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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION (REINFORCED),
119TH INFANTRY (30TH INFANTRY DIVISION)
AT STOUMONT, BELGIUM, 19 - 22 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of an Artillery Liaison Officer)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION DEFENDING
A ROAD BLOCK AND COUNTERATTACKING

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

The German counter offensive in the ARDENNES was stopped by many widely separated units whose actions in their entirety were called the Battle of THE BULGE. The operations of one of these units, the 1st Battalion (Reinforced), 119th Infantry, 30th US Division during the period 19-22 December 1944 contributed to the concision of this bulge.

A glance at preceding events will indicate the significance of the efforts of the 1st Battalion in relation to the success of the Allied plan.

After the successful invasion of NORMANDY and the break through at ST LO, FRANCE, the Allied armies swept across FRANCE, BELGIUM, and HOLLAND, and forced the Germans into their homeland behind the Siegfried Line. In the north, the British First and the Canadian Second Armies were generally disposed along the MAAS RIVER from the NORTH SEA to ROERMOND. To the south the US First and Ninth Armies had breached the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of AACHEN and by 30 November 1944 the Ninth Army had reached the west banks of the ROER RIVER where it held up pending the capture of the ROER RIVER dams to the south by the First Army. Realizing that their capability to destroy these dams and send a deluge of water racing down the already flooded river was a serious obstacle to any further advance by the Ninth Army, the Germans stubbornly defended this area. (1)

(1) A-3, p.163

In the south the US Third Army was planning to launch an assault on 19 December to break through the defenses at KAISERLAUTEN. The US Seventh Army and the French First Army held the line from BITCHE to the MEDITERRANEAN SEA.(2)

Although the Allied armies had sixty four divisions on the western front on 16 December 1944, only four of these held the seventy five mile line between MONSCHAU and TRIER, the northern and southern limits of the ARDENNES sector.(3) (See Map A) The absence of strategic objectives and large supply depots in this area, and the rugged nature of the terrain, influenced the Supreme Allied Commander to hold this sector lightly and concentrate his forces for the major efforts in the north and south.(4)

Since their failure to drive a wedge between the First and Third Armies at MORTAIN, FRANCE, in August, the Germans had been planning a counter offensive. The ARDENNES offered an excellent opportunity. It was lightly held and the narrow valleys and frequent fogs during December would hide their armored columns from air observation during the initial stages of the attack.

The objectives of this counter offensive were the capture of the port of ANTWERP, the severance the Allied main supply lines, and the destruction of all Allied forces north of the line ANTWERP-BRUSSELS-BASTOGNE. The German Sixth Panzer Army was to make the main effort, sweeping southwest of LIEGE then turning north to ANTWERP. The Fifth

(2) A-6, p.8
(3) A-6, p.9, 10
(4) A-5, p.76

Panzer Army was to cross the MEUSE RIVER at NAMUR and protect the rear of the Sixth Panzer Army. The Fifteenth Army was to secure the line MONSCHAU-LIEGE and protect the right flank. The Seventh Army was to secure the line DINANT-TRIER and protect the left flank. A parachute drop was planned to cut the roads leading into the north flank of the sector, and a group of English speaking troops equipped with American uniforms was to infiltrate into the American lines and create confusion.(5) (See Map B)

At 0530 hours on 16 December 1944 the Germans attacked along the fifty mile front from MONSCHAU to ECHTERNACH. By evening the Sixth Panzer Army's 1st SS Panzer Division was racing towards STAVELOT and HUY. Eight hundred paratroopers had been dropped in the EUPEN area but had failed in their mission to cut the roads.(6)

After the Sixth Panzer Army had been identified as the attacking force, the Supreme Allied Commander realized the seriousness and postponing plans for continuing the offensive in the north and south, ordered that units from these sectors be moved into the ARDENNES to stop the attack. The Allied plan at this time was to hold the shoulders of the penetration at MONSCHAU and BASTOGNE and counterattack with the Third Army in the general direction BASTOGNE-COLOGNE.(7)

One of the units moved was the 30th Infantry Division, a combat experienced unit which, since its landing in NORMANDY on 13 June 1944 had participated in the ST LO break through,

(5) A-6, p.12,13
(6) A-6, p.18
(7) A-5, p.76

the battle at MORTAIN, and the breaching of the Siegfried Line.

GENERAL SITUATION

On 17 December 1944 the 30th US Division was taking advantage of the comparative quiet on the western banks of the ROER RIVER north of AACHEN when at 1115 hours a warning order was received from XIX Corps that the division would be transferred from the Ninth Army and probably move to the south. At 1300 hours an order was received from the V Corps of the First Army to move to an assembly area north of EUPEN, BELGIUM, and prepare to counterattack to the southeast. (8)

By 1625 the 119th RCT was motorized and on the road moving south towards its designated assembly area. The 117th and 120th RCTs followed in order. At 1915 hours V Corps ordered the division to send the second RCT (117th) to MALMEDY, and be prepared to move the remainder of the division into MALMEDY on 18 December. (9) Enemy aircraft discovered the column but took little action and no damage was sustained. They had passed up an easy target, for the road was clogged with traffic going in both directions. The 119th RCT halted for the night north of EUPEN.

About 1200 hours on 18 December, V Corps ordered the division to hold MALMEDY and block any advance north of STAVELOT and west of TROIS PONTS on the WERBOMONT-BODEUX road and the TROIS PONTS-STOUMONT road; and to attack to the south and east when the situation permitted. (10) The 120th RCT was dispatched to MALMEDY and the 119th RCT proceeded by motor along the route EUPEN-VERVIERS-

(8) A-3, p. 347
(9) A-3, p. 348
(10) A-3, p. 350

REMOUCHAMPS to block the roads west of TROIS PONTS.

The terrain in this sector was made up of rugged, forest covered hills which rose to heights of 600 feet above the AMBLEVE RIVER which was the main river in the area. The primary) were fair and generally followed along the streams. Movement for anything but light vehicles was confined to the roads. There were two main roads leading west from TROIS PONTS; one passed over the high ground south of the AMBLEVE RIVER to WERBOMONT, and the other lead to STOUMONT then through the narrow valley to REMOUCHAMPS where it connected with the road to LIEGE.

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 119TH INFANTRY

The 2d Battalion set up a road block three miles east of WERBOMONT and immediately became engaged in holding off a force of six tanks and six half tracks. The 3d Battalion detrucked at STOUMONT at 2100 hours and set up their defenses around the town. A patrol was sent forward and at 2130 hours reported approximately forty enemy tanks assembled in the woods 500 yards east of the town.(11)

The 1st Battalion detrucked just before darkness in the vicinity of REMOUCHAMPS and proceeded on foot through the narrow valley towards STOUMONT. The battalion had been designated as the regimental reserve and ordered to set up road blocks behind the 3d Battalion in the vicinity of STOUMONT STATION. When the head of the column had reached the station at LORCE-CHEVRON, the regimental commander arrived and ordered the battalion to establish it's road block in its present position.

B Company took a position astride the road about

300 yards east of the road junction. C Company extended B Company's right flank to the river and the deployed in depth. A Company set up a road block across the river on the road to WERBOMONT and dug in one platoon on the hillside overlooking the river from where it could give fire support to B Company's road block. The battalion command post was set up in a small hotel at the north end of the bridge crossing the AMBLEVE and the regimental command post was established in a house across the road from the station. (See Map C) (12)

K rations were issued for the following day and wire was laid from the battalion CP to the company CPs. With the exception of the men on local security the troops bedded down for the night. The battalion was at about eighty percent strength and its combat efficiency was excellent. Having met some of the best troops the Germans had, from the hedgerows of NORMANDY to the ROER, their presence less than three miles away had no effect on the men of the battalion who were confident of their ability to accomplish their mission. Perhaps they were a bit too confident and during the next few days there must have been doubts in the minds of some.

THE BATTLE SITUATION

At 0645 hours, 19 December, the enemy struck the 3d Battalion with a strong tank-infantry force, later identified as Task Force PEIPER, the spearhead of the 1st SS Panzer Division and the perpetrators of the "Malmedy Massacre". The Mark V and Mark VI tanks soon overran the defenses of the 3d Battalion

(12) Personal knowledge

including four guns of the 823d TD Battalion and one 90mm gun of the 110th AAA Battalion, and by 1030 hours had forced the 3d Battalion out of STOUMONT. At 1210 hours the 3d Battalion, having suffered 267 casualties and lost most of its equipment, passed through the 1st Battalion and spent the remainder of the day reorganizing and reequipping. (13)

The 400th Armored Field Artillery Battalion which had been attached to the 119th RCT at 0600 hours on 19 December was able to get only one battery into position on the hill 400 yards north of CHESSION and fired its first mission at 0910 hours. After firing only a few rounds the battery withdrew into the positions of the 1st Battalion. (14)

The 197th Field Artillery Battalion, the direct support artillery of the regiment was having difficulty finding suitable firing positions and registered too late to be of assistance to the 3d Battalion. (15)

The position of the 1st Battalion was excellent for the defense. The wooded hills rising sharply from the road and the river canalized any attack in force onto the road. Between the road and the river was an area from ten to forty yards wide through which ran a railroad. Two hundred yards in front of the road block the road curved around the hill giving a marked advantage to the defenders over any eager foe who ventured around the bend. The weather was cold and damp, and a fog had begun to settle in the valley.

THE PLAN FOR THE DEFENSE AND COUNTERATTACK

The plan for defense was simple. Since the terrain restricted maneuverability, all efforts were concentrated on the road. It was apparent that the main threat was from

(13) A-2, p. 88

(14) A-12

(15) Personal knowledge

the direction of STOUMONT. D Company's heavy weapons were kept under battalion control and were sighted to cover the road and the mine field which had been laid just short of the bend. One 90mm gun was in place across the road from the battalion CP and could cover the road as far as the bend. The battalion commander had received regiment's approval to use the self propelled 105mm howitzers of the 400th FA Bn to support the road block with direct fire from their present positions at the road junction.

The regimental commander promised that tank support would arrive during the afternoon and that the battalion should be prepared to counterattack and regain STOUMONT. Improvement of the position had been going on all morning and supply vehicles were able to bring ammunition directly up to the front line positions. A small covering force which had been covering the withdrawal of the 3d Battalion broke contact at TARGNON and returned behind the road block. No further preparations were necessary and the battalion braced itself and waited.

NARRATION

THE ENEMY SPEARHEAD IS STOPPED

At 1240 hours three tanks and four half tracks were observed leaving TARGNON and heading towards the battalion position. These vehicles were fired on by an observer from the 197th FA Battalion who had an observation post on the hill south of the river and who had just completed registering his battalion. Before an adjustment could be completed the enemy had passed forward of the nose of the hill and were defiladed from his observation. Being unable to observe into the valley

he shifted the fire to the western edge of TARGNON which was now almost obscured by the fog. Eighteen tanks which started to leave the town just as the fire fell, withdrew into the town. Meanwhile the other tanks had proceeded up to the bend in front of the road block. The lead tank poked his nose around the bend and was hit with an HE shell from one of the 105mm SP howitzers. The tank was not destroyed but withdrew around the bend.

A small enemy patrol working its way along the side of Hill 560 was driven off by rifle fire. Apparently this was a reconnaissance force for they made no further effort to penetrate the position but withdrew in the direction of TARGNON. Sporadic tank fire continued to fall harmlessly on the hillside in rear of the battalion.

Shortly after noon the regimental S-2 had located the 740th Tank Battalion in the process of equipping itself with any available items it could use at the ordnance plant in SPRIMONT. This unit had recently arrived in the theater and had not received its organic equipment. The S-2 reported this to Major General Leland S. Hobbs, the division commander, who had been at the regimental CP since 1030 hours. The general obtained approval of First Army to use this unit and attached it to the 119th Infantry. One platoon of tanks arrived at the regimental CP at 1530 hours and was attached to the 1st Battalion. They were placed in position along the road in the same positions that had been occupied by the M-7s of the 400th FA Battalion which had been attached to the division artillery and at 1530 hours had displaced to

the rear to take up positions in general support. (16)

The fog now limited observation to 400 yards. The artillery liaison planes were unable get off the ground because of the low ceiling.

THE 1ST BATTALION COUNTERATTACK

The battalion planned a limited attack on STOUMONT STATION in order to disrupt the enemy's reorganization and to obtain a more suitable position from which to launch an attack the next day. At 1600 hours C Company, accompanied by the platoon of tanks from the 740th Tank Battalion, passed through the road block. C Company was in a column of files on both sides of the road and the tanks were in the middle. The company commander's group and an artillery observer were behind the third tank in line. The lead tank had hardly gone 300 yards when a Mark V Panther tank came into view around the bend. The first shot hit the Panther's gun mantlet and ricocheted down into the driver's compartment setting the tank on fire. This was the first shot fired in combat by this unit. One hundred yards further down the road another Panther was knocked out. This time the shell hit the paved road in front of the tank and ricocheted up through the bottom. Within several minutes a third tank was destroyed 200 yards west of STOUMONT STATION. The tank crews were elated. To destroy three Panther tanks within their first ten minutes of combat was a real achievement. Very little fire had been received but as the leading elements neared the station they came within the fires of small arms and machine guns dug in around the station. An area of level

(16) Personal knowledge

ground between the road and the river enabled C Company to get off the road and deploy. By 1930 hours the company had cleared the western edge of the station and was ordered to dig in for the night and hold its present position. The tank platoon remained in the company area. B Company remained in its position and A Company moved across the bridge and occupied the position vacated by C Company when it moved forward. During the afternoon the 119th RCT had been attached to the XVIII Airborne Corps to facilitate control and the 2d Battalion was relieved at WERBOMONT by the 82d Airborne Division and was on its way to an assembly area in the vicinity of the regimental CP. The 82d Airborne Division assumed responsibility south of the AMBLEVE RIVER.(17)

THE ATTACK ON STOUMONT

During the night 19-20 December plans were made to attack along the road and seize STOUMONT. Additional artillery support would be available from a specially organized group consisting of the regimental Cannon Company, six assault guns picked up by the 740th Tank Battalion, and four miscellaneous guns found in the area. The fires of this heterogeneous group were controlled by the 197th FA Battalion.(18) B Company and the tank platoon, followed by A Company, would pass through C Company which would then follow at the tail of the column. The mortars would move up to support the attack as far as TARGNON and when that town was secure they would move in to support the attack on STOUMONT. The machine guns of

(17) A-11
(18) A-4, p.56

D Company were placed in direct support of the rifle companies. The line of departure would be the present position of C Company and the time of attack 0830 hours, 20 December.

B Company crossed the line of departure on schedule and reached the road junction east of the station before receiving fire from a 20mm gun mounted on a half track. The half track was set on fire and the column passed through TARGNON before encountering any serious resistance. At TARGNON A Company moved over to the river and C Company moved up behind B Company. From TARGNON the road wound up the side of the hill to STOUMONT which was located at the top of a spur of Hill 560. The ground sloped steeply from the town to the river and being pasture land offered little cover or concealment. (See Map D) The battalion CP was set up in TARGNON from where the best observation on STOUMONT could be obtained.

About 1000 yards east of TARGNON anti-tank and anti-personnel mines were encountered and one tank was disabled. Fifteen Teller mines were removed from the road. Four more mine fields were encountered within the next 1000 yards. The mine fields were covered by machine guns firing from the woods on Hill 560 and from STOUMONT, and progress was slow. B Company had to climb the hillside and flank these strong points. As B Company moved along through the woods, C Company moved up abreast and held up in the valley to protect the right flank and rear.

At the junction of the roads from TARGNON and MONTHOUET was a three story, stone building about 150 by 60 feet, which

overlooked STOUMONT and the valley. The possessor of this building, which appeared to be a sanitarium, held the key to STOUMONT. It was heavily defended by infantry and four 20 mm antiaircraft guns, self propelled, which were located two on each side of the building. At times the fog almost completely obscured the German positions and only the flashes of the 20 mm guns their positions.

One of the friendly tanks was disabled by tank fire from the edge of STOUMONT and the others were forced to remain behind C Company. Artillery and mortars were concentrated on the sanitarium and one 20 mm gun was destroyed and the others withdrew into the town. B Company then assaulted the building forcing the enemy infantry to withdraw. It appeared that the Germans had been instructed to hold out as long as possible but not to risk being captured. This indicated that they were conserving their forces for a counterattack. The battalion was ordered to hold up its attack in its present positions so that the artillery could fire on STOUMONT during the night.

As darkness settled one platoon of B Company occupied the sanitarium while the remainder of the company dug in on the hillside about 50 yards east of the building. C Company was abreast of B Company and along the road. A Company remained in the valley and extended its left flank up the slope to tie into C Company's rear. Under cover of darkness the four remaining tanks moved up the road to C Company's forward positions. A small stone shed served as the CP for both companies on the hill.

Ammunition for the rifle companies was carried forward in jeeps which also were used to distribute K rations and water. The tanks were supplied and refueled by using M-20 armored utility cars. At no time during the operation were these tanks withdrawn for service. Casualties had been promptly evacuated along the road from the companies to the battalion aid station in TARGNON.

The remnants of the 3d Battalion had been reorganized and moved around to the north to establish a road block at MONTHOUET. (See Map D) Task Force JORDAN of CCB 3d Armored Division had attacked through the 3d Battalion at 1030 hours but had been forced to withdraw into MONTHOUET.

In STAVELOT, the 117th RCT was locked in a bitter struggle for the town, while the 120th RCT held MALMEDY.

Task Force PEIPER was not to be easily forced out of STOU MONT. As members of the 1st SS Panzer Division which was honored with the title "Liebstandarte Adolph Hitler" they were imbued with an extraordinary loyalty to their fuehrer and a thirst for victory which would wipe out the stigma of defeat which had plagued them since the Allied invasion. An unmailed letter taken from the body of a dead SS trooper stated in part, "it is just like 1939, our tanks are rolling again". (19)

THE GERMAN COUNTERATTACK

At 2300 hours 20 December, spurring themselves on with cries of "Heil Hitler", the Germans launched their counterattack. They had quietly crossed the 300 yards separating the two forces and the first shot fired was from a panzerfaust, the German version of the "bazooka", which set one of the US tanks on fire. As the flames lit up the area, rifle and machine gun fire broke

(19) Personal knowledge

out all over the hilltop. Tanks firing from STOUMONT quickly knocked out two more US tanks and then moved up to support the assault on the sanitarium.

Artillery and mortar defensive fires which had been registered before dark were fired. A barn on the near side of the town was set on fire and the resulting light together with that created by the burning tanks made it possible to adjust fire on targets of opportunity.

By 2330 hours, C Company reported that the enemy was almost into its position and that it could not hold them off much longer. The battalion commander ordered the company to hold at all costs and organized a force from the battalion headquarters to be prepared to move up to reinforce C Company. A Company was not moved but told to place fire in front of C Company. Within ten minutes C Company reported that the attack along the road had slowed down.

Meanwhile, the battle in the sanitarium had developed into a room to room struggle. Hand grenades were thrown in and out of windows, and up and down halls as the defenders fought hand to hand with the enemy. Three tanks were supporting the attack on the sanitarium from ranges within 50 yards. One tank drove up to the building, thrust its 88mm gun through the window, and fired into a hallway where five men had barricaded themselves, killing them all.

At 2330 hours the Germans had control of the sanitarium except for one room which was held by a sergeant and two riflemen. Like C Company, B Company was too involved defending its position outside the building to send help. One enemy

tank was knocked out by a bazooka and while the riflemen were keeping the enemy out of their positions, the artillery and mortars were forcing the remainder of the attackers to seek cover in the sanitarium or return to the comparative safety of STOUMONT. Over thirty men from B Company had been captured in and around the sanitarium.

The action had died down by 0030 and only sporadic small arms fire was being exchanged. At 0130 the Germans attacked again and attempted to swing around the left flank. When they were unsuccessful in getting by B Company they attempted to penetrate C Company's road block. This effort was supported by fire from the sanitarium and from STOUMONT. The artillery was firing constantly at the town and at times brought the fire within fifty yards of C Company. The sergeant who remained in the sanitarium adjusted on some targets by shouting the sensings to the artillery observer who was dug in fifty yards away.

The attack again was stopped but the enemy continued to send out patrols in an effort to find a weak spot in the line. Machine guns firing tracers from the sanitarium and from the town were marking targets for the tanks. The battalion commander requested that one company from the 2d Battalion which was in position at the regimental CP be committed on the left of B Company to protect that flank. F Company was attached to the 1st Battalion for that purpose and moved into position.

At 0530 on 21 December the enemy attacked for the third time. Tank replacements for the four tanks of the 740 Tank Battalion that had been destroyed had arrived and gave much needed support to the companies whose ammunition was running low. The fire in the area had almost burned out

permitting the tanks to move up to the road block without being observed and fired on from STOUMONT. Although the darkness prevented them from firing at specific targets, the newly arrived tanks fired along the road and discouraged the Germans from using that approach. An enemy patrol seeking an opening on the right was intercepted by A Company and two prisoners captured. The dogged determination of the riflemen finally stopped the attack and by 0600 the enemy had withdrawn into STOUMONT. However, they still occupied the sanitarium. Except for the artillery, which continued falling on the town at fifteen minute intervals until 0700, all was quiet.

During the night the battalion had lost five platoon leaders and about one half the men in B and C Companies who were now down to about sixty effectives each. (20) Elements of four companies of the 1st SS Panzer Division and the 12th Parachute Company had been identified.

THE SECOND ATTACK ON STOUMONT

At 2200 hours on 20 December Task Force HARRISON, commanded by Brigadier General William K. Harrison, the Assistant Division Commander, was constituted from the 119th Infantry, the 740th Tank Battalion, Company A 823dTD Battalion and elements of Task Force JORDAN of CCB 3d Armored Division, and plans were made to attack STOUMONT at 0730, 21 December. Because of the German counterattacks during the night the attack was delayed until later in the day.

A self propelled 155 mm gun was obtained from the 3d Armored Division and arrived in TARGNON at 0900 hours on

(20) A-1, p.186

21 December. It was placed in position in the vicinity of the battalion CP and during brief periods when the fog cleared, fired into STOUMONT.

At 1145 hours the battalion was given the mission of retaking the sanitarium so that the 3d battalion and CCB of the 3d Armored Division could move by and seize ROUAT. The 2d Battalion was moving around to the north to attempt to cut the road between STOUMONT and LA GLEIZE.

A Company was moved up abreast of C Company but left an outpost in the valley as security for the flank. At 1245 hours the three companies moved forward but made only 100 yards before being pinned down by fire from STOUMONT. B Company continued its attack on the sanitarium and occupied it by 1325 hours. F Company remained in its position protecting the left flank. Four enemy tanks approaching from ROUAT reached the sanitarium and again B Company was forced to withdraw. Friendly tanks could not get up the high bank between the road and the sanitarium to give any support. With the sanitarium again in enemy hands A and C Companies were ordered to fall back to their previous positions and the attack was called off.

The Task Force Commander planned to concentrate artillery on the town during the night and attack again the following day. The battalion began to plan for some way of getting its tanks up to the sanitarium. The men rested most of the day. The usual K rations were distributed, and ammunition resupplied.

Shortly after midnight a road was cut through the

embankment which was preventing the tanks from getting up to the sanitarium. Because of the mud it was necessary to corduroy the ramp with shell casings. Just before daylight the tanks were in position and fired on the building. The German tanks had apparently withdrawn previously and this time with the advantage on their side B Company occupied and remained in the sanitarium.

In the morning of 22 December the 2d Battalion had reached the road about half way between STOUMONT and LA GLEIZE but the battalion commander had been captured and against strong attacks from LA GLEIZE the battalion had been forced to withdraw to the vicinity of MONTHOUET.

With the sanitarium held by the 1st Battalion the Task Force planned to attack at 1320 hours. The artillery would fire on ROUAT from H to H plus 15, and on STOUMONT from H to H plus 30. As soon as the fire lifted on ROUAT the elements of CCB and the 3d Battalion were to move in. The 1st Battalion was to move on STOUMONT when the artillery lifted.

The 1st Battalion planned to attack with B and C Companies along the road, accompanied by the tanks, and A Company along the open slope south of the road. F Company was to support the attack by fire from positions at the sanitarium. Lt. Colonel Robert H. Herlong, the battalion commander requested that the artillery be fired only on call. Tanks had been heard moving out of the town during the morning and it was his opinion that only a small covering force had been left in the town and that the artillery would be wasted. Higher headquarters refused this request and the artillery fired as scheduled. However, at

1330 hours the fires were lifted and the battalion quickly moved into STOUMONT. It had been evacuated except for three men who had been taking cover in a cellar. These prisoners stated that their unit had been ordered to hold the sanitarium at all costs but they had suffered such heavy losses in STOUMONT from artillery that they could ^{NOT} hold it, and when they were forced out of the building the previous night most of the men were withdrawn to LA GLEIZE.

The battalion set up a defensive position on the eastern edge of the town where it could see the German tanks moving around LA GLEIZE, the objective for the next day.

In summing up this operation it can be seen that the 1st Battalion, plus its reinforcing units, successfully accomplished the missions assigned to it, namely, to stop the enemy spearhead, and to retake STOUMONT. Little was known of the enemy situation at any time, partly because of the adverse weather conditions which made visibility poor throughout the action. In forcing the enemy back into LA GLEIZE the stage was set for the destruction of Task Force PEIPER which managed to get 800 of its troops out of LA GLEIZE but lost all of its equipment.

The battalion had suffered 148 casualties, most of whom were from B and C Companies. The 740th Tank Battalion had lost five tanks. The aggressive spirit of this unit plus the artillery support given by the 197th FA Battalion and the Cannon Company contributed much to the success of the operation.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

The entire action took place astride the road between the LORCE-CHEVRON station and STOUMONT which made it possible to transport supplies by vehicle directly to the company positions. The procurement of supplies was delayed in some instances because the operating personnel of the supply installations had been evacuated and the Service Company personnel of the 119th Infantry had to find what they wanted and help themselves. In other instances where the items desired were readily located, this situation speeded up the process. Only on one occasion did the ammunition supply run low, but before it became critical additional supplies arrived.

K rations were used exclusively during the period and are believed to be the most suitable type of ration for this kind of an operation.

2. THE MISSION

Noted

In view of the situation and the mission assigned to the 119th RCT it is difficult to see how any other mission could have been assigned to the 1st Battalion. Considering that the 1st Battalion was initially in reserve behind the 3d Battalion it is reasonable to assume that two battalions, disposed on suitable terrain, can constitute a formidable road block even against a superior force.

Had the 1st Battalion initially occupied TARGNON, it is believed that it could have given fire support to the 3d Battalion, and although this would not have prevented the Germans from taking STOUMONT, it might have reduced the casualties and the losses of equipment of the 3d Battalion and therefore

afforded an opportunity for a more speedy reorganization and counterattack. Also ,with the 1st Battalion in TARGNON, the positions of the 400th FA Battalion at CHESSION would have been more secure. This position afforded excellent fields of fire for direct fire into STOUMONT.

3. THE DEFENSE AT LORCE - CHEVRON

The terrain was utilized to the utmost in organizing the defensive position. By setting the defense short of the bend in the road enemy observation was limited and he was confronted with the problem committing his tanks in column along the road,exposing them one at a time to the maximum fire power of the 1st Battalion.

The battalion commander's initiative in using the self propelled 105mm howitzers of the 400th FA Battalion was rewarded when one of the howitzers hit the first tank to appear around the bend. Had this unit been allowed to withdraw to the rear at this time they could not have found a firing position in time to be of use against the initial attack.

4. THE ATTACK

The decision to attack along the road was substantiated by the nature of the terrain. It would have been possible to climb the steep slope of the hill overlooking the road but it would have been an arduous task and would have left the troops in a fatigued condition at the point when they would have required to attack the sanitarium. The fields of fire in this area were very poor and the route offered no possibility of flanking the sanitarium. The most direct route to this key feature was along the road.

5. THE DEFENSE OF THE SANITARIUM

The key to the defense of the sanitarium was tank support. The 1st Battalion was successful in taking the sanitarium on the afternoon of 20 December because the artillery and bazooka fire destroyed or forced the withdrawal of the self propelled 20 mm guns which were supporting the German defense. When the Germans attacked that night with tank support they quickly regained the building. The 1st Battalion retook the building during the absence of the German tanks but lost it again when the tanks appeared. Once the US tanks got up to the sanitarium the enemy withdrew and did not attempt to retake it.

Bazookas and artillery were of some assistance against the German armor but they are not sufficient against sustained armored attacks.

The Germans skillfully used the sanitarium in covering the approaches into both STOU MONT and ROUAT. While delaying the 1st Battalion in its attack from the west, they also prevented the element of CCB of the 3d Armored Division from using the road from the north to attack ROUAT.

6. EMPLOYMENT OF THE RESERVE

During the German counterattack on the night 21-22 December, a situation indicating the possibility of committing the battalion reserve arose when C Company reported that it could not hold out much longer. A Company could have been moved up onto the road to assist C Company. This would have left an open flank on the right. The commander's decision to leave A Company in position was justified when A Company

intercepted the patrol seeking an opening on that flank. If A Company had been committed up on the road it is very probable that the enemy would have turned the right flank and cut off the companies on the hill.

The battalion commander took prompt action in creating an additional reserve from the battalion headquarters for possible committment should the situation require.

The battalion commander's decision not to commit the reserve was also influenced by his policy of not relieving a company when it was in a hot spot until it was imperative. It was his opinion that by successfully fulfilling its mission a company gained confidence and aggressivness and that premature relief would destroy these qualities.

7. USE OF SUPPORTING WEAPONS

Even though observation was poor throughout the operation extensive use of artillery was made with successful results. The effect of unobserved fires was good as witnessed by the statements of the infantrymen who were able to observe this effect and the statements of prisoners. Quick support was possible during the counterattack on the night 20-21 December because the defensive fires had been registered during daylight. The adjustment of fire by the infantryman who remained in the sanitarium, by calling his sensing to the artillery observer who was fifty yards away indicates the advantage of all infantrymen knowing how to adjust artillery fire and using all means available to get it.

The tanks and infantry operated well together. The tanks were used within their capabilities and proved to be

the best anti-tank weapon. When tanks are placed on the front line at night they must be give close protection against enemy patrols. The loss of the first tank on the night 20-21 December when it was hit by a panzerfaust prompts the assumption that adequate protection by the infantry was not given.

On occasions when the fog lifted and suitable artillery targets appeared, before an adjustment could be made the fog had settled again and the target was obscured. The use of the self Propelled 155 mm gun solved this difficulty. It was able to get quick accurate fire on a target within seconds after it appeared. Firing direct fire at a range of 1500 yards its effect was devastating.

The use of the 105 mm howitzer in an anti-tank role has been covered in paragraph 3 of this section.

LESSONS

1. Adequate logistical support is necessary for the success of any operation and commanders must take measures to insure proper support.

2. In assigning tasks to subordinate units, the foremost consideration should be how these tasks will contribute to the accomplishment of the mission.

3. In organizing a defensive position, maximum use of the terrain should be made to obtain observation, fields of fire, and put the attacker at a disadvantage.

4. Unless the possibility of an encirclement or flanking movement is present, the best approach to an objective is the most direct route that will adequately support the attack.

5. Infantry units require tank support when operating against armored units.

6. In the defense, the reserve should not be prematurely committed, particularly when such commitment would affect its mission of protecting the flanks.

7. All commanders should be familiar with the capabilities, limitations, and uses of their supporting arms.

Serial Number 01176930		Grade Capt		197th FA BN, USA		Corrected Copy	
Headquarters DAYKIN, ALBERT		Order Number 41		Date of Orders 28 Feb 1945		Rescinded	
Type of Award 30th INF DIV APO 30		General No		Special Oak Leaf Clusters		Revoked	
		Posthumous		O. L. C. Number		Amended	
		SILVER STAR		1		Corrected Copy	

Present Status If Living

Citation

For gallantry in action on 20 and 21 December 1944, in *****. Captain Daykin voluntarily left friendly lines and crossed through an unmarked mine field to an exposed position in order to register the fire of his battalion. A few hours later, when the enemy launched a series of vigorous counterattacks, Captain Daykin delivered such effective fire on enemy assembly points and other hostile targets that the enemy efforts were thwarted. The courage and devotion to duty manifested by Captain Daykin reflect great credit on himself and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the Armed Forces. Entered military service from New York.

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6-11-46*

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