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OPERATIONS OF AN ADVANCE COMMAND POST PARTY
411TH INFANTRY, 103RD INFANTRY DIVISION
IN THE VICINITY OF MARKTWALD, GERMANY
27 APRIL 1945
(Personal Experience of Regimental Staff Officer - S-1)

Type of operation described: THE OPERATIONS OF A
REGIMENTAL ADVANCE PARTY

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of an advance command post party, 411th Infantry, 103rd Infantry Division in the vicinity of Marktwald, Germany, 27 April 1945, during the latter phase of the Central Europe Campaign.

The Seventh United States Army, after crossing the Rhine River in March 1945, continued to advance across southern Germany, attacking first east and then southeast, and by 20 April 1945 had moved to a line extending generally northeast from the vicinity of Stuttgart on its left flank to the city of Nuremburg on its right flank. (1) (See Map A)

At this time the Seventh Army was ordered to change its direction of attack from southeast to south. The purpose of this change of direction was to push Allied troops as fast as possible to the so-called National Redoubt Center. (2)

This National Redoubt Center, as described by Brigadier General Reuben E. Jenkins, G-2 of the Sixth Army Group, "extended generally east west through the Tyrol - Bavarian, Austrian and Italian Alps and consisted of compact, mountainous, inaccessible terrain. Its extreme relief, narrow, abrupt valleys and winding roads made it admirable for a determined defense by minimum forces well supplied and armed with modern mountain equipment." (3)

It was the Allied belief, at this time, that the enemy would make a concentrated effort to move large numbers of troops to this area to set up a final defense. Therefore a determined drive on the part of the Allies

(1) A-3, pp. 796, 801; (2) A-3, p. 797; (3) A-3, pp. 1-2.

was planned to forestall the anticipated German move. The Allied forces planned an attack, with speed as its keynote, which would accomplish the purpose of encircling or destroying the larger part of the German forces before they could move into the Redoubt Center. (4)

The change of direction was completed by the Seventh Army on 21 April 1945, and the Redoubt Campaign was now an actuality. (5) Initially, the advance was rapid and by 26 April 1945 the Danube River had been successfully crossed by all three corps of the Seventh Army with the VI Corps on the right, the XXI Corps in the center, and the XV Corps on the left. (6)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The VI Corps, consisting at this time of the 10th Armored Division and the 44th and 103rd Infantry Divisions, now prepared for a southward drive to the Memmingen - Mindelheim - Landsberg line. The tank columns of the 10th Armored Division were to spearhead the drive, with the motorized elements of the two infantry divisions following closely on the heels of the armor, protecting its exposed flanks and clearing up remaining pockets of resistance. (7)

The 103rd Infantry Division, previously designated as SHAEF reserve, had been released from its reserve assignment and attached to the VI Corps on 18 April 1945. (8) The division joined the Corps attack on 20 April 1945. (9)

The pace was extremely rapid for the next five days bringing the division some forty-five miles to the north bank of the Danube River. The division, with the 409th Combat Team on the left, the 410th Combat Team on the right, and the 411th Combat Team in reserve, forced an assault boat crossing of the Danube on the morning of 26 April 1945, and by that evening

(4) A-1, p. 89; (5) A-3, p. 810; (6) A-3, p. 819; (7) A-3, pp. 820-821; (8) A-3, p. 1014; (9) A-3, p. 802.

forward elements had pushed on into Weissenhorn and Burg where they halted for the night. (10)

Here
er
reading needed

The speed of this advance deep into uncertain enemy territory, frequently led to situations which called for rapid adjustment of the original plan. To accomplish these modifications the regimental commander of the 411th Combat Team had established the practice of directing the activities of his command from advance operational command posts set up well forward along the axis of the regimental advance. The task of establishing these advance command posts, and setting up the necessary security, was assigned to an advance command post party which had been organized for that purpose at the start of the operation. (11)

HERE

This advance command post party, comprising a total of four officers and fifty enlisted men, consisted of four groups combined under the direction of a regimental staff officer from the S-1 Section of the regiment. These four groups were the headquarters group, consisting of the leader and four enlisted men; the communications group, consisting of the regimental communications officer and ten enlisted men; the security group, consisting of the security platoon leader and seventeen enlisted men; and the quartering and liaison group consisting of one officer and nineteen enlisted men. This latter group was made up of one officer representative and his driver from the attached company of the 328th Medical Battalion, and non-commissioned officer representatives and their drivers from the three battalions of the regiment, the regimental Anti-Tank Company, the regimental Cannon Company, the attached battalion of the 384th Field Artillery Battalion, the attached company of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, the attached company of the 328th Engineer Combat Battalion and the attached platoon from the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self Propelled). The transportation for the four groups consisted of twelve jeeps. (12)

(10) A-5, p. 130; (11), (12) Personal knowledge.

Alger mission?

The division plan for 27 April 1945 called for multiple pushes to the south with the 410th Combat Team leading the division effort to the right, and the 409th Combat Team, followed by the 411th Combat Team, making the effort to the left. (13) (See Map B)

The mission assigned to the 411th Combat Team at this time was to advance in the zone of the spearheading 409th Combat Team and clear out any pockets of resistance that remained in the wake of the forward element. (14)

On the evening of 26 April 1945, the commander of the 411th Combat Team directed that necessary arrangements be made to establish the next forward advance command post, on 27 April 1945, in the town of Marktwald, Germany, which lay some twenty-five kilometers to the south. In accordance with this directive, the advance command post party groups were alerted to be prepared to move out from the vicinity of the present command post in Neuberg at 0530, 27 April 1945. It was planned by the leader of the party to move his column to the town of Burg and there follow the advance of the reinforced 1st Battalion of the 409th Combat Team who were scheduled to move out of Burg at 0630 and advance along the route in the general direction of the town of Marktwald. All necessary details were coordinated on the evening of 26 April 1945. (15)

more details needed on plan for coordination of party groups for the advance

THE INITIAL ADVANCE

The advance party met as planned the following morning and moved on to the town of Burg reaching this point in plenty of time to tag along at the tail end of the battalion which cleared the town on schedule. (See Map C)

The reinforced battalion headed south and proceeded rapidly towards the direction of the town of Balzhausen. The column moved along smoothly (15) Personal knowledge.

for quite some time. It was very quiet and the countryside seemed serene and peaceful.

Suddenly the peaceful atmosphere was dissolved by the sound of heavy gunfire breaking out to the front of the column. The vehicles came to an abrupt stop as the firing continued. After an interval of about thirty minutes the move was resumed and the ground ahead disclosed the reason for the delay. The road was littered with wrecked and burning enemy artillery wagons. Dead Germans and dead horses lay in the midst of the wreckage. It was evident that the Americans had overtaken a marching column and that the enemy had offered futile resistance. The broken ruins spread out along the road necessitated frequent by-passes by the advancing column into the nearby fields to continue the march. The column moved on with subsequent stops, and sounds of gunfire to the front indicated that more of the enemy still possessed the will, if not the strength, to offer resistance. This light opposition was quickly disposed of and the column continued through the towns of Kirrberg, Tiefenried, Derndorf, Kirchein, Spock, and Morgen with very little delay. Several of these towns revealed hundreds of German prisoners being herded into newly established prisoner collection points which had been hastily set up where found necessary. As the column neared the town of Zaisertshofen gunfire again broke out at the head of the column and the vehicles came to another stop. The sound of the heavy guns of the tanks could be heard intermingled with the sound of machine guns and individual rifles. This firing continued for quite some time. It seemed obvious that the Americans had run into a pocket of determined resistance. Finally, after an unusually long delay, the column continued forward and again the results of the battle could be seen. A second horse-drawn column had been overtaken and destroyed near the north edge of the town and the fight had continued well on into the town itself. The tank elements had ^hown no mercy and had blasted and chewed their way through

every point where resistance had been encountered. The broken houses, burning and scarred, along with hundreds of prisoners held under guard disclosed the final result of the American effort.

This town of Zaisertshofen marked the end of the advance of the 411th party with the armored column, for it was here that the road to Marktwald, which was the destination of the group, swung to the left while the path of the armor stretched to the right. The 411th vehicles were brought to a halt at the intersection of this change of routes.

At this intersection, an American Major presumably in charge of supervising the flow of traffic, was approached by the command post leader and queried as to information concerning the route to Marktwald. The Major, unfortunately, had no information as to what enemy strength, if any would be found in that direction. He did state, however, that no Americans or American vehicles had proceeded up the left route. (16)

THE ADVANCE TO THE TOWN

The officers of the command post party discussed the situation and planned a tentative course of action. It was decided to continue the advance to the town checking anything or anybody along the route that looked suspicious. The vehicles were to be dispersed and were to maintain a distance of at least fifty yards between vehicles. The three infantry officers were to be located to the front, middle and rear of the column and the officer from the medical battalion was to ride at the rear of the column. All vehicles were to maintain visual contact with the vehicles to the rear as well as to the front. All personnel were to dismount immediately if the column came to a halt and be prepared to fight. The men were briefed as to the plan and were checked to ascertain that each carried the maximum amount of ammunition on his person, rather than in the vehicle, (16) Personal knowledge.

thus assuring that each would have the means to fight upon leaving the vehicle. The personnel again mounted their vehicles and the column was rearranged in the desired order. (17) (See Map D)

The lead vehicle started slowly to get the column moving and then rapidly picked up speed with the others following at the specified distances. The road stretched out in front with wide, open fields to either side. The column moved on and no sign of activity was noticed. The column continued and had advanced a little over a mile when a group of German soldiers were seen running into a house which was located about fifty yards from the left side of the road. The vehicles came to an immediate stop and the occupants of the first two jeeps advanced cautiously towards the house, leaving the drivers with the vehicles. The group advanced to within fifty feet of the house without receiving any fire. At this point they stopped and a German speaking soldier in the group was directed to yell at the soldiers in the house to come out and surrender. He shouted his message twice and a reply came from the house saying they would surrender. The Americans were ordered to hold their fire and five Germans advanced from the house. They were quickly placed under guard and searched for weapons. The house was then entered and searched but yielded no further prisoners. The Germans were questioned concerning the town of Marktwald but professed to know nothing of the situation in that vicinity claiming they had just fled from the town of Zaisertshofen. Four other houses in the area were quickly searched but were found to be empty. The prisoners were placed under the guard of personnel of one radio jeep who were instructed to march them back to the PW collecting point at Zaisertshofen, and were then to contact the column by radio for further instructions.

The personnel remounted their vehicles and the column moved on. The terrain ahead now showed the road to be bordered on both sides by heavy
(17) Personal knowledge.

woods. (See Map E) The column had moved almost to the near edge of the woods, a distance of about three hundred yards, when a ^{second group} ~~second group~~ of Germans sprinted from the edge of the road to the cover of the woods about one hundred and fifty feet to the left. They were immediately fired on by personnel of the lead vehicle, but the fire was ineffective and the Germans continued running. The vehicle was brought to a quick stop and the Americans piled out and ran in the direction of the woods after the Germans, firing as they ran. Suddenly a hail of fire was received from the woods and one American who had been running by the side of the leader of the party fell wounded. The officer dropped immediately by his side and looked for any available cover. The firing continued from the woods but was now returned by the driver of the vehicle who had dropped into a depression on the near side of the road. To his fire was added the fire of the other two former occupants of the jeep who had dived for a hole when first fired on and were now located in this hole about fifteen yards to the right rear of the wounded man and the officer. This return fire on the German position provided the officer the opportunity to roll himself and the wounded man to the cover afforded by a shallow ditch which lay about ten feet to their left. The wounded man was bleeding profusely and appeared to be in great pain. A quick check of his injuries revealed several wounds in various parts of his body. The most serious injury appeared to be to his right leg as the raw ends of the bones could be seen protruding through the flesh and the blood was gushing out in spurts. A tourniquet was improvised from his belt and trench knife and placed on his leg. The bleeding stopped but it was evident that he would need further treatment quickly.

The firing ceased momentarily and the officer contacted the two men to his right rear. They assured him that they had not been wounded and stated that they had a plentiful supply of ammunition remaining. They

inquired about the wounded man and were told that his condition was serious.

The officer then peered cautiously from his position in the ditch and looked over the ground. Directly to the front at about a distance of one hundred feet was the wooded area which contained the Germans. This wooded area started from an open field about fifteen feet to the left front of the observers position and then ran to the right, paralleling the road, for a distance of four or five hundred yards. This wooded area was split by a trail about fifteen feet wide which started from about ten feet to the right front of the officer's position and continued back deep into the woods for an undetermined distance. The open field on the left edge of the woods extended left to the rear of the houses which had just been searched, a distance of a little over three hundred yards. This field was flat and open. A glance to the rear disclosed the empty jeeps spread out along the road. None of the Americans could be seen but it was reasonable to assume that they were all, with the exception of the former occupants of the first jeep, somewhere on the far side of the road.

This assumption was quickly confirmed, for as the enemy again opened fire a return fire of some strength was thrown at them from the other side of the road. The ^{? or fire} enemy appeared to be coming from the woods on both sides of the trail to the front.

The discovery of the extent of the German positions brought a new problem to light inasmuch as the ditch in which the officer and wounded man lay continued from their position up to the left edge of the woods where a slight maneuvering on the part of the enemy would enable them to get to a position where they could fire into the American position.

The situation at this time appeared to be difficult to say the least. Five of the Americans, one of them wounded, were on the near side of the road with the rest of the Americans on the far side. Any attempt to move

either group to join the other would necessitate crossing the open exposed road and ground in between the positions. The vehicles were sitting like ducks on the road and certainly no attempt could be made to mount them while the enemy remained in the woods. It also appeared to be impossible to bring any successful flanking movement on the German position without incurring heavy casualties as the open field to the left afforded no cover for a maneuvering force, and an attempt to hit the Germans from the other side would entail moving the flanking party deep into unexplored territory where, even if successful in crossing the exposed road to get into the woods, there would be only a remote possibility of approaching the enemy without being seen or heard.

The soldiers to the right rear contacted the officer in the ditch and told him that the security platoon leader on the other side of the road had sent word that most of the other Americans were now in positions along the far side of the road and the remainder were with the communications officer who was making an attempt to get his group to a position in the vicinity of the houses to the left. They further passed along the message that the officer from the medical battalion was going to make an attempt to get to the wounded man.

This message had scarcely been conveyed when the Americans opened fire from the far side of the road. As this was evidently the covering fire for the advancing medic the Americans on the near side added their fire in an attempt to keep the Germans pinned down while he crossed over the exposed ground. However, the Germans on spotting his movement opened fire, but he made the cover of the ditch with a couple of bullet holes in his clothing as mute testimony to the closeness of his escape. He very quickly and efficiently went to work on the wounds of the injured man and relieved his pain with a hypodermic injection. This courageous act, made entirely on the officer's own initiative, was an excellent example of

coolness under fire and devotion to duty and was a definite contribution to the morale of the men who witnessed his act, for which he was later decorated.

While the officer was working on the wounded soldier a sudden heavy volume of fire was poured into the woods from the general vicinity of the houses to the left. This fire from the flank was evidently a complete and unprepared-for surprise to the Germans in the edge of the woods near the field as they could be seen hurriedly moving to get out of line of the fire. In moving they exposed themselves to fire from the front and the Americans, now with a definite target at which to aim, poured it at them. This combined fire was apparently too much for the Germans as they made no effort to return the fire, but instead made a wild dash to the rear. The fire of the Americans followed them on their flight and several were seen to drop evidently either wounded or killed. Continued American fire was poured into the section of the woods which had just been vacated, but no further movement or return fire was observed from that side of the wooded trail. However, the Germans on the ^{East?} other side of the trail, now realizing that the American fire was not being directed at their position, picked up the fire indicating that they still were far from through. The fire died down shortly, and again everything was quiet. The officer from the medical battalion told the leader at this time that the wounded soldier was in a very serious condition and it would be necessary to get him back to an aid station quickly if he were to have a chance to live.

The leader in the ditch decided that the only course of action left was to attempt to move the American group, now located in the vicinity of the houses, across the open ground to a position in the woods. As the Germans remaining in the woods could still cover the open field, although not as well as before, it was obvious that the maneuvering force would need some effective covering fire as they advanced across the field. It

was also quite obvious that the only one who could provide this effective covering fire was the leader himself as he was the only one in a position to advance to the edge of the woods along a covered route. The officer decided to have the maneuvering force on the left prepare to move, to have the group to the rear open fire and to advance to the woods while this fire was being delivered. After reaching the woods he would attempt to provide the necessary covering fire and as soon as he opened up with this fire the flanking group was to start moving towards the woods. His instructions were transmitted back through the soldiers to his right rear and after about twenty minutes the soldiers passed back the word that everything was ready to go. The officer signified that he was ready to move and the fire opened up from the Americans in the rear. The officer started his crawl to the woods. The Germans returned the American fire but did not fire in the direction of the ditch so it appeared that the officer's movement was unnoticed. He made the edge of the woods without incident and was greatly relieved to find that its only occupants were two Germans, both apparently very dead. He crawled to a position behind a large tree and looked over in the direction of the German position. They were easy to spot as they were still firing out to their front and were paying no attention to their flank. The officer opened fire on the enemy position which immediately caused a great deal of confusion, they could be seen shifting positions hurriedly. The fire now increased in intensity from the American position on the far side of the road and the group led by the communications officer advanced rapidly across the open field and slid into position in the woods to add their fire to the rest. This additional fire was evidently the final straw for the Germans as they suddenly broke out with loud cries of surrender. The American fire was halted and the Germans advanced from the woods with their hands in the air. They were placed under guard and the woods were checked. Four more wounded were found, making a total of

What
did
they
do?

twenty-nine prisoners, nine of whom were wounded. Five dead, including one officer, were left in the woods where they had fallen. The prisoners were questioned and volunteered the information that they had wanted to surrender from the beginning but were prevented from doing so by the officer. They stated that they had given up as soon as he had been killed. They did not, however, have any information as to what enemy would be found in the town of Marktwald claiming that they too had just fled from the town of Zaisertshofen.

The personnel of the radio vehicle who had been designated to march the prisoners back to Zaisertshofen had heard the firing as they started back to town and had stopped, left one man to guard the prisoners and the vehicle, and had then come back to join the others in the fight. The second group of prisoners, carrying and assisting their own wounded who had been given first aid, were added to the first group and the personnel of the radio jeep started them on their march back to town. The wounded American soldier was placed in another vehicle under the care of a non-commissioned officer who was instructed to get him back to the nearest aid station and then either rejoin the radio jeep personnel at Zaisertshofen, or in the event that they were gone when he got back, to wait at Zaisertshofen for the rest of the regiment to come along.

The woods on both sides of the road were checked but nothing suspicious was found. All personnel were accounted for and ammunition was redistributed from the vehicles. The vehicles were checked and found to be in good condition with the exception of a few harmless bullet holes.

The personnel were remounted and the column continued on its twice interrupted march. The vehicles moved rapidly and reached the southern edge of the town without further incident. The column was halted at this point and the Americans advanced into the town on foot.

A wild scene of confusion greeted the Americans as they started up

the main street. German soldiers seemed to be running from every direction with most of them running away from the town through a large open field which lay just east of the town. No effort whatsoever was made at resistance and the soldiers who were running across the field appeared to be unarmed. Several of the Americans opened fire on the fleeing Germans but they were quickly ordered to hold their fire. There were two reasons for this order. Firstly, the Germans appeared to be unarmed and could therefore offer no resistance, and secondly, the leader of the Americans reasoned that the remaining Germans in the town would be more inclined to give up without a fight if they did not see their fleeing comrades slaughtered.

The Americans were quickly organized into four groups. The first group was to stay at the edge of the town with the mission of protecting the vehicles and giving warning of anything entering the town. The second and third groups were to advance up both sides of the main street and make a house to house search for enemy soldiers. The fourth group was to follow the second and third at a distance of about a hundred yards to act as a reserve in case the need arose for additional assistance.

The searching groups advanced from house to house uncovering scores of enemy soldiers who were found hiding in the buildings. The prisoners were moved into the middle of the street and their number was constantly increased as the search continued.

Slight resistance in the form of a few scattered shots was encountered at three points. This resistance was quickly dispelled with the Americans returning a heavy volume of fire and the Germans quickly surrendering. The search continued throughout the entire town and was finally concluded.

Road blocks were set up at the remaining three entrances to the town with a force of five men being left at each point and a roving patrol of

nine men was established to roam the town looking for anything which may have been missed and to check the road blocks.

The prisoners were consolidated and marched back to the southern edge of town where they were searched for any additional weapons they might have concealed on their persons. While this search was going on the road blocks had not been idle as they had shot and killed one motorcyclist who had attempted to evade capture, and had captured a total of sixteen Germans, including one Colonel. These prisoners had driven into the town evidently unaware that the town had been occupied by the Americans.

The prisoners now totaling one hundred and fifty-one were lined up under guard and started on their march back to the prisoner collection point at Zaisertshofen.

The officers of the advance party had just started to discuss the command post set-up when a radio message was received from the regimental commander. This message directed the group to vacate Marktwald and proceed to Landsberg instead, so thus the operations of this command post party in the town of Marktwald was relegated to the position of just another incident in the advance of the 411th Infantry. (18)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

✓ The preparation for carrying out the assigned mission was not complete. The leader of the advance party was aware, prior to the move, that his group would have to travel alone for that portion of the advance from Zaisertshofen to Marktwald. This factor should have prompted him to consider whether or not his group had adequate fire power to venture into unexplored enemy territory. Sub-machine guns and hand grenades were available and would have been highly useful in this operation.

The determined defense offered by the enemy to the heavily armed reinforced battalion at Zaisertshofen indicated the enemy will for resistance. (18) Personal knowledge.

Handwritten notes:
This is a personal
copy of the report
of the advance party
in the town of
Marktwald.

Future plans should have taken this into consideration. The advisability of continuing the march by motor at this point can be questioned. Adequate time was available for the group to make the move on foot with the security portion of the group being utilized as an advance guard as their primary mission was protection.

With the advance from Zaisertshofen being made by motor it is doubtful whether the specified distance of fifty yards between vehicles was sufficient. One well placed enemy machine gun along the route might well have succeeded in neutralizing the entire column.

The spot decision on the part of the leader to pursue the fleeing Germans into the woods, showed a lack of judgement as it failed to take into account the possibility of an ambush.

The movement of the group led by the Communications officer, first to the vicinity of the houses and then across the open field, combined with the covering fire of the remainder of the Americans, illustrated an excellent example of the use of fire and maneuver.

The value of the element of surprise was successfully illustrated three times during this operation. Once by the enemy in the initial pinning down of the Americans, and twice by the Americans in their two successive maneuvering advances.

The excellent performance of the personnel from non-infantry units emphasizes the desirability of basic infantry training for all branches of the service in the combat arms.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

- ✓ 1. Every leader should insure that his unit is equipped with the proper tools to most effectively and efficiently accomplish all phases of the assigned mission.

More analysis needed.

✓ 2. The enemy will for resistance is a factor which should merit some consideration when planning a move into enemy-held territory.

3. All elements of a military force should be utilized to the fullest extent to accomplish the mission for which they are assigned.

4. Military formations, either foot or motor, should be planned so as to offer the greatest protection to the personnel within it if the formation will not interfere with the accomplishment of the mission.

✓ 5. Aggressive action should be tempered with caution and good judgement.

✓ 6. Personnel traveling by motor should not lose sight of the fact that some phases of their mission may be more efficiently accomplished by foot.

✓ 7. The element of surprise combined with fire and maneuver can be utilized to lessen the odds against a force which finds itself in a precarious position.

*See in
M.I.
2/24/42*

*according
to manual*