them, mainly because of ricochetes. Some of these bullets bounced off the pavement and into the fire line along the dyke but more of them caromed off the metal gate and into the foxholes. COLE stayed up with the forward company for about four hours watching this phenomenon. He did not see how he would be able to get his men across Bridge Number 4 if the enemy continued his fire. So he proposed to CLEMENTS that he make ready to swim his Company across the last canal and that

he reconnoiter off to the leftward to find a suitable place for the crossing. COLE figured that if he could get one company across the canal he could throw some ropes to them and pass the rest of the Battalion over the water, hand over hand.

Company I held the most exposed ground in the column—on the right side embankment to the south of Bridge Number 3. There was not enough dirt in this embankment for troops to dig in; it was without any cover except the slight screening afforded by the reeds. From somewhere way out in the marsh, some of the men thought, a group of snipers were shooting into their open flank. At about 600 yards off to the right of the road, a solid neck of land stood up in the marsh like the prow of a battleship. They thought this might be the source of the sniper fire. Others thought that the bullets were coming from a concealed boat lying out in the reeds. Still others believed that an automatic gun along the high ground up ahead on the right was doing all of the damage and that there were no snipers in the marshes. (These varying views were expressed by both men and officers at the time of the group interview.) All that the Company knew for certain was that the barren spot just beyond Bridge Number 3 on the right embankment had become an alley of death and anyone who approached it became the choice target for the fire of the enemy. After 15 of their number got hit, the men of Company I grew weary of running this gauntlet and weary of the day. A first aid man, PVT TKCYZKA, was hit in the head

and died almost instantly. LIEUT GEORGE A. LARISH, leader of First Platoon, was shot through the heart. LIEUT JOHN P. PAIN-SCHAB was mortally wounded. The curious part was that the rest of the column had a kind of insulation from the shock of these losses. The Battalion was so spread out that it felt almost nothing as a whole. Juniors knew that their superiors had become casualties only when someone passed the word along the line for them to take over. The men on the right embankment had a general idea that the men on the left embankment were faring a little better than themselves and they would have crossed over to the other side had that passage not become impossible. (Their statements.) Bullets were scratching the asphalt of the road in two directions. The men moved forward crawling. Those who were hit got it while lying down. Those who remained unscathed could see very little of what was going on except the heels of the man in front of them.

CPL LLOYD KING, PVT WESLEY JACKSON and PVT THOMAS A. PINON from Headquarters Company worked their way up to Bridge Number 3, carrying a machine gun. They then crawled under the bridge and made their way to the far bank by passing along the struts. PINON'S ammunition carrier was hit during this passage and dropped into the water. PINON got the gun set up in a foxhole right beside the bridge and began firing rightward at an angle 90° from the road. The hour was about 1800. There was no more sniper fire from that direction during the evening. Bridge

Number 3 began to cool off, although PINON'S action was the only thing done to counter the bullet fire at this point. The men of Company I had been under steady fire for about two hours.

CAPT CECIL L. SIMMONS got Company H up to Bridge Number 2 about 1630. They went forward according to SIMMONS' instructions:

"Keep your heads down and try to follow the leader." One half of the lead platoon crossed Bridge Number 3 before the general movement of the column was halted by the coming of dark. Five rounds of enemy mortar fire struck around the bridge coincident with their arrival and two men of the Company were hit. Also wounded by the mortar fire was LIEUT ROBERT L. MC LAUHLIN of Headquarters Company. A patrol was sent out through the reeds to right of the CAUSEWAY. It waded for about 60 yards but saw no enemy and drew no fire. Several of Company H's men were picked off by stray rifle bullets while trying to hug the ditch on the right embankment. But on the whole Company H stood the evening better than the others. COL COLE figured that if he had to swim any men across the MADELEINE that night, he would move Company H up through Company G and let SIMMONS' men take the beating for a while. (COLE'S statement.)

With the coming of dark the situation quieted a little because the enemy could not see the live targets wriggling along the CAUSEWAY banks. Company G was still drawing heavy bullet fire

THE STRAFING

up front and was taking losses as some of the men tried to crawl

across the road to get the better protection on the left side. The hour was about 2330. PVT HANS K. BRANDT had moved up to Bridge Number 4. He noted that the men were badly bunched at that point, seven or eight of them crowding into a ten-yard space. From somewhere off in the reeds to the right—he thought it about 75 yards—a German machine gun suddenly opened fire and the bullets began to bounce off the bridge. BRANDT figured that with the men bunched as they were, the fire would get some of them. He took a grenade and started out through the reeds. At about this moment the men farther back along the CAUSEWAY, being not so closely engaged, saw and heard a plane coming toward them from the direction of CARENTAN. The men saw that the plane's wheels were down and they recognized it as a dive bomber. It came steadily along, flying the line of the road and about 150 yards up. No one yelled. Those who had seen the plane still scarcely realized what it signified. Above Company I the plane unloaded—six or eight small personnel bombs which hit along the flank of the road, dead on the ground where Company I's men had been trying to hide from the snipers. PVT BRANDT had moved only a few yards when he heard a heavy explosion close to him. He looked up and saw the dive bomber. In the same instant that he went flat next a stunted tree, there was another explosion and he felt a jar against his left leg. The "whole place seemed to light up." BRANDT went cold for a few seconds. So did the man just to his rear. BRANDT got up and went on to his objective. He waded as far as he

could and then heaved his grenade in the general direction of where he thought the enemy gun lay. He didn't know whether he hit anything but the position got no more fire from there. Coming back, he found that the man who had got concussion was still out and had slipped down into the water. BRANDT carried him to the embankment. He noted that the men who had been only lightly wounded in the bombing had now properly spaced themselves. Those who couldn't move were still bunched together. He got some of them spaced out, then started back for first aid. There were so many wounded along the embankment that he was blocked that way. He then walked right down the middle of the road. There was no fire. After dropping its bombs—or so the men along the CAUSEWAY thought—the enemy plane went right on down the position, blistering the column with machine gun bullets. Between bombs and bullets, Company I lost another 30 men in those few seconds, the strafing taking the greater part of them. About eight of the 30 were either dead or badly hit. It was a curious thing that the men who were strung out along the CAUSEWAY thought without exception that only one plane attacked them (this was determined at the group critique). It is probable that they went flat so quickly that they had no real view of it. For others, who had watched the attack from behind Bridge Number 1 on the road to QUESNILS, saw clearly that two German planes had crossed above the column at right angles to one another in a split second. The plane which had dropped the bombs had flown across the marshes while the plane

which attacked with its machine guns had come right along the road from CARENTAN. They had seen the tracers "bouncing like ping-pong balls off the pavement". PVT PAUL J. MC KENNA was on the left side of the road. He got bomb fragments in both shoulders, his right leg and right hand. He walked on back for first aid. PVT GLENN A. MOE had started digging a foxhole on the left embankment and was about 3 feet down when the bombs hit. Two shards struck him in the left hand and shoulder. Two men who were lying within 10 feet of him were also hit. He completed digging the foxhole. Then he walked on back to PONT DE DOUVE, carrying one of the wounded. After getting his wounds dressed, he returned and brought the other man back with the aid of a stretcher bearer, this work taking him until 0400.

The air attack practically eliminated Company I from the reckoning for the time being. Having gone flat when the bombs fell, the men of the Company did not arise again save for the few whose first thought was to evacuate the badly wounded. The others fell victim to the deadly drowsiness of which infantry are especially susceptible after they have experienced heavy shock losses. They had almost no interest in what had happened to them and no curiosity about who had been hit. (This was the statement of their officers.) LIEUT ROBERT G. BURNS found that he could not keep his men awake no matter how he tried. Some were asleep within two or three minutes of the bombing. This confused BURNS because he could not tell which were the

sleepers and which were the wounded men. He saw men who had tumbled down the embankment and lay still with their bodies half in the marsh. He went to them, figuring they had been hit, and then discovered that they were sleepers who had rolled down the bank and had not been awakened when they slipped into the icy water. Others lay there in their ODs and jump suits, wet through and through, yet sleeping the torpid sleep of utter spiritual exhaustion. The officers had to yield any attempt to rouse these men and for the next four hours Company I remained a cipher in the column.

But there were signs that the enemy also must have passed the limit of endurance. For the Battalion lay there open to him and his guns knew how and where to fire. The night was fair and the air chilled. Visibility was exceptionally good. Yet the hours of complete darkness passed and the moon rose, fully illuminating the scene, without changing the situation. Over the marsh lay a great quiet.

The way was open for another try at the Number 4 Bridge. About 0130, STOPKA reported to COLE that CLEMENTS had said all of Company G had crossed the bridge except a few men who were right around him. COLE told STOPKA: "OK, tell him to get them all across." At 0330 the commander went forward. He then found that SIMMONS was getting his men across the bridge but that CLEMENTS' men were all where he had left them 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours before. Only now LIEUT CORTEZ was up ahead with a 5-man out-

post on the right embankment, and three men under a corporal were ten yards beyond the bridge on the left-hand side. When SIMMONS had come up, CLEMENTS had said: "I am not sending any more men up. There's no cover." SIMMONS had replied: "Hell, there must be some if there's men up there." (COLE did not know of this conversation but SIMMONS reported it.) SIMMONS had then gone forward and made a reconnaissance past the bridge, finding the ground as barren as CLEMENTS said. He crawled on along the left side of the road until he heard Germans talking within a few yards of the spot where he lay in the roadside ditch. Then he crawled on back to his radio and asked for artillery fire along the hedge where he had listened to the Germans; he was told by fire control center that the guns couldn't fire at night. At 0200, COL COLE confirmed the arrangement

PASSAGE OF BRIDGE
NUMBER 4

of the companies as they then stood with Company H taking over the lead from Company G and moving along the left embankment. He figured that Company G was the more "beat up" of the two, and as for Company I, he figured that he would have to wait another hour or two before knowing whether they were ready to fight again. SIMMONS, taking over the lead position, could hear wagons creaking along the enemy front and calculated that the Germans were getting either more machine guns or mines into position. CLEMENTS, dropping his Company back to support, did not get a chance to explain to COLE why he had incorrectly reported that his men had passed through Bridge Number 4; he

was wounded and taken from the battle early in the morning.*

At 0400, COLE got back from Regiment with orders to continue the attack. SIMMONS was putting his men through the gap at Bridge Number 4 at a rate of one man per minute. Though the enemy was not firing, SIMMONS thought it best to space his men that way so that if fire were opened suddenly, not more than one or two men would be caught. But on coming back to the Battalion from Regiment, COLE had walked right down the middle of the CAUSEWAY without one shot being fired at him. This made him optimistic. (His statement.) He told SIMMONS to send his men on through the gate as rapidly as possible and not to hesitate about bunching two or three of them there. Company H completed the passage without loss. Company G followed. Company I for the time being pulled back of Bridge Number 2. COLE had looked the Company over and decided it would be folly to order it forward immediately. There were only 21 men and 2 officers

*Note by Historical Officer: It seems possible that this is another case where the lower commander makes an overly optimistic report of his position to keep his superior mollified. STOPKA had this to say when asked whether he was certain about what CLEMENTS had reported to him: "I could not be mistaken about the message. I harassed him at least seven times about it." Probably any junior commander would have felt some hesitation about ordering men to run through the gate. CLEMENTS and the others all the way back along the Causoway had witnessed the spectacle of the afternoon. Telephone and electric wires were down in a tangle over the gate. When each man made his run, diagonally through the small breach, those who were watching from the rear could see scores of sparks fly up from the gate and bridge iron and from the electric lines as bullets bit into the metal. The men said it looked like a "fire works display".

left to it of the 80 which had started the action.

Company H moved on along both sides of the road, toward the hedgerows and the farm house, 84 men in the Company. Company G, with 60 men, and Headquarters Company, with 121 men, moved on to the solid ground on left of the road, thus entering a very small meadow bounded by hedgerows. SIMMONS' men were going forward in column. They had been told to advance along azimuth 195 which would take them on a cross-country route over high ground to HILL 30.

The lead scout, PVT ALBERT W. DIETER, went forward in the thin light until he was within about five yards of the hedgerow which ran at right angles to the main road and behind the farm

THE ATTACK BEGINS

buildings. The Platoons were strung out behind him in squad column for about 200 yards. As he took his last few steps to close on the hedgerow, German fire—rifle, machine gun and mortar—opened up on the Company all along the line. Whether the enemy had been surprised by the advance or had simply held fire until Company H had moved to within easy range wasn't clear; however, the first fire was wild and did little damage. DIETER, in the lead, got the full effect of it and his left arm was shredded from wrist to shoulder by the opening volley. Without ducking or quickening his pace he walked right back along the line of fire to where SIMMONS had taken cover in a

ditch. There he stopped. He said to SIMMONS: "Captain, I am hit bad, ain't I?" SIMMONS said: "Your sure are!" DIETER said: "Well, I didn't fuck-up on you, did I Captain?" SIMMONS replied: "No, you sure didn't." The boy then went on back. COLE, who only a couple of minutes before the wounding of DIETER had yelled to SIMMONS: "The Company's too bunched. Those God-damned Germans are here. They must know we're here," now looked around to survey the damage. Up forward, a couple of men had been knocked down by machine gun bullets. Five or six others from the leading platoons had been wounded in one way or another and had crawled off to the ditches at the side of the road. SIMMONS crawled over to dress their wounds. He needed some kind of a table on which to work while putting rough splints on one boy's arm. There was a dead German in the ditch lying cold and stiff and ready for his purpose. He took the corpse's pack off, rested it on the stomach and went to work with the first aid pack.

A sniper from the other side of the road kept firing into the ditch. From rearward, a light machine gun was passed up to the position and SIMMONS and S SGT JOHN T. WHITE pressed it over against the bank and fired about 250 rounds into the hedge-row from which they thought the fire was coming. WHITE kept working the gun. PVT WILLIAM PEDEN came running out of the field and flopped down beside SIMMONS. SIMMONS asked: "Are you hurt, PENDEN?" PENDEN answered: "Hell no, they haven't got

me yet." SIMMONS said: "Well let's keep firing at the dirty devils." (However stilted this conversation may sound, SIMMONS said in front of his Company that these were his exact words.) PENDEN then inched his way up to the ditch and fired a few rounds. SIMMONS, putting a new clip in his carbine about two minutes later, noticed that PENDEN wasn't firing. He said: "What's the matter, PENDEN?". There was no answer. WHITE shook PENDEN, then turned to SIMMONS and said: "PENDEN'S dead. The sniper got him. The left side." Another boy crawled to SIMMONS with a bad arm wound, spurting blood from an artery. SIMMONS told him he had no tourniquet. The boy said: "Maybe there's something in this medical kit I've got in my pocket that might help." SIMMONS took a hemostat out of the kit and pinched off the flow of blood. The German sniper kept on banging away.

THE CHARGE

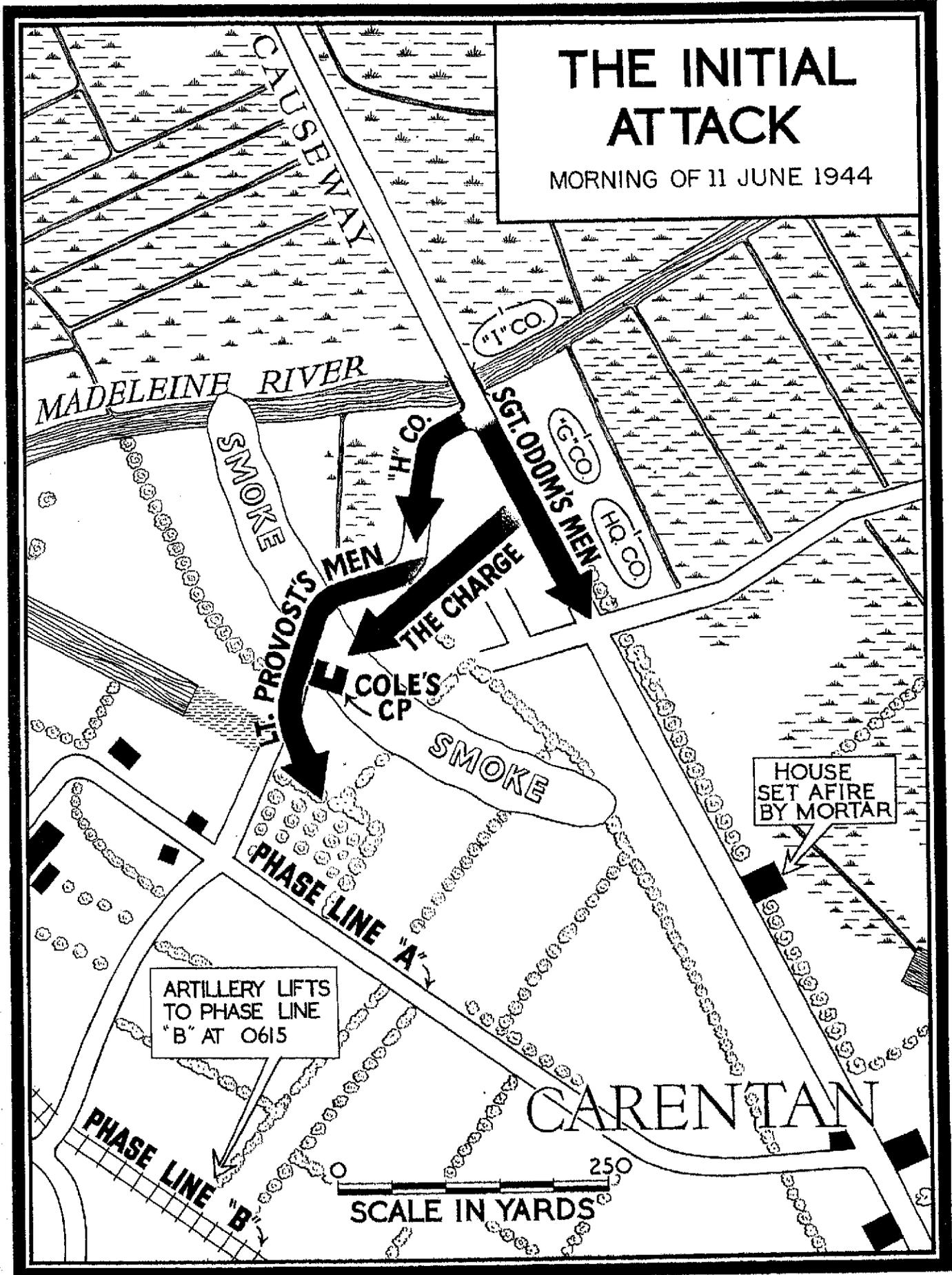
COLE crawled back along the ditch. Forty or fifty yards behind him was CAPT ROSEMOND, the artillery liaison officer. COLE asked him to shell the farm house and the hedges. ROSEMOND told him he couldn't get the fire because the artillery commander wasn't present with the guns to approve the request. COLE said: "God damn it! We need artillery fire and we can't wait for a general." He got the fire in 15 minutes.

The hour was then about 0530 and for the next 25 minutes the artillery pounded the hedgerows around the house. COLE and ROSEMOND watched the shellbursts; it looked as if the stuff was getting in where they wanted it. Still, there was no slackening of the enemy bullet fire. On COLE'S order, the artillery fire was changed from air bursts to delay, and then changed back again. It made no difference. Bullets still whipped through the thorn above the ditches and tore into the embankments in as great volume as before. (All hands at the interview agreed that was the case.)

COLE was puzzled. He felt no assurance about what to do next. For a fleeting moment, he considered moving his men back the way they had come. He wondered whether he should try to get them forward by infiltration along the main road, and against this, he weighed the possibility of making a heads-up assault against the house. But he did not weigh these alternatives

THE INITIAL ATTACK

MORNING OF 11 JUNE 1944



very long. He made his decision on impulse, not as a well-reasoned thing, but with almost explosive force. (COLE was asked to recall as carefully as he could whether he had made an accurate estimate of situation prior to decision and what he said here is not an interpretation but a faithful account of his emotions and reactions as he stated them.)

STOPKA was right across the road. COLE yelled to him. He said: "We're going to order smoke from the artillery and then make a bayonet charge on the house." STOPKA replied: "OK." COLE told ROSEMOND what he wanted. Within a few minutes, the smoke was being laid in an arc which had the house in its center and extended past the MADELEINE RIVER on one end and over the main road to CARENTAN on the left. COLE waited while the smoke was being put down. About 15 to 20 minutes passed. COLE adjusted the smoke further leftward to meet the wind. He was especially concerned that the screen would be just right.

Company G, deployed and pinned in the small meadow to the left of the main road, was being sprayed by fire from a machine gun and a machine pistol in a covert along the hedgerow on the southern border of the field. The men in the meadow tried to crawl over to the hedgerow next the main road as this fire fell among them. Others of the company who had not got up to the meadow were sent scurrying from the road by fire which swept right down the CAUSEWAY. They dug in beside the road and remained in their foxholes while the action thickened around the

farm house.

1ST SGT HUBERT ODOM of Company G, taking three men and a machine gun, worked along the hedgerow which bounded the road to the hedgerow covering the enemy fire trench. The men moved crouched over, walking in the ditch and sticking close to the embankment. At the same time, PVT EMERY, the mortar man, went to work on a house about 800 yards down the road from where machine gun fire seemed to be spilling into Company G's position. He bracketed the house and hit it with his third round, setting it afire. Then he put two more shells on the target for good luck. He picked out a second enemy position, and working the mortar by himself, continued to fire. ODOM was still toiling forward with the machine gun. At 40 yards range, he saw a German stand up behind the hedge and fire a burst from a machine pistol. ODOM was 15 yards ahead of his own gun. The German's first burst hit all three men who were behind him, carrying the gun. One of them, PVT WILLIAM P. EVANS, got the gun in action and kept on firing. ODOM crawled forward through the water of the ditch which ran along the hedge. He was low enough that the enemy fire could not find him. He yelled to SGT ANTHONY L. ZEROSKI to toss him some grenades. ZEROSKI did so. ODOM threw three grenades over the hedge and heard a German scream. Then he saw a German rise out of a trench and disappear so quickly that ODOM had no chance to fire. ZEROSKI crawled up and covered ODOM while he crawled on through the

his men had let him down. (His words.)

What had happened? Some small part of this slack was due to men who had gone to ground at the first heavy volley from the enemy and had remained mentally pinned. But there were other contributing factors. COLE, concerned most of all with the QUESTION ABOUT AN ORDER direction of his artillery, had not checked to make certain that his whole command knew of the plan and were expecting the signal. STOPKA had not troubled to make a careful round of the companies and be sure that the officers understood the plan and the signal and were getting the word back to their subordinates. He, too, was watching the smoke screen and after shouting what was intended to the officers nearest him, he did not follow up to make certain that all hands understood. In the din of the battle and the natural excitement of the moment, it was not easy to get the word around to a command which was widely distributed, and for the most part, hugging earth. Nor was it certain that a clear signal could be given which would reach the entire field. Some men, some officers, never got the order. They heard something passed on to them about "whistle" and "bayonet" but in the confusion they could not tell what was said. Others heard nothing. Still others got the order, but didn't know the advance was on until they saw the trickle of men crossing the field. Then a few raced

on trying to catch up.*

COLE trotted half way across the field. Then he stopped knelt on one knee and looked back. Fire was clipping the grass all around him and more of it was passing overhead. He saw that his men were trailing behind him single file. So he waved both arms at them trying to get them to fan out. Instead, they hit the dirt. He started working on them one man at a time, urging them to get up and go on. He kept firing his colt .45 wildly in the general direction of the farm house and as he fired he yelled: "God damn, I don't know what I'm shootin' at, but I gotta keep on." (His exact words as recalled by COLE and by several of the men who heard him and who remembered that they laughed at the spectacle.) About 5 or 6 men were killed by bullet fire as they lay there, while COLE was trying to get them up. TEC 5 ROBERT E. DORAN, COLE'S radio operator (Later KIA in HOLLAND), got up to his Commander, his SCR300

*When the critique was held and this point in the narrative was reached, the Historical Officer asked COLE: "Why didn't the men follow you?" COLE replied: "God damn it, Colonel, they were afraid, that's why." The Historical Officer said to COLE: "I can't be satisfied with that answer and I would like to inquire into the facts with your permission," as the evidence had already shown that the men were well spread out and both COLE and STOPKA were preoccupied. About 30 witnesses were heard, including 4 officers. Their testimony was substantially as is reported above. COLE was then asked for his opinion. He replied: "The men we have heard from are among the best men in my Battalion. I would not question their courage for a moment. I am convinced now that the fault was largely my own." The testimony as to STOPKA'S actions was given by STOPKA himself. As both of these men are now dead it is in point to add that they were willing that the circumstances should be clearly stated in the record.

on his back. Then they ran on together. The smoke was gradually clearing from the barrage fire and through the rifts in it, they could see the farm house. STOPKA kept yelling: "Let's go! Let's go!" and ran on, hurdling the first ditch. COLE leaped a low hedge and came down in a ditch almost up to his neck in water. He yelled back to DORAN: "Don't follow me!" and DORAN took both hedge and ditch in one leap. Others caught up with the leaders and passed them. STOPKA saw two men go down in front of him. He yelled to PVT EDWIN S. PASTOURIS, one of them: "How are you?" Said PASTOURIS: "I'm OK. You keep going!" Fifteen men from Company H and Headquarters Company, who had come belatedly to the action, ran on up the road to the hedgerow which formed the rear boundary of the house, then turned and ran down the hedge on the outside till they came to the building. They kept right on, going into the orchard. That was the way COLE wanted it. He was standing by the house, waving the men on; all of them wanted to stop as they came to the building. He told Company G to assemble on the brush pile behind the house along with Company I, which was now coming up from behind Bridge Number 4. Company H and Headquarters Company were to collect themselves next the right of the house before continuing. The enemy machine gun groups which had been well fortified on the high ground to the right of the house had now pulled back for the most part. There were dead Germans lying thick over the ground and in the fox-holes, but most of the live ones had retired through the

orchard toward the railroad. The American artillery continued to fire into this area. The Battalion had lost radio contact with the artillery and the guns continued to fire at the last assigned target.

PVT BERNARD STERNO of Company H had started the charge with COLE although his M1 was jammed. Halfway across the field he saw a dead German sprawled in a slit trench behind a clump of bushes. Set up in the bushes in front of the German was a pistol with a cord leading back to the body. STERNO wanted the pistol, but figuring that the cord might be set to a mine, he took his knife out and slashed the cord. He felt something "bump into a finger" on his right hand. But his gloves were on and he didn't realize at once that he had been hit by a bullet and had lost a finger. He got the pistol and crawled on. A few feet farther along STERNO saw another man from Company H. He went to the man but saw that he had been shot through the chest and was near death. An aid man came along and told STERNO that his hand was all bloody. He bandaged the stump of the finger and STERNO kept going. Then he heard someone call: "Help me!" It was a sergeant from his own company. STERNO crawled up to him. The sergeant was hit in the stomach and leg. Next him was the medical man who had just bandaged STERNO. But he was dead now with a bullet through his head. STERNO got the medical man's kit and canteen and gave the sergeant rude first aid. By that

time, enemy fire was breaking around the CP in heavy volume and COLE was telling the men to move away from the vicinity. STERNO went on about 25 yards beyond the house, found a place in the fire line, flopped down in a water-filled ditch and began to fire, using an M1 he had taken from one of the wounded. His bandage worked loose. Another first aid man came along, looked at the wound and told STERNO to get to the rear. There were a number of wounded lying in the ditch along the road and STERNO figured he'd better help them. They begged him to stay there and try to flag the ambulance that came along. The ditch and the road were now being raked by 88 mm fire from the direction of CARENTAN. One man lying next STERNO had had an eye torn out by shrapnel. He didn't know whether the eye was gone and he asked STERNO about it. STERNO didn't want to tell him the truth so he replied: "Well, even if it is, you should be glad you have the other one." He prepared a sulfa pad and put it on the man's eye. Then he started to work on some of the other wounded. There was the sudden swish of another 88 shell. STERNO jumped for the slit trench but didn't quite make it. He felt "something terribly heavy" land against his back—jarring him as if he had been kicked hard. He wasn't sure whether he was wounded again or had only felt concussion. In fact, a shard had ripped into his back and stopped in the groin although this was not known until he was thoroughly examined on the LST the next day. The man who had lost an eye was now yelling: "My arm, O my arm, O my arm."

STERNO was groggy for a few seconds. When he looked at the man he saw that his arm had been smashed by the latest explosion. Another man next him, who had been alive a few minutes before, had lost half of his head. It felt to STERNO as if there was blood running from his own back but he wasn't certain; he thought still it might be shock and imagination. He looked at the others in the group of wounded. One man who was just five feet from him had blood streaming from his ears, nose and mouth; he was conscious but was so shocked that he couldn't utter words and was expressing himself in a little babble. STERNO figured that most of these men were beyond his power to help. He crawled on rearward to Bridge Number 4. There was a foxhole and he dropped into it. About one-half minute later a mortar shell hit just outside the hole and a piece of it got STERNO in the neck and another piece hit an officer lying beside him.*

*This man returned to the Battalion from hospital in late July. He seemed to remember accurately everything that had happened to him. His statements were made in the presence of all Battalion officers and such of the wounded as had returned to the Battalion. A number of the officers and men had seen him during the movements herein described and it is believed that his story is absolutely reliable.

AROUND THE FARM HOUSE

1ST SGT KENNETH M. SPRECKER and PVT ROACH of Company H reached the farm house 20 yards in front of COLE. They shot the lock off the door and dashed inside. The place was empty. SPRECKER moved on to the brush pile and saw two Germans in the orchard, rifles in hand, getting ready to fire. SPRECKER fired first with the tommy gun. Both Germans fell.

2ND LIEUT EDWARD A. PROVOST of Company H had nine men with him as the charge started. Five got hit or lost crossing the field and he carried on with the four who remained. They worked up the road skirting the right of the house. A hedgerow parallels the road; just opposite the house was a solidly constructed machine gun position which had been dug deep into the embankment overlooking the MADELEINE. The men crept in behind the cover of the farm house wall. PROVOST was not giving them any orders; they moved in silence. TEC 5 JAMES O. BRUNE, the mail orderly, threw a grenade over the hedge. There were five Germans at the gun and in the V-shaped fire trench which adjoined it. The grenade hit and exploded fair among them. Some were stunned; others stood there screaming. BRUNE and PROVOST saw them so as they bounded up the eight crude steps from the road to the gun position without giving the gun crew a moment to recover. BRUNE started to fire as he ran. PROVOST yelled: "Don't waste bullets! Use the bayonet!" This was what they did but such was the excitement of the moment that later they

could not remember how many of the five they had run through. Then they retraced their steps and went on up the road, picking up men from Companies I, H and Headquarters as they went along — ten men altogether. As they drew abreast of the orchard, they looked leftward and saw about two squads of Germans "milling around" beyond the first few rows of trees, as if getting ready to pull out. The men with PROVOST propped up behind the hedge and fired. A few of the enemy fell at the first volley. The others went to ground immediately and formed a line, then began shooting. PROVOST thought the Germans were at extreme range for a grenade but he pulled the pin out and got ready to throw. Then a bullet slashed through his cheek. Blood spilled all over him and he returned to the farm house looking for first aid. There he met SPRECKER who had come back in search of other men from the Company. PROVOST told him what had happened and SPRECKER went forward and took charge of PROVOST'S men. They had ceased firing when PROVOST left but SPRECKER held up the fight and five Germans came out of their foxholes. That ended the skirmishing around the orchard for the time being.

When the German fire had broken over the head of the column during the advance of Company H along the CARENTAN road, Company I had been in movement from behind Bridge Number 2 to behind

ADVANCE OF COMPANY I

Bridge Number 4. The survivors of Company I heard the sounds of battle

up ahead, in and around the farm house. The Germans fire, however, had again engulfed Bridge Number 4 and bullets were rattling off the iron gate as on the afternoon before. The men of Company I had to run for the narrow opening through this bullet fire; they did it one man at a time with heads down. Those who made it then jumped down to the protection of the embankment. The last two officers, LIEUTS BURNS and GLEASON, were hit in trying to get through the gate. About one-third of the other survivors were lost at this point. The rest went on leaderless. They attached themselves as individuals to any group they could find and joined the skirmishing around the orchard and through the hedgerows. For the time being Company I ceased to exist as a unit. The entire Third Battalion was by now completely scrambled and the junior leaders fought on with little scratch groups, however it was easiest to collect them.

The fire had not lifted from fields which were immediately south of Bridge Number 4. Most of the men who had been under cover there when COLE and his group charged the house were still pinned. Many of the enemy were positioned behind the hedgerows which ran at right angles to the CARENTIAN road. It was from this direction that much of the automatic fire had poured into the fields and had kept the men from Company H and Headquarters Company confined to the ditches. The charge had moved off oblique to the right from the direction of this fire, though the original movement, extended into the orchard, would have outflanked it. The enemy's point of greatest strength, inso-

far as command of the CAUSEWAY was concerned, had been on the ridge of high ground between the house and the MADELEINE. The charge had routed the force there and PROVOST'S dash-in with the bayonet had stifled the last flicker of resistance at this position. However, the Germans in the hedgerows along the opposite flank had not been dislodged by the charge. When the smoke began to clear away, they could again volley into the fields south of Bridge Number 4. This was their natural line of fire. In fact, the hedgerows which the enemy was holding were on axial lines toward the fields where the Battalion remnants were still looking vainly for cover.*

*In the NORMANDY fighting the Germans almost invariably had their Resistance Line behind, and running parallel to, the hedgerows. These are considerable obstacles, being so thick with thorn, vine and bramble that at most places, a man cannot force his way through them. More than that, they are, in point of screening, a fair fire breastwork, in that they are thick enough at the base that a man may lean up to them and fire through them without being seen. If the position cannot be destroyed by artillery or mortar fire, then infantry must find a way to move around the flanks and enfilade it. For supported by fire, the hedgerow is a stopper to any skirmish line which tries to assault it frontally. Behind the hedgerows, the Germans dug their foxholes in perfect geometric proportion, square-walled and deep. In fact they were so deep that a man of average height could stand erect in them and just see over. When two Germans stand to from within a foxhole, they maintain themselves in a sort of half-crouch, back on their haunches, with heads erect. They face one another. Each man has a rifle slung at his hip and pointed up over the edge so that one man sees whatever comes at the back of the other and both have a fair field of vision. In NORMANDY the machine gun strong points were usually at the corners of the field where the hedgerows came together. So positioned they could cover the roads or a sweep of country. The foxholes were along in a line directly back of the hedges and spaced more or less evenly between the machine guns. The battle was complex because of the cut up nature of the country. Yet its tactics were as simple as a run around end: flank the hedgerow line and the whole section of front then must form on the next convenient field to the rear.

CAPT SIMMONS and SGT WHITE hadn't heard COLE'S order. Trying to attend to his wounded, SIMMONS had heard someone yell something about a "whistle" and "bayonet" but the words didn't register as an order. He shouted to WHITE: "Well what about a f—— whistle?" but he got no reply and he continued with his work. The charge across the field got away without either man seeing it.

It must have been only a few minutes later that a shell exploded near SIMMONS and the concussion knocked him cold. He came to, with WHITE shaking him by the shoulders. "What happened?" SIMMONS asked. WHITE told him that the Battalion had been ordered to charge across the field and that some of the men were already at the farm house. SIMMONS said: "Then let's get the hell out of here." His head still was not clear. He motioned to the men around him to follow. A group got up. He didn't notice how many. They advanced straight up the ditch and toward the corner of the hedgerow which ran back of the house. A German machine gun was still firing from that point into the field where SIMMONS' men had been. This last anchor of the German forward line gave way as SIMMONS and his men ran on toward the hedgerow. A few of the men with SIMMONS fell under bullet fire in crossing the ditch. The Americans ran on firing their rifles toward the gun. A few Germans were killed. A grenade knocked the gun out. SIMMONS set up a machine gun on the same spot and pointed it in the opposite direction. The men then prowled around in the im-

mediate vicinity for a few minutes. About one hour after the charge (This was COLE'S estimate) SIMMONS reported to him at the house. COLE told him that he should move over to the right of the farm house where the rest of the Company was reorganizing. He had started the day with 84 men. When it was over, he had 30. Most of them had been lost in the field during the first couple of hours.

The fighting slackened for a few minutes. The right flank had been cleared. The left flank was clear to the first hedgerow, though it was a question whether the enemy had pulled any farther back on that side than the width of the first field. COLE, making a random estimate of his own strength without leaving the farm house, sent PVT DOYLE BOOTLE of Headquarters Company back to LIEUT COL PATRICK F. CASSIDY of First Battalion to tell him to bring his men on through. COLE figured that Third Battalion was washed up at least for the time being. (His own statement.) In point of fact his situation was even worse than he knew; the meager parties which had closed up to the hedgerows were not even sufficient to compose a thin fire line. Still, COLE believed that he had the enemy on the run. (His statement.) The mission of Third Battalion remained unchanged; it was to go on to HILL 30. But COLE figured that a fresh Battalion would come through in sufficient momentum to complete the assignment that day and he so advised the Regimental Commander. PVT BOOTLE went on back and was fired on by snipers all the way across the

field to the CARENTAN road. The field was now clear of troops except for the dead and wounded, BOOTLE saw. First Battalion was still north of Bridge Number 4. But BOOTLE didn't get that far. He gave the message to SGT JOSEPH H. GILLION of Company H who sent it on to the Regimental CP from where it was relayed to First Battalion. A few minutes after BOOTLE had left COLE, PROVOST showed up there, looking for a bandage for his face wound. There was no aid man at the farm house. COLE told PROVOST to keep moving to the rear. DURAND'S radio was again working by this time but COLE didn't know it. So COLE gave PROVOST the same message which he had given BOOTLE and told him to deliver it to CASSIDY. PROVOST got the message as far as a sergeant who was with the most forward platoon of First Battalion near Bridge Number 4. He told the sergeant to send the message back to CASSIDY. Right afterward, PROVOST saw one of his own men lying in a ditch, shot through the chest. He stopped to patch him up. Then he noticed that a group of men from Company H were hugging the dirt around him and he asked them why they weren't forward. "We're pinned down," several of them said. PROVOST couldn't understand it. Quite suddenly the fire opened on him and he crawled on hands and knees back along the ditch until he could yell to the first men of CASSIDY'S Battalion. They, too, were hugging the cover of the ditch. About 10 minutes later, he saw CASSIDY'S men get under way. As the leading files made their way into the field beyond Bridge Number 4, machine gun and rifle fire coming from far down on

the left hand side of the CARENTAN road cut into them.

They went on through a scene already well littered with the dead and dying. COLE at the farm house had his hands full. During the charge two of his first aid men stopped to patch up their comrades and the other wounded men in the field. That left no one to care for the wounded from the fight which was still going on up forward. PVT JOHN W. PIKE, a mortar man from Headquarters Company, came in with a wound through his shoulder. COLE and SPRECKER bandaged him. PVT JAMES W. EVANS of Company H came in with a leg broken by a shell burst. PVT JOE JIMINEZ of Company H came in with a bullet wound in the shoulder. COLE and SPRECKER put splints on one man and bandages on the others. COLE got on the radio and asked Regiment to "send up all kinds of ammunition, particularly machine gun" and also to send along an ambulance and any aid men who could be found.

By now, the Engineers had rigged a temporary span at Bridge Number 2 and had torn away the jammed gate at Bridge Number 4. It was possible for vehicles to come through to the farm house. COLE was in the court of the farm house where he had just finished splinting EVANS' leg with a pick handle. Next the door was a young private from CASSIDY'S Battalion. He had taken off his shoe and was putting sulfa powder on a minor wound in his heel. COLE said to him: "Get out of here right now. This is a dangerous spot." The kid said: "I want to be safe, Colonel.

I might get blood poisoning if I don't fix this," As he spoke the last word, he was hit straight on by a flat trajectory missile which smashed him up against the stone building and dropped him in a bloody heap on the flagstones.

The ambulance duly arrived, carrying ammunition. There were no Red Cross vehicles present and so an ordinary truck had been rushed to the scene. It brought ammunition up and took the wounded back, under fire in both directions. There were so many wounded that they were carried out double deck, some riding in the body of the truck and others in stretchers across the top. Two jeeps were also pressed into service.

The truck ambulance returned on its third trip, bringing a group of first aid men from FIRST ARMY with it. COLE'S Staff got back to him. They had been scattered about with the various elements. GEHAUF, dead beat from his exertions of the two preceding days and nights, had gone to sleep in a ditch in the early morning and COLE had decided to let him sleep. He came into the CP cursing COLE for leaving him behind. LIEUT RALPH A. WATSON, S1, had been back with the radio section. CAPT EDWARD J. BARRETT, S3, had been at the Fourth Bridge and had then gone on up the road which wound past the farm house to help organize the men.

The Staff collected in one room. COLE was in the room next them working on the wounded. A shell—whether it was mortar,

ADVANCE OF THE FIRST BATTALION

COL CASSIDY and his men had seen the first wounded from Third Battalion's morning action streaming back along the CAUSEWAY embankments, but they did not have any clear idea of how the battle was going around the farm house. CASSIDY suspected that COLE had probably broken the back of the enemy resistance but had spent his own force in so doing.

This impression was gradually dissipated as First Battalion got in motion. Company B came under heavy fire immediately. It was automatic fire and the worst part of it seemed to be coming from well-concealed positions in the marsh off to the right of the road. When the lead elements reached Bridge Number 4, the bullet fire became so thick that "a man could scarcely raise his head." (Statement of LIEUT ROBERT ROGERS.) ROGERS had two of his machine guns set up on the embankment at Bridge Number 4 and put a traversing fire over the marsh. Still, the fire from the marsh did not diminish. Company B lost 8 men that morning — 3 of them killed — just in finishing the move across the CAUSEWAY.

ROGERS led his men forward: he was still thinking that he would crash them through a thin line of enemy and then march on to HILL 30. (His words.) They reached the open field across which COLE had charged and were able to deploy over toward the house without many additional losses. At that point COLE warned them

that the house was becoming a target for artillery and mortar fire and that they had best get on quickly. They did so. ROGERS found to his amazement that there were only small fractions of squads from Third Battalion holding any part of the ground. So he disposed his men generally up along the hedgerows to the right of the house and on the far side of the road which ran alongside the house. He saw that Third Battalion "had no defensive position" and that he would have to relinquish for the time being any idea of advancing beyond his initial line among the hedgerows. (His words.) The advance of the Company stampeded the small number of enemy who had continued to cling to the immediate foreground. They were pursued beyond the houses at the crossroads and small groups from the Company kept on going for several hundred yards farther. LIEUT HOMER J. COMBS led six men all the way to the railroad track. Meanwhile, another group of men got a machine gun forward to the crossroads and then searched all of the houses. In this party was PVT REDMOND WELLS who was to conduct himself conspicuously later in the day. The men found the houses empty, except for a few French civilians. The group which had gone on to the railroad track saw six Germans some distance away, off to their left. They fired at them. But as they themselves were already being fired upon by snipers, their aim was not good. The enemy vanished. The group held a council of war. The men wanted to go on, hunting for the six enemy. COMBS figured he was getting too far away from the main body and led them on back. They stopped

at the road and built up a fire line along it, distributing themselves just in front of the houses and employing the ditch and hedgerow cover abounding the road. This line—or rather a part of it—held until the Battalion was relieved late that night. It had no moments of quiet. It was counterattacked numerous times. On one occasion, it almost completely shattered and during much of the day was subjected to a continuing pressure from 20 yards range. The Germans came back to the road line almost immediately after COMBS' sortie, and took up position in the ditches on the other side of the road. There they were protected by a high brick wall. Thus locked with the enemy and virtually isolated from their own main body, the men at the forward line on the right maintained themselves by duelling with grenades, and in two instances turning the Germans back at the point of the bayonet. They had one machine gun which was set up initially to fire diagonally across the cross-roads and into the field beyond. For a time, this machine gun position was able to hold firm. The group, however, had no line of communication to the rear. One thing helped them. As they had come forward, they had found a grim tableau at the cross-roads. Set up there was a German machine gun with a dead gunner behind it. Sprawled across the gun and the gunner was a dead American paratrooper. He had been dead many hours but next his hand were two boxes of American machine gun ammunition. The group took this gift along and before the morning was out, they had need of it. At first, there were only a dozen men on the

forward line. More came as the morning wore on, until at its strongest the position had about two-thirds of First Platoon and 25 men from the Third.

The backstop of the right flank had been set up, however, at the Number 1 Hedgerow, on the side of the hedgerow which faced toward the orchard. There S SGT HARRISON SUMMERS, who on D Day had given as distinguished account of himself as any soldier in the American Army, had set up two machine guns, one at the corner and the other at the rear where it could sweep up the road.

While these arrangements were going on, disaster had already overtaken Company A. The two leading platoons came over the CAUSEWAY and through Bridge Number 4 under a heavy shelling by artillery and mortar. They lost a few men along the way. Then they started across the clear field as Company B had done. One of the heaviest concentrations of shell that day—mainly mortar but with some 88 mm mixed in it—fell right among the men as they reached the middle of the field. Fifteen men were hit. The shock scattered the others in all directions and they scrambled four ways in search for cover. The deep ditch was directly ahead of them. Some jumped head-first into the water. But others ran back to Bridge Number 4. It took 1½ hours to get the men together again and up to the firing line; the mortar fire continuing meanwhile, though in lesser amounts. Third

Platoon (These platoons had only 15-25 men apiece) then came up, started across the field and got caught in the same meat grinder. This platoon lost 9 men on the identical spot and the others scattered, looking for any kind of cover. But cover was not easy to find by that time; the more convenient ditches and foxholes were already filled by the wounded and the stragglers who had been caught in the backwash of the battle. Company A had lost 6 men in crossing the CAUSEWAY, most of them from bullet fire. That made it 30 all told before the Company approached the fire line.

It was at about 1100 that this first heavy blow fell on Company A. The same barrage had engulfed the farm house where COLE was sweating out the regulation of his artillery and the finding of his own flanks. The American artillery was firing toward the railroad and CARENTAN. This COLE knew. He knew also that some elements of First Battalion had gone on and were working at the hedgerows somewhere beyond. But he did not know how the battle was forming or whether the men forward in the orchard and along the hedgerows were closely engaged. (His statement.) By now most of the forward line—to call it that is an exaggeration—was manned by First Battalion, and between COLE and CASSIDY on that day there was curiously little

exchange of information.*

In the long run, it probably made very little difference. For First Battalion's role in the CARENTIAN fight was simply to build up on the ground where Third Battalion had exhausted itself. Without actually relieving Third Battalion, First Battalion took over, got its shoulder in the door, and there became wedged. Such of COLE'S men who were still in the fight filled in along CASSIDY'S defensive line. Nobody reconnoitered the front in detail—it wasn't that kind of a day—and COLE continued to imagine that his men were doing the lion's share of the work. After Company A had been ripped apart while trying to move up left of the farm house so as to push the enemy from the high ground lying west of CARENTIAN, five men who had jumped forward to seek cover in the ditch picked themselves up and tried to keep their assignment. They got as far as the left end of Hedgerow Number 4 where they reinforced the leftmost element of Third Battalion—four rifleman and a light machine gun. At this position two successive gunners had been hit by

*This was because both commanders, who were having their first experience with war, were preoccupied with what they saw directly before them. Later, in talking together with the Historical Officer, they agreed that this was the case. COLE and CASSIDY were roommates and had a Damon and Pythias kind of friendship. COLE rode CASSIDY hard; the latter, who is a quiet and non-assertive Irishman with a gentle sense of humor, was able to take it. They consulted almost none at all during the battle. Although CASSIDY'S men were spread pretty much over the general front, he stayed mainly on the left and tried to run that part of the action.

bullets bouncing off the gun and hitting them in the face. They tried to resume fire and did so twice. But both were bleeding badly and the gun finally went out of action because they grew too weak and there was no one to take over. When CASSIDY'S men reached the hedge, all four of COLE'S men were lying in the ditch, bleeding badly and unable to defend themselves. The newcomers took up fire positions behind the hedge. But the German automatic fire from the right swelled to such proportions that they could not raise their heads to take one shot. They pulled back before noon, taking the wounded. But they had reached the most advanced ground to be held during the day.

In that time, they had not seen a single enemy, and indeed, this was characteristic of the whole day's fighting. It was like fighting an army of phantoms, the men said. (All of these

NATURE OF THE BATTLE details were supplied by numerous witnesses during the critique.)

Keeping well covered, the Germans advanced along the perpendicular hedgerows and ditches, then moved to the flank on the inside of the hedgerows which ran at right angles to the road. They understood this manner of advance very well and rarely exposed more than a shoulder or the tip of a helmet. The men of 502ND knew that a new line of fire had been built up opposite them only from the rising rattle of the guns. Many of them fought all day and saw no one. In fact, two-thirds of

COLE'S men who were under fire around the farm house saw Germans only after the Germans had become corpses. (This was by count at the critique.) They fought on, pouring their small arms and machine fire at the hedgerows, hoping that volume of fire alone would keep the enemy back. In this work the rifle was their most useful weapon. (Their statement.) Only 13 could remember having made some use of the grenade; only 6 were certain that they had killed any of the enemy with it. More by accident than by design, about 10 of them closed with one or two of the enemy in the scurrying around the hedgerows and used their bayonets.

Too, the scrambling which had resulted from the manner in which the two battalions were committed was made worse by the geometric pattern of the countryside. The fields in this part of

NATURE OF THE GROUND

NORMANDY are sometimes square, some oblong and some triangular in shape, and of varying size. Their outline, rather than the rise and fall of ground, determined the lines of advance and of resistance. The units had to accommodate themselves tactically to the situation as they found it. Large units could not remain together as a group, and for the same reason, could not be put forward as a group. To greatly increase the strength along any one stretch of hedge was to multiply the chance that a number of men would be killed. Small groups, moving out on separate missions, sometimes advanced on converging lines, or returned

from a completed mission to find their companions gone, then joined another group. Each company lost some of its number to the ditches and other cover as the advance continued under fire. When these stragglers were rounded up and put into action by a passing officer or non-com, they included men of every company.

The weakness of the general position, as COLE and CASSIDY both realized (They discussed this with the Historical Officer on three different occasions) was that it had no rear. As the dif-

COMMAND WORRIES

fusion of the assault forces increased, any chance for organization which would allow for a local reserve was swallowed up. There was nothing to fall back upon. If the front cracked, those who were still on two legs would have to retreat back over the CAUSEWAY. (Their statements.) CAPT ROSEMOND, who was trying to direct the support artillery from the second story of the farm house, was being plagued by the hedgerows. They blanked out the fields so that he couldn't see where the shells were falling. So he had to sense and regulate in the manner of "jungle warfare" — judging by the sound whether he was getting the shells in where he wanted them. COLE wanted more delay fire — something that would get into the ground at the base of the hedges and root the Germans out of their holes. He felt that too much of the stuff was wasting in air. However, the ammunition supply didn't allow for it. What bothered both men even more during the morning hours was the absence of communications. ROSEMOND'S

radio operator had gone down in the same ditch where COLE had taken his bath and the set had been drowned out. That deprived them of all contact with the batteries. Artillery fire was breaking around the house at the time and ROSEMOND wasn't sure whether it was his own or enemy fire. About 2½ hours after he had taken his post, the first truck ambulance arrived, bringing ammunition. Aboard it was an SCR609. ROSEMOND took the crystals out of his dead radio and put them in the 609. From noon-time on for several hours, he did his forward observer's work without a hitch. That should have been LIEUT SPRUEL'S work but SPRUEL had been killed in the charge across the field with COLE. SPRUEL had had a hunch about it. He said to ROSEMOND as he arose to jump off: "Well, I didn't want to go back to England, anyway. They'd just give us another training schedule." (All of this statement came from ROSEMOND.)

But until the sun stood high, neither Battalion had gotten enough feel of the enemy to be sure whether he intended to stand and fight or to cut and run. During the first heavy blaze of artillery and mortar fire which broke over the American front in mid-morning, the rattle of the burp guns had crept closer and the men had said to one another: "They're coming now." Machine guns from far over to the West of the CARENTAN road had put Bridge Number 4 under heavy fire and enveloped the area immediately south of it. First Squad, Third Platoon of Company H lost 6 men in less than 10 minutes while they were lying in the ditches; the men said later that more of their comrades died in ditches

that day than died going forward. (At the critique.) A man from Company G had a mortar shell land almost on his head as he lay flat in a ditch with arms out-stretched. It wrapped the helmet around his skull and he had to crawl to a medico to have it pried loose.

SIMMONS had sent 8 men up beyond the first farm house on the righthand side of the winding road. Three were hit by mortar fire. The others jumped into a water-filled ditch. The bullet fire above the ditch was such that they lay submerged for more than an hour.

But this, too, passed and a lull held the front.

AMONG THE CABBAGES

What caused the break in the morning action is not known for certain though it may have had its source in certain moves which at this hour, unknown to the two Battalions, were taking place in the higher headquarters of both camps. But it was the greatest boon that came to the 502ND REGIMENT all day, for it enabled First Battalion, which up till this moment had not been able to take hold firmly, to complete its defensive arrangements.

Company C came forward and moved to ground just ahead of Hedgerow Number 2 and along the main highway. The deep ditch which forms the boundary of the field between the CARENTAN road and the farm house turns about even with the Number 2 Hedgerow and the stream flows under the road and through a culvert. Beyond the ditch at this point and extending almost to Number 3 Hedgerow was a large cabbage patch. This patch was to become the pivot of First Battalion defense along the left flank. Company C moved up among the forward cabbages. There its rifles and machine guns were positioned so as to put a flanking fire on the Germans as they crept down the far side of Hedgerow Number 3, or with equal facility, to pour a frontal fire on the enemy as they came down the inside ditch and the hedgerow paralleling the main road. Company A's line was built up along the rear of this one, taking in the base of the cabbage patch south of the ditch. From this ground the company could fire toward the top of the orchard and against Hedgerow Number 3. The line extended across

the road and past the culvert so that the machine guns stationed there could fire frontally against the Germans coming down the ditch on the outside of the road. These were to become the lines along which the enemy was to press his further attacks. The attacks varied hardly at all throughout the hours of the afternoon.

In all of this, however, was a large element of luck. For insofar as First Battalion was concerned, the decisive character of the cabbage patch had not been carefully estimated. (The statement of CASSIDY and his officers.) The men spread themselves among the cabbages because the plants themselves provided fair concealment. They did not realize at first that this plot of ground was a hub covering the enemy's axial lines of advance. CASSIDY had been over to COLE and they had discussed where First Battalion might find room to dispose its upcoming platoons so that they would have some usefulness in the event of a counterattack. They agreed that the area next the CAREN-TAN road was the least lightly manned and the most vulnerable sector of the front at the moment. So the platoons were told to go that way and the men took up their positions among the cabbages. (Statements of COLE and CASSIDY.)

While the two companies were fixing themselves on this ground, LIEUT W. A. SWANSON and SGT JAY SCHENK of Company C, SGT STANLEY CZARNICK of Headquarters Company and two machine gunners from Company G (unidentifiable) took advantage of the respite

AFTERNOON ACTION

LINES OF ENEMY ADVANCE
ON DEFENSIVE POSITIONS

11 JUNE 1944

BRIDGE NO. 4

MADELEINE RIVER

3 502

CULVERT

CABBAGE
PATCH

"E"
O

HEDGEROW NO. 1

HEDGEROW NO. 2

HEDGEROW NO. 3

HEDGEROW NO. 4

"B" CO

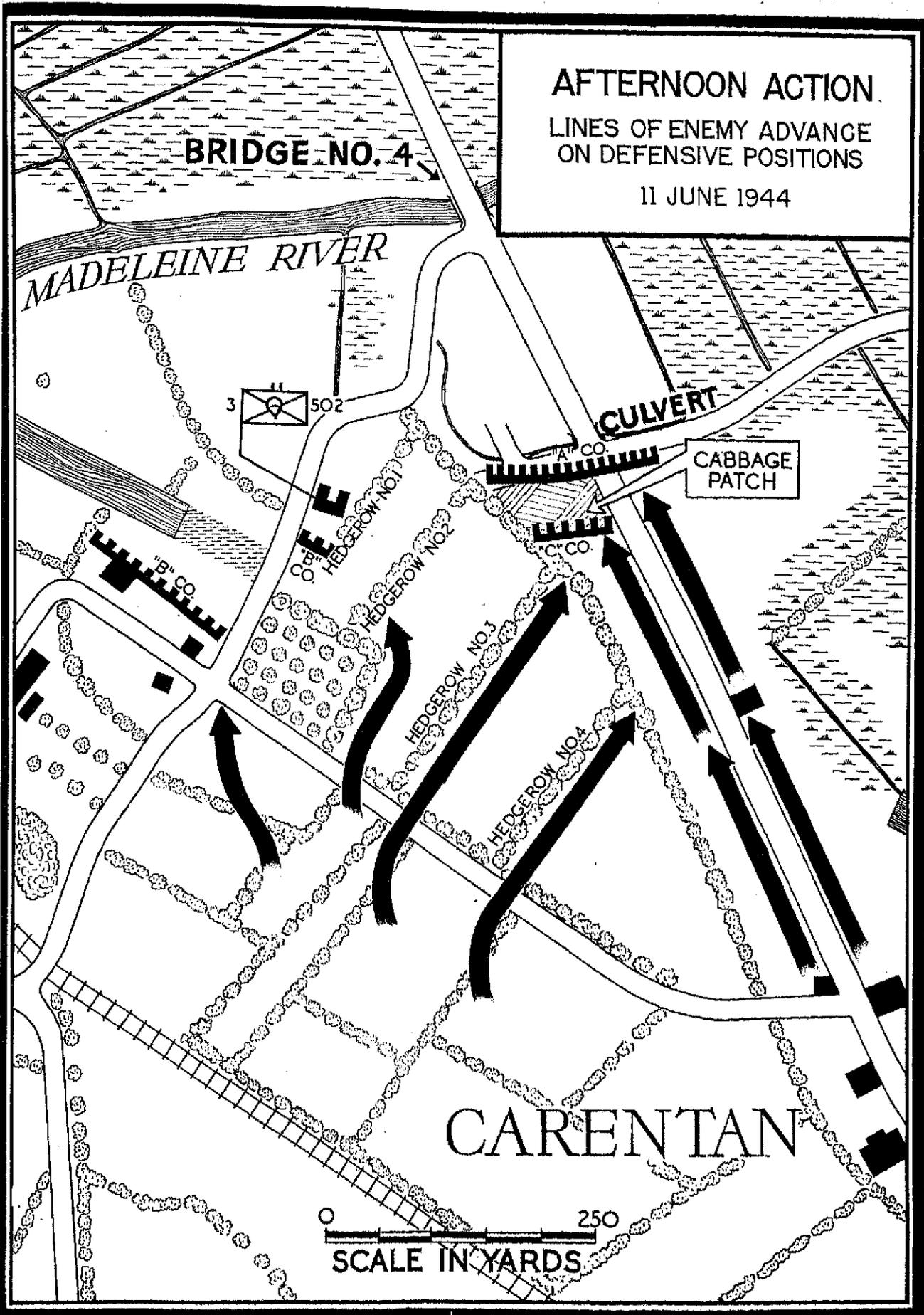
"A" CO

"C" CO

CARENTAN

0 250

SCALE IN YARDS



from mortar fire to go up to the main road to the house which was on the left side of the road. The house was just a little beyond Hedgerow Number 4. They saw Germans in the next house. The Germans saw them at the same time and engaged them with rifles and machine pistols. Two Germans were hit by machine gun fire. CZARNICK then got hit in the face by a bullet from a machine pistol and he started back for a dressing. The machine gun ran out of ammunition. (It was 1145.) SWANSON decided he'd better fall back. The situation, insofar as the enemy infantry were concerned, was quiet. SWANSON had seen no enemy activity off toward his right. But while he was retracing his steps he saw Germans moving along Hedgerows Number 3 and 4 toward the road. LIEUT GEORGE R. CODY, who was then in the cabbage patch, could look ahead and see these same activities. No one was firing at the enemy during this time and it mystified SWANSON.

SGT ODOM, who had got up to this same forward ground early in the morning, continued to hold it with his two men after knocking out the enemy machine gun. He had been there when SWANSON came up and he remained there after SWANSON withdrew. But he could not see what was happening to the SWANSON group because, though they were spaced only a few yards apart, a hedgerow intervened. However, PVT ALLEN C. MC LEAN of Company G had been keeping a solitary post in this same field between the road and the house. Not far from him, although MC LEAN did not know

it, were CPL LEROY DRUMMOND of Company H and a small group of men from First Battalion. DRUMMOND had stopped in the field to help a wounded comrade, PVT CLAUDE F. FLETCHER, who had been hit in the stomach by a shell fragment. After getting FLETCHER to the road he met the First Battalion men who were coming along. By now, SWANSON and the machine gunners had already begun their retrograde move. As PVT MC LEAN saw it, a few German grenades had fallen among SWANSON'S men and while no real hurt had been done to them it quickened their belief that a lack of machine gun ammunition argued for a slight withdrawal. DRUMMOND and the others saw the Germans coming down the hedgerow on the right of the road. It looked like there were 30 or 40 of them. The group figured it was time to move back. They withdrew carefully, not running or exposing themselves. At the position where ODOM had grenaded the German gunners early in the morning, they found an American machine gun set up. The sight of the gun encouraged them. DRUMMOND and three riflemen from First Battalion and one machine gunner thereupon decided to make a stand. They put down a line of fire on the men moving along the hedgerow, killed a few of them and forced the others to deploy and then withdrew.

During these actions SGT ODOM and his two men stayed right where they were in the forward ground.

Well over to the right of the Regimental front, PVT ROBERT I. BOYCE and about five other riflemen moved up the road past the

right-hand corner of the farm house. They saw a German machine gun squad coming down the road. Two women were marching in front of the squad. At first they thought the Germans intended a surrender. Then one man of the party saw that two of the enemy were lugging the gun and he yelled to the others that it was a trap. They shot into the group and killed two of the Germans. The Americans had gone to ground as they fired. The women ran, but where they disappeared, no one noticed.

SIMMONS' men who had been in the water-filled ditch finally worked off flankward toward the RIVER MADELEINE. They reached its bank just in time to see two squads of Germans pull out of a dugout and flop into position behind a hedgerow. The two squads poured so much fire toward the American party—rifle fire supported by one machine pistol—that the men had to get down into the water again. Having spent one hour in the water of the ditch, they spent another hour in the water of the river.

SWANSON in the meantime had gone on a sight-seeing tour. He had made one prior trip to reconnoiter the situation on the extreme right where THOMPSON and the others were fighting at the crossroads. He again moved forward to see how things were going there. But before he ever reached THOMPSON he bumped bodily into a group of Germans who came from behind a hedgerow. They grabbed him and blindfolded him and hold him for an hour. Then they turned him loose and he returned to his own lines.

All of this mystified LIEUT SWANSON very much.

ONE MOMENT OF ROUT

The enemy infantry had been pressing their only strong counter-attack of the morning. SWANSON had seen their right flank come on along Hedgerow Number 4 as he had walked back along the CAR-ENTAN road but he had moved on before the two forces opened fire. DRUMMOND and his men had turned back the attack on the right flank without knowing that this was part of a general engagement. But the fight had flamed along all the hedgerows and through the orchard. Firing machine pistols and rifles, the enemy moved straight along the hedge bordering the orchard toward the two machine guns commanded by SGT SUMMERS.

LIEUT CLARENCE A. THOMPSON, JR, was moving along Hedgerow Number 2 trying to round up some men. There were two or three 502ND riflemen near him. They began to feel the heat of the German fire as the enemy came on through the orchard. SGT WILLIAM A. GRANT was hit in the arm and ran toward the farm house to get first aid. The other men, seeing GRANT go, moved out fast along Hedgerow Number 2 toward the highway. They had not seen the bullet hit GRANT but they had seen him run, and they took alarm and followed him. (This was determined at the critique but it was agreed that in view of the circumstances the names of the men would not be entered in the record.) THOMPSON, seeing his men run, took out after them.

LIEUT ROGERS, who was at the hedgerow next the house, heard the

cry as it passed along: "The order is to withdraw." The word passed from man to man: "Withdraw! Withdraw!" Then an officer repeated it. "Don't say that unless you're sure!" ROGERS yelled at him. The officer stayed at his post and was shot dead by a German bullet a few seconds later.

The rift at Hedgerow Number 2 dropped the weight of the attack squarely on SUMMERS' two guns. Fire from the enemy's burp guns ripped the trees and cut the ground all around the gunners. They gave back everything they had, raking the Orchard Hedgerow and Hedgerow Number 2 with steady fire. After closing to within 30 yards of the gun, the Germans faded back. It is not too much to say that the salvation of the position turned on the effectiveness of SUMMERS' fire at that moment, coupled with the courage of the few riflemen from Company B who supported him.

For what THOMPSON and ROGERS had feared most had happened on the left. The sudden run by the three men along the Number 2 Hedgerow and the cries of "Withdraw!" brought panic to the stragglers and the wounded who were lying in the fields and ditches to the rear of the cabbage patch. They arose on all sides and ran toward Bridge Number 4. There they were stopped and turned back by a small group of supply and communications officers and non-coms. This retreat was not even felt in the cabbage patch; the men were too busily engaged in firing at the enemy to know that it had taken place.

COLE, who was still directing the battle from the farm house, did not know there had been a breach on his front. But of a sudden he felt a vague uneasiness. He thought from the way that the enemy fire was building up and from the prolonged rattle of his own machine guns that the Germans were counterattacking. He asked for more artillery.

It was different with PVT ALLEN T. EMERY of Third Battalion, Headquarters Company. He was in the hedgerow just beyond the house. The men who had been with THOMPSON were a little to the left in the hedgerow just forward of EMERY. He sensed nothing unusual until he heard a cry: "The Germans are counterattacking. Get behind the bridge!" He heard several men yell it. Then he saw men from First Battalion come running back. At first they were not running rapidly but at a kind of slow trot, as if doubtful whether they were doing the right thing.

EMERY, and PVT EUGENE W. SAVER of Company H who was with him, watched them go. Some of the First Battalion men were firing as they fell back. EMERY and SAVER jumped in a foxhole to keep out of the line of fire. In the hole they found a large bag of food—sausage, butter, bread, and fudge—and they proceeded to eat it while they peered out of the foxhole and watched the First Battalion men stream back to the bridge. Mortar fire had been falling spasmodically all along the line. Then it came quite suddenly in large and persistent doses. There was a pick-up in machine gun fire also from the hedgerows. Being in the foxh

EMERY and SAVER saw no Germans. They didn't believe that any were coming and they kept on eating and wondering why the others had fallen back to the bridge.

They thought that the fudge was very good.

THE TRUCE

Noon was a few minutes gone when Regiment sent word by radio that all hands were to cease firing: The enemy wanted a truce. COLE dispatched runners to tell the men that they were to hold their positions but that all hostile activities along the front were to cease.

Some of the groups never received this order. The men had taken cover in such a scattered way that it was impossible to circulate any message completely. SWANSON wandered right through the early part of this truce without hearing about it. That was how he happened to be captured when he blundered into an enemy position and how he happened later to be released without any explanation.

The men on the right who had established the forward line near the crossroads heard nothing about the noon time truce. So far as they knew, the war was still going on. They had no radio nor were any runners getting up to them. Far off on their left, they could see the Germans moving around and concentrating toward them with more freedom than before but they had no awareness that the American left had suddenly quieted. The Germans who were behind the wall opposite them were still carrying on the fighting with percussion grenades, machine pistols and a few rifle grenades. They replied to this fire as best they could but they were having to hoard the last of their ammunition. The free movement of the Germans up ahead of them during this general

respite was something they could not curb in any case. The road curved sharply beyond the intersection. That, and the intervention of the hedgerows, made futile any fire toward the left flank. The men there simply sweated out the German re-grouping and wondered what was happening.

Elsewhere, among the men who knew what it was all about, the feeling was general that the Germans were using the truce to strengthen their small arms fire positions. They were sure the enemy would come on more strongly than ever if the truce failed. All of the men felt this (Determined at the critique) but there were only a few of them who saw any movement among the Germans and these few saw little which could really support their suspicions. Rather than the tangibles of sight and sound, it was the difference in the volume of power in the German build-up before and after the battle which convinced them that the Germans had abused the truce.

Among the men, rumor ran like wild-fire. Along the road someone yelled: "They've surrendered." Another story went the rounds, "We have captured a German field marshal." However, those who figured that they were through fighting for the day and that the battle was over, were in a small minority. The majority had only a limited idea of the truce. They thought it had been called to permit them to remove the dead and care for the wounded. These things, they proceeded to do. The impression was strengthened a few minutes after the "Cease firing!" order came through.

An American officer with a Red Cross flag came across Bridge Number 4 behind two Germans who were bearing white flags and took the road into CARENTAN. However, MAJ DOUGLAS T. DAVIDSON, MC, the Regimental Surgeon, was acting as a direct agent of the Division Commander to ask whether the Germans were ready to yield CARENTAN.

His mission failed. The military commander in CARENTAN wouldn't see him. Nothing came of the truce except that the men got one hour's rest. There was occasional firing by riflemen and mortar men from both sides during the lull, coming apparently from outposts which hadn't received the order. One German machine pistol man in the forward hedgerows broke the silence with a few rounds. A few riflemen joined him and others answered him. Regiment heard these sounds and called COLE to ask who was firing. Upon being told that the enemy was guilty, Regiment replied: "Don't let our men fire except in self defense."

During the truce all of the wounded were taken to the rear except six who were behind Bridge Number 4. A chaplain came up into the forward ground, collected about 30 of the casualties and started them out.

MAJ DAVIDSON got back to his own lines about 1300. The men didn't see him return. But they didn't need to be told that he was back. As he crossed Bridge Number 4 on his way to the Regimental CP, the Germans cut loose with everything—rifle fire,

machine guns, mortars, and artillery—in what was by far the most intense concentration of the day.

It fell with power and precision over the entire area held by both battalions, and casualties mounted all up and down the line. COLE called Regiment and asked for permission to return the fire. He was told to wait: as far as Regiment knew, DAVIDSON had not returned. COLE waited. Then he called again. Regiment was still hesitating. It had not received official notice that the truce was ended. Just then a shell hit the farm house directly above COLE'S head. "Listen to that!" COLE said: "How about me telling my men to fire?" They again told him to wait.

All of this, however, was slightly beside the point. The men of the two battalions were already bearing down with every weapon they had. When the Germans had opened fire, the men had taken the situation into their own hands and the belated order from Regiment to resume fire wasn't even passed on to the men by COLE.

There was a little moral sag when the fighting started. The men had relaxed during the truce. But they hadn't expected too much of it. SIMMONS heard one of his men say: "Well if the bastards won't surrender we'll fight it out with them."*

*ROSEMOND'S statement was: "I am certain that the enemy carefully prepared an artillery attack during the truce. It was the heaviest shelling they gave us at any time and quite well regulated." The men along the hedges agreed unanimously that this was the most destructive fire they felt during the day.

THE AFTERNOON

The afternoon battle wore on much as the morning fight had done though to the men on the fighting line it seemed to have a more deadly monotone. (This simply sums up many things which they had to say during the critique about their nervous reaction to the combat.) In the morning the enemy had acted indecisively, as if not certain whether to fight or retire. In the hours which followed the truce, there could be no doubt that the Germans intended to either drive 502ND REGIMENT back across the CAUSEWAY or annihilate the two battalions on the ground around the farm.

All offensive vigor by this time had been spent in the American force. That was almost as true of the individuals, taken one by one, as of the units. In COLE'S battalion, the last residue of offensive dash had been exhausted during the charge across the field and the brief advance into the orchard and the first few hedgerows beyond. CASSIDY'S men had become so spread over the wide front that the separate groups could no longer feel the strength of the larger unity. For both battalions, therefore, the afternoon was a period of grim holding on. The volume of German fire rose steadily, and the paratroopers felt again the pressure of an invisible enemy who revealed himself only through the swelling of sound as his mechanisms pushed nearer.

PVT PETER P. DUNSKY of Company H spoke for the men all along the line when he said: "We had to play it by ear. When we heard rifles and machine pistols fire at us from 200 yards away for

half an hour, then from 100 yards, then from 50 yards, we knew they were coming that much closer to us. The B-r-r-r-r sound of the machine guns would double, then treble in volume—not more shots, but more sound. We could hear them working the bolts of their rifles. We could hear their cartridge shells rattle. And the nearer they came to us, the more accurate they became."

Up at the crossroads on the right flank, the on-fall was swift and furious when the truce ended. The Germans swept in force around and within the curved line of the American position, throwing rifle, machine pistol, grenade and mortar fire ahead of them as they crept along the hedgerows. They got to the crossroads and from the ditches and trees just beyond the intersection they poured automatic fire into the ground beyond the road in great volume. The 35 men from First Battalion who were situated there had to break back precipitately. There is a place near the farm house where a long man-made inlet from the marsh and river gets almost to the roadway. They fell back to that neck of land and set up a new defensive line. So far as they knew, the whole detachment on the right had been forced to make this withdrawal.

But they were wrong about it. Seven men on the extreme right had stuck it. They continued to stick—a little island of resistance which lasted throughout the day.

Hour after hour, the Germans pressed on through the orchard and along the abounding hedgerows. About 10 men from Company B had taken position along Hedgerow Number 2 next a small detachment from Company H. The fire from the flank found them. Seven men from Company B were hit by bullets and the others quit the hedgerow in order to help their wounded back.

All that saved the Americans was that the enemy did not have a sufficient artillery. There were not more than two guns. (Both of them were 88s according to CAPT ROSEMOND.) After firing 6 or 7 rounds, each gun would break off for a while. The mortars never let up. They had the range and they stayed on it. This was just as true of the automatic weapons. After the men from Company B had fallen back from the Number 2 Hedgerow, the 10 men from Company H stayed on, holding it by themselves. They were on the north side of the hedge in one spot and the Germans held the rest of the hedge on the other side. Neither group could get immediately at the other because of the thickness of the hedge. But they grenaded each other.

The enemy kept coming. SGT SUMMERS' number 2 gun at the front of the last hedgerow was knocked out and the three crew members were killed. The right hand gun kept on firing down the road.

Probably the interdictory effect of this fire helped save the 7 men who were isolated in the forward position on the right. PVT WILLIAM J. BURT, who was on the gun, had no idea that there were any Company B men up ahead. But to him, firing along the

road seemed like a good idea at the time. (BURT'S own explanation.)

The 7 men—PVTS LUTHER DAVIS, JAMES PARHAM, BURTON FETIT, JOHN KOKRUGGA, ANTHONY FOGLIA, WELLS and SGT TED KAUS—had watched their original numbers dwindle steadily. COMBS had been hit. Fifteen others had been wounded and three killed in the forward line.

Late in the afternoon, PVT WELLS, who was the acting squad leader, got a bullet in the shoulder. "I think that's about enough," WELLS said to the others. "Leave me here. The rest of you had better drop back to the next hedgerow." His comrades said nothing. They just looked at him and shook their heads. The grenade battle went on. The 7 men were still holding out when the American barrage came over and the Germans faded back. The closest shells were within 25 yards of them and some fell behind their flank. They were glad to see it.

Twenty-eight men had been helping SUMMERS and ROGERS hold the ground around the machine gun position at the farm house. Twelve remained in the fight. The others were dead or wounded, mostly from bullet fire.

Company C and what remained of Company A had had almost no hedgerow maneuvering to do. In the cabbage patch, where they had been disposed during the late morning, they held their ground for more than 6 hours against all enemy counterattacks. They

were in pretty solid. Alone among the units which had distributed over the front, they had maintained a semblance of their tactical organization. This was a marked advantage. The men knew one another and knew their leaders. Company A had about 30 men with three machine guns among the cabbages. Company C's strength was a little less. They took losses from German fire throughout the afternoon but as evening came on they were the weaker by only about 20 men. There was enough fire power distributed through the cabbage patch that the flank never faltered.

Nor was the position ever dented. In the first German on-fall which followed the truce, the enemy came right on down the hedge-rows, moving in parallel lines toward these two companies on the American left. At the same time, other enemy riflemen came crawling along the ditch on the outside of the road. These lines of advance were continued throughout the afternoon. Each attack had the same pattern. Though toward the close of the action the Germans had trouble coming forward because they were obstructed by the bodies of their own dead, the machine guns covering the ditches were still cutting down enemy riflemen within 25 feet of their own muzzles. (This statement is attested by gunners and those who were around them.) From both sides of the culvert the machine guns covered the two parallel ditches. PFCS CHARLES L. RODERICK and FRANKLIN E. CAWTHON on the right hand ditch kept their gun going 6 hours. RODERICK got a hit on the operating handle while his gun was firing. It drove a piece of

the handle through his shoulder but he refused to be evacuated. PVT LERO C. NICOLAI and PFC ALFRED A. FITZSIMMONS stayed on the left hand gun. They fired usually in bursts of 6 or 7. It took a lot of ammunition. They counted 10 German dead within 25 yards of their gun when the action closed. The banks of the ditch were irregular and these enemy were able to crawl almost to the gun position before NICOLAI could get a clear shot at them.

Through most of the afternoon the CARENTAN road could not be travelled as far as the culvert by either jeeps or men carrying ammunition, such was the intensity of the fire. To the rear of the guns, the ditches were so fully clogged with wounded that ammunition carriers could not come forward over their bodies. Yet one of these hardships compensated for the others. Men — the wounded, the faltering and all of those who for one reason or another could no longer face the fire — were strung out along the ditches and along the CAUSEWAY for more than a mile on both sides of the road. These two chains of battered human beings served as a moving belt. Ammunition boxes were given into one pair of hands back beyond the CAUSEWAY. They passed through hundreds of hands on the way up. But always, they came along. The wounded would crawl the three or four yards which might be necessary to get the up-coming ammunition and then crawl back to pass it to the next man up the line.

The congestion at the road got worse as the afternoon yielded

more wounded who took cover in the ditches. As their numbers increased, the need grew for new hands at the front. Some of these men, rounded up by officers and non-coms working the rear, were stalled in the ditches as they tried to come up. SGT CHARLES R. DEROSE, who had stepped in a hole and broken his leg just as he got up to Company A's position, stood up in the same hole on the broken leg for 4 hours and served as a traffic director. He shuttled the wounded back and he urged the able men on toward the cabbage patch.

To all who witnessed, he was one of the most splendid figures of the day. But the Germans had his number on one particular shell.

CRISIS

The hour was about 1800. In the farm house ROSEMOND stood at the second story window for a few moments looking out over the hedgerows. COLE joined him there. He noted the pitifully scant numbers of his men around the house and along the first two hedgerows. They were firing as rapidly as they could. Compared with the volume of sound from the close-up enemy bullet fire, however, the sound of his own pieces seemed to COLE like a dying rattle. (COLE said that it was the relative noise from the two fire lines which convinced him that he was beaten.) He knew then that his line was cracked.

Crawling along the inside of the hedge, CAPT SIMMONS made a last trip up to carry ammunition to the 10 men who were holding out along Hedgerow Number 2. Their machine gun was jammed and they were engaging only with rifles and grenades. SIMMONS then came back and with a handful of men around him built up a line of resistance in the last hedgerow next the house. They figured this was the final reserve. If the Germans got through the second hedge and the men there had to fall back from the last field, they could at least be covered during the withdrawal.

There was no longer any attempt to evacuate the wounded. They moved back along the ditches if they could crawl. If they couldn't, they stayed where they had been hit. The few remaining aid men tried to care for these cases on the spot after get-

ng up to them through the ditches. So close joined had become
e bullet battle that the litters could not be brought up past
idge Number 4.

COLE and ROSEMOND, straining their eyes toward the eastward,
seemed now that the play was ended. They could see nothing
the enemy but they could feel his presence all around them.
fle fire was buffeting the house from two sides and knocking
ates from the roof above their heads. They said nothing.
ey simply nodded their agreement to one another that the fight
l been lost. (Their own description.) In ROSEMOND'S mind
ere was a question whether it would be best to stay and go
wn fighting or try to retreat over the CAUSEWAY with all the
ard that such a retreat entailed. He said a prayer. (His
words.) In COLE'S mind there was no question at all. He
gured that his men had already "fought to the last" and that
had no right to ask any more of them. He believed it was his
y to pull out. He decided that in pulling out, he would
ve his wounded. There were 5 or 6 of them in the house. He
d the first aid men that if a withdrawal was ordered, they
e not to encumber themselves.

1630, he talked by radio to LIEUT COL ALLEN W. GINDER, the
imental Executive. COLE told him he'd had enough for the
. He said that he thought the Regiment had better get set
rearward so that the forward battalions could be covered when
y withdrew. He asked that the Second Battalion build up a

fire position on the dyke behind the MADELEINE and along the righthand side of the highway so that a fire screen could be put around the farm house when the appropriate moment came. He asked also for the artillery to get ready with smoke so that they could put down a curtain around the farm and the highway area when the battalions began to funnel back into the CAUSEWAY.

But after he had given GINDER these forewarnings, he marked time for a while and waited for a further sign that the battle was turning more radically against him. STOPKA, moving around the farm house to watch the fighting, could hear the Germans working their rifle bolts in the hedgerows. He said to COLE: "It is getting God-damn hot."

There were few local arrangements for the withdrawal. COLE thought the best thing was to get out as fast as possible. He told STOPKA to regulate the movement on the right while he, COLE, took it in the center. CAPT JAMES H. HATCH of First Battalion would do the same on the left.

One last chance remained. That was the American artillery. But ROSEMOND'S radio was jammed. The men had been working over it frantically but were getting only German jamming. (ROSEMOND'S words.) What was coming over from the guns was insufficient in quantity and too far from our lines to turn the enemy back.

ROSEMOND knew that the situation required everything the artillery could give it, planted just as close to the farm house as

possible. He got through at last to CAPT CHARLES ALDRICH at the artillery CP. As he made contact, COLE said to him: "If this don't work we'll get the hell out of here right now." ROSEMOND told ALDRICH what he wanted. ALDRICH replied: "We're almost out of ammunition." ROSEMOND said: "For God's sake get some!"

(These quotations are made exactly from the recollections of the officers concerned.) ROSEMOND was pleading with him as a man pleads for his life "Get it!" "We must have it!" ALDRICH drew back for just a moment to make further inquiries. Then he returned to the instrument and said to ROSEMOND: "Fresh supplies of ammunition are just now coming into the battery positions."

The shells came over at last and they sounded like sweet music. During most of the day only two battalions had been firing in direct support of the farm position. This time every gun within the command was brought to bear. Without asking COLE what he wanted, ROSEMOND pulled the fire back so close that it was just arching over the farm house roof and falling in the field beyond.

For some few who had survived the battle thus far, it was too close. SGT DEROSE was still standing in the hole next the roadway, leg broken, doing his duty. He saw a shell land 25 feet in front of him. He said to those around him: "The next one will fall here." (Three survivors heard him say this.) But he continued to stand there, waving the men on. The next shell landed

within 5 yards of him and blew him apart. LIEUT FRANK MAGRIE, already in a dying condition from a bullet wound, was also killed by the burst. SWANSON and CODY escaped death by a few feet. They heard a whistle and they dove head first into the water-filled ditch.

The men of Company A talked about these things afterward but they did not have the usual reaction of infantrymen who have lost men through their own artillery fire. "We lost good men but we had to have that fire." one of them said, and the others agreed. They had seen the last onslaught as the Germans came down Hedgerow Number 2 and the hedgerow bordering the orchard and started to close on the house from both sides. They knew as clearly as COLE how close a thing it was.

The barrage lasted not more than 5 minutes. The infantrymen who heard the shells go over and saw them explode along the line later described the fire gratefully as "very intense". In fact, however, the fields and the hedgerows were not much knocked about, and a day or so afterward one could walk about through this ground and scarcely notice a sign of a shelling. But the explosions took enough of the advancing German infantry to turn the tide of battle. When the American guns ceased fire, COLE listened carefully. What he heard told him that the crisis had passed. There was enemy fire—bullet fire—still beating around the farm house. But the volume no longer sounded ominous. ROSEMOND also listened and got the same idea. They wait-

ed 5, 10 minutes. The recession continued. They could still hear the crackle of small arms fire. Only it sounded now as if the pieces had been muted. The enemy machine guns were moving southward.

"Listen to it!" COLE said to ROSEMOND. "Just listen to it!"

COLE went outside and sent about 10 men up to the field which lay well beyond the farm house between the road and the MADELEINE. They moved on as far as the crossroads. Four Germans came out of the woods shouting "Kamerad". But they still held their arms. Two men of Company H had been killed by this same trick within a few hundred feet of the same spot earlier in the day. So the patrol shot into them. Two went down and the other two jumped back into the woods. Otherwise the patrol found nothing but dead Germans. They came back and reported it.

COLE sent a second force of 25 men under LIEUT GEORGE H. CRAFT and 2ND LIEUT GEORGE E. BEAN, both of Company G, to prowl the orchard. They crossed the first field in a skirmish line—a scratch force drawn from all four companies. There was no German fire. However, the advancing line continued to fire into the base of the hedgerow as it went forward. The second hedgerow and orchard were about 75 yards away and it was another 100 yards across the orchard. From the area embracing field and orchard had come most of the enemy fire throughout the day.

The artillery had cut a few convenient holes in the hedgerow.

Some of the men jumped through them. Others went by the gate. They stayed in the field and orchard for more than an hour. A German machine gun fired loosely at them from far over on the left. Next the hedgerow, they found an American 60 mm mortar which the Germans had been using against them. COLE came up to them where they had formed a fire line along the hedgerow. He told them to hold it until Second Battalion came to relieve them. The German fire could still be heard faintly in the distance. But the whole front had cooled along the bank of the MADELEINE.

About 2000, Second Battalion arrived and took over the position. COLE ordered a roll call of his men. There were 132 left to make answer. While they were forming in the orchard about 2100, there was one last burst of shelling from the German artillery. Three more men were killed and 8 were wounded.

The others marched off to ST COME DU MONT. They arrived, walking, at 2330. One of the men said to COLE: "Did you know today is Sunday?" Said COLE: "Jesus Christ, why didn't somebody tell me?" (This conversation was witnessed by about 6 men who reported it at the critique.) When morning came, the enemy had disappeared from this sector of the CARENTEAN front.

CAWTHON and the others at the machine gun used direct fire. They were able to see the enemy coming on. They killed about 50. The men in the cabbages got only occasional glimpses of the enemy. Those fighting from behind hedgerows almost never saw the Germans

There was a large group of trees at the corner of Hedgerow Number 3 which enabled the enemy to concentrate at that point behind pretty good cover.

COLE got the Congressional Medal for his charge across the field. He did not live to know that he had received it. He was killed when a sniper's bullet hit him between the eyes at BEST, HOLLAND, in September. His family received the award about one month later. (The manner of COLE'S death is fully covered in the historical account of OPERATION MARKET.) STOPKA was given the Distinguished Service Cross for his part in the charge. He got it a few days before he was killed by one of our own air bombs at BASTOGNE, BELGIUM, in January.