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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY " A ", 354TH INFANTRY REGIMENT
(89TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE RHINE RIVER CROSSING AT
WELLMICH, GERMANY, 25 MARCH - 26 MARCH 1945
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: RIVER CROSSING

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company "A", 354th Infantry Regiment (89th Infantry Division) in the Rhine River Crossing at Wellmich, Germany, 25 March- 26 March 1945. (Central Europe Campaign)

The crossing site assigned to the men of the 89th Infantry Division has quite a historical background. At the same sites, in the year 1813, Blucher, a Prussian General, known to English readers as the man who came to the aid of Wellington at the battle of Waterloo, chased Napoleon's Army across the Rhine river. Although his bridges were swept away by the swift current, his crossing slow and tedious, the operation was a success. Blucher said, ~~the~~ " The whole Rhine crossing was at a cost of three hundred men. So long as the Rhine has gone by that name, no army of eighty thousand men ever crossed it so cheaply." (1)

At this same crossing site stands the famous rock of Lorelei. In the way of a legend, Lorelei is a beautiful maiden who threw herself into the Rhine over a faithless lover, and a siren whose voice lured many fishermen to their doom. The legend is closely connected to the Myth of Holda, queen of the elves. I quote, " the man who sees her loses sight or reason, he who listens is condemned to wander with her forever." (2)(3)

(1) A-9, p. 200-203; (2) A-11, p. 1; (3) A-10, p. 393

THE GENERAL SITUATION

By the 25th March 1945, all determined German resistance had been reduced and the Allied Armies had complete control of the West bank of the Rhine river from Switzerland in the South to the North Sea. (4) At this time three bridgeheads had been established across the Rhine, the first one at Remagen on the 7th March by the First Army, (5) the second at Oppenheim, on the 22d March by the Third Army, (10) and the third bridgehead at Wesel on the 24th March by the Ninth Army. (16) All Allied Armies now stood poised awaiting orders to advance across the Rhine into the very heart of the crumbling German empire. (6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19). (See Map "A")

THE MISSION OF THE EIGHT CORPS

The Eight Corps, composed of the 76th, 87th and 89th Infantry divisions, planned to attack across the Rhine in the vicinity of Boppard, advance Northeast and effect a junction with the First United States Army in the vicinity of Giessen. (See Map "B") The attack was to be made with the 87th and 89th Infantry divisions abreast, the 89th on the right. The 87th Infantry division to attack on the 25th March and cross the Rhine river near Boppard, the 89th Infantry Division to attack on the 26th March and cross the Rhine near St. Goar, both divisions to be supported by fires from the 76th Infantry Division deployed along the East bank of the Rhine River. (20,21,22,23) (See Map "B")

(4) A-8, p. 93; (5) A-5, p. 44; (6) A-8, p. 91; (7) A-6, p. 29; (8) A-2, p. 96; (9) A-12, p. 91; (10) A-13, p. 314; (11) A-8, p. 101; (12) A-3, p. 75; (13) A-5, p. 44; (14) A-6, p. 37; (15) A-7, p. 273; (16) A-6, p. 34; (17) A-2, p. 96; (18) A-8, p. 100; (19) A-5, p. 45; (20) A-1, p. 315; (21) A-13, p. Command 12; (22) A-2, p. 96; (23) A-4, p. 147

THE MISSION OF THE 89TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The 89th Infantry Division, composed of the 353rd, 354th, and 355th Infantry Regiments, planned to attack on the 26th March with the 354th and 353rd Infantry Regiments abreast, the 353rd on the right, cross the Rhine river near St. Goar, secure a bridgehead and capture Zorn and Espenschied. (24, 25) (See Map "B")

THE MISSION OF THE 354TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

The 354th Infantry Regiment, with Company "B", Tank Destroyer Battalion and Company "B", 314th Medical Battalion attached, with Company "B", 314th Engineer Combat Battalion and elements of the 1107th Engineer Combat Group in direct support, planned to attack on the 26th March with the 1st and 2d Battalions abreast, 2d Battalion on the right, cross the Rhine river at St. Goar, contact the 87th Infantry Division on the left and capture that part of the division objective in their zone. The 341st Field Artillery Battalion(105) was in direct support, reinforced by fires from the 282d Field Artillery Battalion(105) and the 776th Field Artillery Battalion (155). (26) (See Map "B")

PREPARATION FOR THE ATTACK

During the above operational planning, the 1st Battalion, 354th Infantry was occupying a defensive position near the village of Halsenbach, Germany, which was about eight miles West of the Rhine river. (See Map "C") On the 25th March(the day before the crossing) at 1130, all company commanders and key battalion personnel moved by motor from Halsenbach to the high ground over-

(24) A-4, p. 147; (25) A-2, p. 201; (26) Personal Knowledge

looking the crossing site at the Rhine river. We arrived at the crossing site about 1230, and after having been oriented on the ground, were shown the crossing point. A stone building along the waters edge, located in the left edge of the village (Name unknown), was designated as the crossing point. At this time the Battalion Commander gave us the following information: Elements of the 76th Infantry Division hold the village to your front, limit your forward reconnaissance to this point, the time of crossing unknown, but we expect to cross the river sometime before daylight the 26th March. (27)

All platoon leaders and squad leaders of the Battalion were moved by motors, and closed into the crossing area by 1330. Thus, allowing all unit leaders of the Battalion, three hours of daylight in which to make their personal reconnaissance. Each Company Commander had sufficient time to give all details of the attack known at this time , down to and including rifle squad leaders. In my case, I personally pointed out to all my squad leaders the stone building which was the crossing point, and the Company rendezvous point. Our Company rendezvous point across the river was a railroad tool house along the railroad bed about fifty yards from the left edge of Wellmich. (28)

The 1st Battalion closed into the forward assembly area at about 1700, 25th March. (See Map "C") A short time after arrival, they were fed a hot meal. Extra ammunition(One Bandoleer) and emergency rations(One "K" Ration) were issued each man and by 2100, most men in the Battalion were asleep. (29)

THE TERRAIN

The terrain at the crossing site was very rugged. On our side, the terrain rose from the river into a mass of buildings, (27) Personal Knowledge; (28) Personal Knowledge; (29) A-2, p. 97

then to a first class hard surfaced road. Behind the road the ground rose abruptly to heights of over 500 feet. The entire area being covered with large trees and heavy undergrowth, thus, limiting our observation except for a few open spaces between groups of large trees.

The Rhine river at this point was about eight hundred feet wide with a strong and swift current. The water in the river at this time of the year is very cold due to the drainage of the water from the snow capped Alps.

On the German side, the water ended at the base of a concrete sea wall which extended down the river. A gradual sloping beach about one hundred yards in length and fifty yards in width extended from the right edge of the sea wall to the left edge of the town of Wellnich. The beach ended at a hard surfaced road with the ground rising ^{up} to a railroad bed. Behind the railroad bed lay a deep ditch, with the terrain in rear rising almost straight up among rocky cliffs to heights of over four hundred feet. This high ground was composed of a net work of rock terraces with vineyards planted in between. The rock terraces were so high that one had to find steps in the wall in order to negotiate the steep slope.

On each flank of this rocky hill lay high commanding ground rising to heights of over seven hundred feet. The hills on the flanks were covered with dense foliage and offered excellent defensive positions for the Germans. In short, all the advantages of the terrain ^{were} ~~was~~ in favor of the enemy. (30)(31)(32) (See Map "C").

THE ENEMY

The 89th Infantry Division G-2 estimated that the Germans were capable of throwing against the 89th several divisional organ-
(30) A-6, p. 5 & 42; (31) A-2, p. 98; (32) Personal Knowledge

izations totaling about fifteen thousand troops. The enemy was strengthening his defenses but reports showed no extensive system of fortifications. A few individual positions and weapon emplacements had been observed. Some obstacles and mines were evident. (33)

Enemy activity during this period consisted of a few rounds of Artillery coming in at infrequent intervals, and sniper fire from positions across the river. This artillery and sniper firing did not cause any casualties in the Battalion during this period. (34)

THE EFFECTIVE STRENGTH OF COMPANY "A"

Company "A" effective strength was at about ninety eight percent total table of organization strength, having lost one Officer and six enlisted men on the Moselle river crossing on the 16th March. These losses effected the combat efficiency of the 3d Platoon and the Weapons platoon. The men wounded in the 3d Platoon were the Platoon Sergeant, the Platoon Guide, and Squad Leaders of the 1st and 3d Squads. In the Weapons Platoon the Officer, Lt. O'Connell, was wounded. The only replacements received to this date were four privates. (35)

THE ATTACK

I crawled into my sleeping bag at 2230, 25th March, only to be awakened at 2330 by my first sergeant Truggi, who informed me that the Battalion Commander wanted me at the Battalion Command Post immediately.

Upon arrival at the Battalion Command Post at about 2400, the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Davidson, issued the following attack order:

1. This Battalion, with the 2d Platoon Antitank Company,
- (33) A-2, p. 96; (34) Personal Knowledge; (35) Personal Knowledge

1st Platoon Cannon Company, 1st Platoon Smoke Generator Company, and one Platoon of Company "B", 314th Engineer Combat Battalion attacked, attacks at 0200, 26th March in a column of Companies, Company "A", "C", and "B" in that order, cross the Rhine river at Wellmich in three waves, and capture that part of the Regimental objective in our zone. (See Map "D")

2. Company "A", with one Platoon of Light Machine Guns attached, attacks at 0200, crosses the river in the first wave by using twenty one assault boats, seizes objective (See Map "D"), contact the 87th Infantry Division on the left, and prepare to continue the attack on orders.

3. Company "C" crosses the river in the second wave behind Company "A", by-pass^e the town of Wellmich, seizes the castle, and prepare to continue the attack on orders.

4. Company "B" will send a strong patrol (One Platoon) across the river at H minus thirty with mission to post lights on the far side for the purpose of guiding the assault wave to the beach. The remainder of Company "B" will cross in the 3d wave, clear the town of Wellmich, protect the right flank of the Battalion, and prepare to continue the attack on orders.

5. The Heavy Weapons Company (minus one platoon), the AntiTank Platoon, and the Cannon Platoon, will support the attack by fire from positions on this side, and be prepared to cross on orders.

6. A battalion guide will be posted along the road near the stone building to guide your companies to the crossing site.

7. Radio silence until contact with the enemy. I will be in the Battalion Observation Post. Any Questions? (36), (37), (38)

(36) Personal Knowledge ; (37) A-2, p. 101; (38) A-2, p. 103

I asked Colonel Davidson, how about a thirty minutes Artillery preparation on the village and the high commanding ground. He said, ~~that~~ an Artillery preparation could not be fired, because this was to be a secret crossing.

After picking up an overlay of planned artillery concentrations, I hurried back to my company area.

Upon arrival at my company area at 0030, 26th March, I immediately alerted my command post personnel and all Platoon leaders who were sleeping close by. As soon as they were awake, I told the Platoon leaders to awaken their men and be prepared to move out as soon as possible. It was necessary to move out of the forward assembly area by 0115, in order to reach the stone building by 0200. This, moving out of the forward assembly had to be a hurried-up operation, because insufficient time had been allowed between the issuing of the Battalion order and the time of the attack. My first knowledge of the time of attack was at 0001, 26th March. A hot meal had been prepared for my company, but we did not have time to eat it.

The Company moved out of the forward assembly area at 0115 without the attached Light Machine Gun Platoon from Company "D", in order of First Platoon, Third Platoon, Second Platoon and Weapons Platoon. I issued the Company attack order, in piece meal fashion, to each Platoon leader individually as we moved down the road to the crossing site. The information given each platoon leader while we marched down the crooked road was that the Company would cross in the first wave at 0200, using 21 assault boats, and that Company "B" would send a patrol across the river at H minus thirty with mission to post lights in order to assist us in landing. (39)

(39) Personal Knowledge

As my company moved down the road to the crossing, the night was very dark, the weather cold and misty, and most of us expected it to rain. Marching at the head of my company, I missed the Battalion guide, and moved the company on down the road about two hundred yards beyond the designated point. Realizing that I had missed the guide, I halted the company along the road and proceeded individually back up the road looking for the guide. In a few minutes I found the guide and led my company down the slope to the stone building.

At the stone building I met Major Willis, the Battalion Executive Officer, who informed me that the patrol from "B" had crossed without a shot being fired, and he stated that it looked as if the crossing would be easy. He then pointed out the route to the assault boats and stated that they were already in the water.

Shortly before 0200, Lt. Randolph and I started feeding the men down the steep river bank to the assault boats. As the tail of the 3d Platoon cleared the bank, Lt. Miller, leader of the Platoon, paused momentarily, and asked; " Captain, where do I go?" I hurriedly replied, "Get in any boat", and gave him a pat on his back as he went down the bank. Lt. Miller was killed about fifteen minutes later on the far shore while getting his men to safety. (40) (41)

As the head of the second Platoon started down the bank, intense firing started on our right flank. The fire was directed at the crossing site in the 2d Battalion zone about two hundred yards up the river. None of this fire bothered us. As the tail of the 2d Platoon cleared the bank, all hell broke loose in our sector. The Germans opened up with small arms, automatic weapons, dual-mounted 20mm Anti-Aircraft guns firing tracers, antitank guns, mortar and Artillery fire. The sky was alighted with tracers and (40) A-2, p. 102; (41) Personal Knowledge

the darkness had been turned into daylight. Fire from automatic weapons and antitank guns paralleled the water and one could see tracers glancing off the water. German shells and bullets churned the water around the stone building. From the high commanding ground on the German side, the enemy was firing plunging fire at the crossing site. By the light of bursting shells, one could see assault craft in the stream, some sinking and some circling crazily drifting down the river.

I was standing on the edge of the bank near the stone building when the firing began. I hit the ground and took cover behind a piece of railroad rail. Actually, I didn't look for the rail, it just happened to be there. As the seconds flew by, the steel rail grew smaller and smaller.

During a lull in the firing, Lt. Randolph called to me and said, "Captain, over here behind this building". During another lull in the firing, I scurried to the cover of the building and there behind the building found most of my company. (42)

Above the noise of the firing, we could hear many, many screams from wounded men and men wounded and drowning in the river. The Engineers assisted in pulling many of my men out of the river. In a few minutes I learned that the first and third Platoons had shoved off just prior to the outbreak of enemy fire, thank goodness. The men in the Second Platoon and Weapons Platoon jumped or leaped out of the boats, hit the ground at the waters edge, and during lulls in the firing, scurried to cover from the enemy fire in the vicinity of the stone building and to the rear. Wounded men were carried or dragged into the stone building and given first aid treatment by my company first
(42) Personal Knowledge

aid men.

The time from 0215 to 0245 was utilized in reorganizing the remainder of my company which had become badly disorganized. Rounding up the men was quite a problem and taxed the efforts of the 2d Platoon leader, Lt Kramer, Lt Randolph and myself. As fast as a small group could be assembled and placed, then go look for more men, upon return, the first group of men would be gone. To make matters worse, the platoon Sergeants of the 2d Platoon and Weapons platoon assisted very little in the operation of assembling their men. Finally, one officer had to stay with the group rounded up, while the other two officers rounded up the rest of the company.

By 0250, most of the company had been assembled under the cover of the stone building which had a very deep cellar in it. After hearing many complaints about individual weapons, and upon close examination, I found that most of the weapons of both platoons would not function due to the large amount of sand and water in them. From 0250 until 0300 was spent in cleaning the weapons of both platoons.

About 0300, a German Artillery shell hit the wooden building about 20 yards to our right flank and started a large fire. At the same time, a large fire started on the German side of the river opposite the crossing site. These fires must have been planned by the enemy because they did an excellent job of lighting up the entire river in our sector. (43) (44)

Several attempts were made to load assault boats but without success due to the intensity of German fire on and around the stone building. The enemy seemed to have direct observation on the area because each time a man would show himself from behind

(43) A-2, p. 101; (44) Personal Knowledge

the stone building, a spray of small arms and 20mm tracers would cover the entire area.

In order to send any more men across, something had to be done. I ordered my Weapons Platoon Sergeant to place my Light Machine Gun Section in action behind a stone wall about twenty five yards to the rear, and be prepared to deliver fire on enemy positions across the river from the center of the hills upward, paying particular attention to the hill tops, and to let me know when they were in position and ready to fire. Shortly afterwards, Major Willis contacted me and ordered me to take out my light machine gun section, and stated that the guns could not be fired because we had men across the river. Well, he and I had quite a heated argument, but in the end I lost. I ordered my platoon Sergeant to place my light machine guns out of action and bring them back to the stone building.

I then contacted the Battalion Commander on the SCR 300 radio, gave him the situation, asked him for supporting fires on enemy positions across the river, and asked for smoke on the river to my right flank. The Battalion Commander gave me a roger on the smoke mission and instructed me to stand by. In a few minutes, three WP mortar rounds landed, one in the river, and two on our side about fifty yards up the river. The firing of smoke ceased and I could understand why. A river is a small target for 81mm mortars which haven't been zeroed in during daylight, and with friendly forces located on both sides of the river. The three WP rounds were ineffective. (45)

In the meantime, Sgt. Wilson informed me that he couldn't find the light machine gun section. I told him that they must be somewhere in that vicinity and sent him back to look for them.

(45) Personal Knowledge

At 0330, the situation was as follows: Two platoons (1st and 3d) had shoved off, none of the assault boats had returned, the patrol from company "B" sent over at H-30, had not been heard from, two SCR 536 radios were supposed to be across the river, all radios were opened at 0200, and the only sound that could be heard over the SCR 536's was a buzzing sound caused by German interference. Actually, the situation seemed rather hopeless. I wasn't sure that any of my men had reached the German shore.

The Battalion Executive Officer informed me that we had to get the men across and asked me how we could do it. I told him that the only way we could get men across would be by motor launches. By using motor launches, the craft could cross the river in a minimum of time and hit the shore above the concrete sea wall. It was almost impossible to cross the river in assault boats and land above the sea wall due to the swift current. Men crossing in assault boats and landing against the sea wall had two courses of action; one, to stay in the boats and let the Germans roll hand grenades over the wall into the boats, the second, to jump out of the boats and be drowned. In other words, men crossing in assault boats didn't have a chance. (46) (47)

The Battalion Executive Officer at this time, contacted the Sergeant in charge of the Engineers and asked him if the motor launches were available. The Sergeant replied, "yes", but it would take him about one hour to get them to the crossing site. The Battalion Executive Officer disappeared and in a few minutes told the Sergeant to send for the motor launches.

During the period from 0330 to 0430, every effort was made to contact units across the river. The remaining three 536 radios were used, hoping and hoping that a faint signal would be heard from (46) A-2, p. 107; (47) Personal Knowledge

units across the river. Weapons were given a through cleaning, the wounded treated, and some of the more seriously wounded were evacuated to the rear during lulls in the firing. All during this period, the Germans were continuously spraying the crossing site with 20mm tracers and small arms fire which kept my men well within the confines of the stone building.

I was called to the SCR 300 radio about 0400 and the Bn. Comdr. asked me if I knew the whereabouts of my LMG section. I informed him that I had been looking for them for the past hour. He then, informed me that he had turned them around at his Battalion OP and sent them back to the crossing site. I asked him if the section leader was with them. He replied, " Yes ". The LMG section did not show up at the crossing site, and I learned later that they bypassed the Bn OP and ended up at the Company kitchens which were located about 500 yards to the rear. (48)

At about 0450, all of us had an occasion to rejoice, because a faint signal had been heard from the 1st Platoon over the 536 radio. Using my 536 radio for the next few minutes, I tried in vain to hear the 1st Platoon call signal. The only thing I could hear was the buzzing sound caused by German interference. I asked the radio operator on my 536, if he was sure that he heard the call signal of the 1st Platoon. He said, " he was positive he heard the signal." I, then, informed the Bn Comdr on my 300 radio that we had some men across the river but that I did not know how many.

At 0430, the motor launches arrived, and after a few minutes were prepared for the crossing. This preparation consisted of tying two assault boats together and placing an outboard motor on the rear. The time consumed in doing this was about 10 minutes.

(48) Personal Knowledge

The technical name for this type of launch is " outboard powered assault boat " and the capacity ranges from 18 to 20 men.

When the first launch was about half loaded, I was called to my SCR 300 radio. The Battalion Commander gave me instructions to go over in the first launch, carry my SCR 300 Radio with me, and take charge of the situation on the other side. I gave the Battalion Commander a quick "yes sir," grabbed my SCR 300 operator, and climbed into the first launch. The Engineer in the launch asked me where I wanted to land- I pointed to the beach in front of the tool house and we shoved off.

The motor launch turned its nose up stream as we proceeded across the river. When we reached a point about one third the distance across the river, the motor, spit, sputtered, and cut off. The Engineer tried frantically to start the motor, and after a few seconds stated that the motor had gotten wet and that it wouldn't start. In the meantime eighteen men and I were at the mercy of the swift stream, with the craft drifting side ways and down the stream across lanes of German automatic fire. By using three paddles and all men on the sides paddling with their hands, we regained the friendly shore about three hundred yards down the river. No one having been hit by enemy fire, I unloaded the launch and led the men back to the crossing site. Upon arrival there, we loaded into another launch and proceeded across for the second time. This time we made it. During the crossing, I pointed out the rendezvous point, and gave the men instructions to hit the beach running, scatter, and proceed individually to the tool house. (49)

Upon landing, the men scattered and proceeded toward the tool house. On the way to the tool house, I ran into the 1st. Sgt.
(49) Personal Knowledge

who told me that he and the Executive Officer came over with the rest of the Company. Upon reaching the tool house, I found Lt. Michelson, leader of the first platoon, with 35 men. After re-organizing my company, I had three officers, seventy enlisted men, three BAR's, one 2.36 rocket launcher with one round of ammunition. Lt. Miller, leader of the third platoon was missing.

As it was beginning to get daylight, I issued orders to continue the attack. The company moved out with the first and second platoons abreast, second platoon on the right. As the leading platoons began to move, a man in the second platoon was hit as he attempted to crawl out of the ditch. This stopped the second platoon but the first platoon continued to move. I made several attempts to get the second platoon to move by calling individually to the platoon leader, and the three squad leaders in succession. The platoon still did not move. I then, gave the platoon leader orders to follow me up the hill. The reason for not calling the platoon sergeant was because he at this time had not crossed the river. He was still on the other side of the river.

As the company moved a short distance up the hill, small arms fire was received to our rear. Several men, turned and fired at the buildings to our rear. I ordered Lt. Randolph to grab off two or three men from the rear of the company and burn the last building in the village. In a few minutes, the enemy had been routed out of the building and it was in flames. (50)

Upon reaching a point about half way up the hill at about 0500, I halted the company and issued orders for all platoons to prepare to defend against a counter attack. Using my SCR 300 radio, I contacted the Battalion Commander, gave him the situation, and

(50) Personal Knowledge

requested permission to hold up until other units of the Battalion crossed. This request was granted. I then, requested that the 776th Field Artillery Battalion(155) observer stand by and be prepared to bracket my unit in case of a counterattack. The Col. informed me that he would send first aid men across in the next available launch.

My company remained in this position until about 1030, receiving some small arms fire and 20mm tracers from German positions on our flanks. All during the above period, the German 20mm continued to pour tracers into the crossing site.

At 1035, two tank destroyers appeared across the river. With the tank destroyers buttoned up, they continually ran up and down the road behind the stone building, stopping every few seconds and firing at the 20mm positions on my flanks. This firing made my company nervous as we hung to the side of the rocky hill. The TD's fire silenced several 20mm positions. One could see the 20mm tracers glancing off the tank destroyers.

At about 1040, I received a message from the first platoon, that the enemy was counterattacking down the rocky hill. I immediately alerted all platoons and called for the 155mm Artillery bracket. In a few seconds, the 155mm Artillery bracket fell on the hill top and nine Germans came down the hill holding their hands high in the air. After asking them a few questions, I sent them on down the hill. By questioning them, I learned that the rest of the Germans on the hill had with drawn to the rear. (51)

At 1115, I ordered the company to continue the attack because the first boat from Company "C" was observed crossing the river. By 1200, 26th March, my company had captured the company
(51) Personal Knowledge

objective which was the top of the hill. (See Map "D ") A report was made to the Bn Comdr and the Co given orders to dig in. The Co dug in with the 1st platoon on the left, the 2d platoon on the right, and the 3d platoon to the rear.

At 1345, 6 P-51 American fighters came over and blasted the 20mm positions on our right flank. Some of the rockets landed in my Co area but no one was injured. At first, I thought we were being bombed by the Germans, because I could see 3 large bombers high in the air over us. They were so high that we could not identify them. One of the P-51's was shot down by the 20mm. (52)

EXTENDING THE BRIDGEHEAD

By 1600, Company "C" had captured it's objective on the right flank, and orders were received for Company "A" to continue the attack toward the village of Prath which was about three miles to the Northeast. (53) (See Map "E")

By this time, my long lost LMG section and two 60mm mortar squads had joined the company. Before moving out toward the village of Prath, I sent a patrol of five men from the third platoon to the left flank with mission to protect our flank as the Company advanced over the open plateau. After receiving an all clear signal from the patrol along the edge of the woods, the company moved out with 1st and 2d platoons abreast, 2d platoon on the right. After moving about 300 yards across the open ground, German armor was heard moving out to our front. With only one rd. of 2.36 ammunition, I moved the company to the left and entered

(52) A-2, p. 108; (53) Personal Knowledge

the woods in a column of platoons with the second platoon leading.

After advancing about two hundred yards into the woods, my leading platoon over ran what appeared to be a German Battalion Command Post. In this enemy installation, we found three freshly skinned deer and many well dug in positions. After a brief examination of the position, orders were issued for the company to continue the advance.

As the second platoon reached the forward edge of the woods, several German soldiers were observed debouching from the woods on our left flank. (See Map "E") Using my SCR 536, I halted the company and issued instructions for all platoons to deploy along the edge of the woods facing the Germans. Seven Germans came out of the woods. The Germans were in a patrol formation and proceeded directly toward the center of my Co. Orders were issued for all men to with hold their fire and be prepared to open fire on order. When the German patrol reached a point about 300 yards from the front lines of my Co, a BAR man from the 2d Platoon opened up on them. Well, this set off the entire company and it took me about three minutes to stop the firing.

While I was eating out the 2d platoon leader, a burst of small arms fire was heard to the rear of my company. This fire was from American weapons. Using my field glasses, I saw the Bn S-2 and a German civilian. After causing the men of the weapons platoon to cease firing, I signaled the S-2 forward. Upon joining us, he seemed to be a very happy man. (54)

Using the German civilian, I sent him down into the open
(54) Personal Knowledge

area to check for dead Germans. Three of the Germans got up and came to my march CP. Upon questioning the prisoners, we learned that Prath was a village with about five hundred people, and that a German platoon was located there.

Orders were issued to continue the advance and the company moved out with the 1st platoon leading, followed by the Co. CP, 2d Platoon, Weapons platoon and 3d platoon. The 1st platoon halted when they came within sight of the village, and I moved to the head of the column. Having received no fire from the village so far, I decided to deploy my 1st Platoon along the high ground astride the trail, and send a patrol into the village. One LMG was placed in action on each flank of the first platoon. The rest of the company was in defilade from the village, and the column extended down the trail to the rear. The patrol being covered by the 1st Plat. entered the town without receiving any fire.

In a few minutes, the first platoon leader signaled all clear and the company moved into the town about 1800, just before dark. In the town, forty German soldiers had surrendered to the ten man patrol. I took over three of the best buildings in the center of Prath, and informed the Bugermeister(Mayor) that if any of my soldiers were molested during the night that I would burn his village to the ground.

In a short time, the necessary guards were posted on the main roads, and the men bedded down for the night. Being out of range for the 300 radio, I sent an oral message to the En Comdr informing him of the situation and requesting that he send a patrol from the reserve company to contact the 87th Div on the left. No further action took place that night. (55)

(55) Personal Knowledge

LOSSES AND PRISONERS

One Officer and eighteen Enlisted Men killed, ~~twenty~~ ^{twenty three} enlisted men wounded, and four taken prisoner by the Germans.

Ten Germans were killed, several wounded and about fifty taken as prisoners.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The mission assigned this company was ~~adequate~~ ^{SUITABLE} and well within the capabilities of a Rifle Company. Although the Company did not contact the 87th Infantry Division on the left flank, in my opinion, the company accomplished its mission and the operation as a whole was a success.

Only two hours were allowed from the time the Battalion Commander issued his orders until the time of the attack. In my opinion the amount of time allowed was not adequate. However, this limited amount of time did not seriously effect the operations because of the three hours of day light allowed lower unit leaders to make their personal reconnaissance.

In my opinion, the sending of the patrol across the river at H-30, served no useful purpose and only alerted a sleeping enemy. As pointed out in this operation, the enemy forces were alerted and ready.

In my opinion a better crossing site could have been selected along the river. The existence of the concrete sea wall on our left flank and the edge of Wellmich on our right flank were definite obstacles in this operation.

The use of an artillery preparation prior to the attack, and the use of supporting fires during the attack, would have greatly facilitated the operation. In my opinion, the failure to use these

weapons, resulted in the high casualty rate sustained in this operation.

Smoke shells and smoke generator platoons were available in this operation and were not used. In my opinion, smoke could have been used in this operation if prior planning and proper preparations had been made prior to the attack. The use of smoke during the period of the large fires and during day light would have reduced casualties and facilitated the crossing.

In my opinion, there is no such thing as a secret crossing of a river. In order to transport the heavy supplies and equipment ~~NECESSARY~~ for this type of operation to the crossing ^{IT IS} necessary ~~TO~~ ^{TO} use heavy vehicles. The noise resulting from the heavy vehicles and the unloading operations would pin point the crossing site to any intelligent enemy.

In my opinion, this crossing was a hurried up affair in that outboard powered motor assault boats were not available when needed at the crossing site. Also, someone did not make the proper estimate in regard to the use of assault boats and the velocity of the Rhine river. Due to the velocity of the stream, none of the assault boats were returned to friendly shores in time to be of any use.

Lastly, taking into consideration the fact that this unit had only been in combat a few days, I think the Company did an excellent job in executing this operation with exception of the light machine gun section which ended up at the company kitchens.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. A river crossing should be made on a wide front.
2. Surprise is an essential element in a river crossing and is necessary because of the high potential casualties.
3. Supporting artillery fires must give close and continuous support to the initial waves.

4. Detail reconnaissance by small unit leaders, down to and including the squad leaders, is necessary.

5. Antitank weapons and Tank Destroyers(SP) should be in position prior to the attack.

6. Speed is an essential element in this type of operation.

7. Chemical Corps troops and mechanical smoke generators should be in position and readily available for use in a river crossing made during the hours of darkness.

8. Motor launches should be available for the evacuation of casualties.

9. The SCR 300 radio should be used to maintain communications during a river crossing.