

General Subjects Section  
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1947 - 1948

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 101ST INFANTRY  
(26TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK  
MOYENVIC, FRANCE, 8-10 NOVEMBER 1944  
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE NO 2

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2nd Battalion, 101st Infantry, 26th Division, in the attack on Moyenvic, France, on the initiation of the Third Army's fall offensive, 8-10 November 1944.

The XII Corps of the Third Army, spearheaded by the 4th Armored Division, had in mid-September of 1944, taken bridge-heads across the Moselle River east of Nancy, France. (1) (See Map A) Low in supplies, as was the whole Army, they adopted a defensive attitude, and waited for the build-up of supplies that would enable them to go on the offensive. Except for vigorous patrolling and straightening of the line, the lull lasted for nearly two months until 8 November 1944 when the attack across Lorraine jumped off. (2) In this relatively quiet sector on 7 October, elements of the 26th Infantry Division, with which we shall be concerned, relieved elements of the 4th Armored Division, and were committed to their first enemy contact. (3)

Like a dozen or more of its sister National Guard Divisions, the 26th (Yankee) Division had been called into the Federal service early in 1941. (4) More fortunate than most, however, it had been constituted as a Division during its between-wars Guard service, with an active Division headquarters, and more important, with its component parts located wholly within the

(1) A-1, p. 210; (2) A-1, p. 228,242; (3) A-2, p. 7; (4) A-2, p. 2.

jurisdiction and geographical limits of the state of Massachusetts. These circumstances engendered within the Division the habit of working as a divisional unit, and permitted the assembly of the entire Division during the annual training periods, a privilege that was denied most of the other National Guard divisions. Once in Federal service, it took its training, went through Carolina maneuvers, and in early December 1941 arrived back at its home station for the winter. (5) A year of coastal patrol duty dispersed along the east coast from New England to Florida, triangularization, reassembly for training, Tennessee maneuvers, and more training, fitted them for shipment overseas. Staging in the hedgerows, and service on the Red Ball express, completed their combat preparation. The infantry battalions at this time contained about ten per cent of their National Guard enlisted men, but these men were in responsible jobs in their companies. They were experienced non-coms. The remaining enlisted men had come from selective service, the only group which shall otherwise be identified being a group of perhaps five per cent who had come to the battalions in February 1944, when the Army Student Training Program had been dissolved. These last were high quality potential leaders. (6)

We shall focus our attention on one of these infantry elements, the 2nd Battalion, 101st Infantry Regiment, commanded for this operation, by Lieutenant Colonel Bernard A. Lyons. (7)

The sector assigned to 26th Division was the right (south) sector of XII Corps, Third Army, and Twelfth Army Group. (8)

(5) A-2, p. 2; (6) Personal knowledge; (7) Personal knowledge;  
(8) A-2, p. 7.

(See Map B) The 2nd Cavalry Group, a XII Corps unit, had been attached to the division, and was being employed in securing the portion of the line between the right infantry regiment, and elements of Seventh Army to the south of the Marne-Rhine canal, the Army boundary. (9) (See Map B)

The sector into which the 2nd Battalion was initially committed on 7 October, lay generally along the crest and forward slope of the high ground forming the left (east) limit of the Seille River valley in that area. The entire line in the Division sector lay generally along this gentle ridge which the previous troops holding the ground had selected as the most easily defensible line. The enemy held the hills across the Seille River, two to three kilometers to the front. Except for aggressive patrols probing the front lines, artillery fire falling with diminishing volume on the position, and deserters coming into the lines at night to turn in their "Surrender Tickets" and give up, the enemy did not give our troops much concern, during the first four weeks they were in the line.

(10) (See Map C)

Late in October it became apparent that the offensive was to be resumed. The battalion commander was called to regimental headquarters, unaccompanied by any of the staff, for conferences with the regimental commander. Security measures for safeguarding the discussion of the plan were redoubled. October passed into November. (11)

(9) A-1, p. 228; (10) Personal knowledge; (11) Personal knowledge.

## DIVISION AND REGIMENTAL PLANS

The plan of the division, which was employing all three infantry regiments on the line, was to make a limited objective attack with the right regiment, while the center and left regiments were to strike at Moyenvic and Vic-sur-Seille across the valley, making penetrations at those points. American air attacks on the dam at Dieuze had breached it, flooding the Seille River, and leading the enemy to expect an attack in that area. (12) (See Map B)

The ~~problem~~ of the 101st Infantry Regiment was to make the penetration at Moyenvic. The initial objective was the high ground, hill 310, rising nearly 110 meters above the Seille River and lying two kilometers northeast of Moyenvic. (13) That town, the intermediate objective, lay two kilometers in front of the forwardmost positions of the regiment. The valley was open farm land and pasture. On the friendly side, observation over the entire valley was excellent from most places on the high ground behind our front lines. The enemy had equally good observation on our front-line positions from hill 310. Fields of fire for both sides were long and unobstructed. There was no concealment in the valley but the precisely aligned trees along the main roads, the carefully kept orchards and vineyards, and what short grass still covered the pastures. Except for occasional drainage ditches, culverts, and roadbanks, there was scant cover. A few fences and the Seille River were the only obstacles before the objective. A main highway led directly through Moyenvic, across the river, and on past the foot of the

(12) A-2, p. 6-7; (13) A-11.

hill. (14) (See Map C)

Faced by such dominating enemy observation, the regimental commander decided to employ his battalions in column to provide the depth and power to his attack necessary to take Moyenvic, and to push on to hill 310 to the northeast. The 2nd Battalion would lead the attack, supported by the fires of the 3rd Battalion who would follow up on regimental order. The 1st Battalion from their position on the line, would make a limited objective attack south of Xanrey as a feint, then withdraw, cross the river at Moyenvic, and follow up the 3rd Battalion. The axis of the attack was to be the road leading into town from the southeast. As a secondary mission, the regiment had been given the responsibility for the flank protection of 26th Division, XII Corps, Third Army. (15)

When he had developed his own plan sufficiently, the regimental commander indicated to his battalion commanders the proposed scheme of maneuver. The 2nd Battalion, which had been selected to spearhead the attack, was then in regimental reserve. It was ordered to take over that part of the line from which the attack was to be launched. On 2 November, they effected the relief, and began their preparations for the operation. (16)

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

The battalion was familiar with the ground. With minor adjustments on the flanks, it was the same line which they had held a month before when they had first come into the line. (See Map C) It extended along the forward edge of the Foret de Bezange la Grande (17), north of the crossroads known as

(14) Personal knowledge; (15) A-11; (16) A-4, p. 5; (17) Foret de Bezange la Grande.



Five Points, forward along the western side of the winding road leading down the hill toward Moyenvic, to the road fork at the foot of the hill, where the road straightened into town. This was the forwardmost point of the line. From this salient, the line fell back up the hill to the Bois de Piamont (18), passing along its forward edge, and tying in at its east end with the adjacent battalion. The actual length of this line was in excess of 3,000 meters. It was held with two rifle companies on the line, E Company on the right, commanded for this operation by Captain Edward C. Dando, and F Company on the left commanded by Captain Edward S. Gizinski. G Company in reserve, was commanded by Captain Arthur S. Cosgrove. The line was not at any place in close contact with the enemy. From their foxholes in the daytime, the men could look out across the valley at either Vic-sur-Seille or Moyenvic and see the enemy troops moving about in those towns. On our own side, too much carelessness in moving about the position was certain to bring on a few rounds of direct fire artillery, invariably alluded to as 88. Normal communications to the companies was by wire. The battalion command post was located in an underground concrete troop bunker, in the Foret de Bezange la Grande, within fifty meters of the boundary between France and Lorraine.

(19) (See Map C)

When the battalion took over the position on 2 November, the first measure to be taken in preparation was reconnaissance. Leaders were familiarized with as much of the general plan as the battalion commander could disclose. It was known that an

(18) Woods of Piamont; (19) Personal knowledge.

offensive was brewing, that the battalion would lead the attack, and that Moyenvic and beyond would be the first objective. All staff officers and company commanders were to study the ground to their front by observation in daylight, and by personnel reconnaissance in the front lines at night. All troops were to familiarize themselves with the ground in front of them as they observed from their foxholes in the daytime. The battalion commander requested and was granted an air reconnaissance flight over the target area. He returned with a graphic picture of the terrain, a new respect for Division Artillery liaison pilots and German anti-aircraft fire, and a pale look. The companies were rotated on the line to give the most number of men a chance to study the ground before Moyenvic. Patrols were sent out nightly to verify suspected enemy locations in the battalion's front yard, and enemy patrols on occasion, were driven off from our lines. The town of Moyenvic was found to be strongly held, both from prisoner of war interrogation, and from observation of enemy action there. (20) Units to the front were elements of the 361st Volks Grenadier Division. (21)

The weather during the previous month had been damp and rainy, but not excessively so. The troops had been equipped with overshoes, as the great bulk of them spent their daylight hours in foxholes where they got little exercise, and where they needed the warmth and dryness that the overshoes provided.

(20) Personal knowledge; (21) A-8, p. G-2 XCII

The temperature had been above freezing throughout this period. (22)

Except for a limited number of men who had been on patrols, this battalion had not yet participated in any offensive action. A month after going into the line they still presented almost the same rosters as the men who had stepped off the boat. There had been no problem of training replacements. (23)

#### THE BATTALION PLAN

The problem of the battalion commander, was similar to that of the regimental commander. His initial objective, the town of Moyenvic, lay twelve hundred meters in front of his forward positions across an open valley. There was small opportunity to employ cover and concealment on this ground in daylight. The next adjacent unit in the left, the 1st Battalion, 104th Infantry, was making its attack on the town of Vic-sur-Seille, on a route that brought it no nearer than 1000 meters to 2nd Battalion troops. (24) On the right, no other elements were to attack across the valley, but the 1st Battalion, 101st Infantry, as mentioned above, was to make a limited objective attack as a feint, then to withdraw and pass over the Seille River in the bridgehead created by the 2nd Battalion. The flanks of the battalion would be open.

In making his estimate, the battalion commander considered that the use of a conventional attack formation of two com-

(22) Personal knowledge; (23) Personal knowledge;  
(24) A-12, p. 60

panies forward and one in reserve would spread the attack too thinly. What was wanted here was power and control so that once the town had been taken, the battalion could push right on and take hill 310, 2 kilometers farther away. He selected an attack formation of column of companies, G Company leading. He asked that the line of departure be set as far forward as possible, in order to move the troops forward and reduce the distance they had to cover initially. His request was granted and it was set at the point where the winding road straightened out at the bottom of the hill and headed for town. (See Map C) The beginning of nautical twilight was carefully clocked for several mornings prior to the attack, and the fact that H-hour came just before it was verified. The battalion commander wished to take advantage of the haze in the valley together with the darkness to push the troops as far forward towards the objective as the artillery preparation would allow him. G Company would attack down the Moyenvic road to take the town. If they experienced difficulty, the second company, E, would be available to help them out, and if not, E Company had a plan of its own to carry out. They were to follow to the town, pass to the right of it, secure the bridges across the Seille River and its subsidiary canals at that point if they were not blown. If the bridges were destroyed, E Company was to force a crossing of the water barriers, move up the right (east) half of the hill 310 and secure it. F Company, the third in line, was to follow the first two as far as the near end of town, then pass along to the left of it, cross the river, and

move up onto the left (west) half of the hill. This operation, if successfully completed, would give the battalion the commanding observation over the Seille valley that the enemy now enjoyed. This was the main operational plan. (25) (See Map C)

There were other facts to be considered. The battalion was in a defensive situation, spread out over a front of 3,000 meters. Plans had to be made to assemble these troops, issue them ammunition, and get them to the line of departure without unduly jeopardizing the defensive position. The regimental commander ordered the 3rd Battalion to take over the 2nd Battalion positions, and to furnish fire support to the attack with their battalion weapons. The 2nd Battalion was to begin assembling at H-3 hours, be fed a hot breakfast, and move to the assembly areas for the attack. One of the most perplexing problems was that of how much clothing and equipment the troops should carry, and specifically, whether they should wear their overshoes. There was on one hand the health and comfort requirement that the weather at this time of year would demand their use, as opposed to the tactical requirement that the troops not be burdened with any item that they could get along without. The company commanders were consulted for their recommendations. They recommended that overshoes be left behind. They did not want their men to be wearing such heavy handicappers out where they might have to run to carry out their missions.

(25) Personal knowledge

On their recommendations, and his own feeling that the tactical considerations of mobility here outweighed those of comfort, the battalion ordered that overshoes be left behind to be picked up by the battalion supply officer later.

The battalion had attached to it for this operation, a platoon from A Company, 101st Engineer Combat Battalion, the divisional engineers. As a primary mission, this platoon was assigned the clearing of mines on the road from the foot of the hill into Moyenvic. Elements of a company of tanks from the 761st Tank Battalion, in support of the attack, were initially to support by fire from positions to the west of the Bois de Piemont, hitting definitely located automatic weapons and anti-tank gun positions.

The battalion command post was to be taken over at H minus 3 hours by regiment, the battalion command post moving down to the foot of the hill to another concrete bunker. The battalion combat trains were brought forward to the slope behind the Bois de Piemont, ready to be sent forward into Moyenvic as soon as the town was taken and the road cleared of mines. The Aid Station was moved up behind the Bois de Piemont, a long way from the front, but behind the first mask that would permit them to work, and on a good road for 1/4-ton truck evacuation. Communications were to follow the leading companies by wire as rapidly as it could be laid. Until then the reliance would be on radio. (26)

(26) Personal knowledge

THE ATTACK ON MOYENVIC AND HILL 310

D - day for the operation was set for 8 November, with 0600 to be H - hour. At 2200 on 7 November, election day back home, it commenced to rain steadily. It continued to rain throughout the night until nearly dawn. As the night wore on, the battalion command post, now occupied also by elements of the regimental command post began to flood. More serious to the operation, the Seille River began to flood its banks east of Moyenvic, and flow out over the flood plain. At 0300 the troops began moving back off of the defensive line, assembling in platoon groups, and then in the company formations. Their excess equipment including their overshoes were left in company piles to be picked up later. The companies being familiar with the ground and the locations of the assembly areas went to them under company control. G Company which had been in battalion reserve, moved from their area up the slope toward the Bois de Piemont thence across the hill down to the winding road and the line of departure. (27)

The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Lyons, impatient to be off, was waiting at the road fork when G Company arrived. With him was the battalion S-2, Lieutenant David C. Schoentag, who was to accompany G Company. The company was deployed entirely on the left (west) side of the road, and approximately perpendicular to it, with the company right flank guiding along it. Behind them was the engineer platoon commanded

(27) Personal knowledge

by Lieutenant Light, waiting to go down the road with mine detectors. E Company was the next in line, waiting to follow G Company by five minutes, and then F Company at the same interval. The machine guns of H Company were emplaced on the high ground lying between the two roads. The mortars of H Company were emplaced farther back, but with observation over the course of the attack. Each rifle company had attached two scouts from the battalion intelligence section to accompany them in the attack, as a special means of sending intelligence reports back to the command post. (28)

Precisely at 0500, artillery of XII Corps, supported by the division artillery of two armored divisions in Corps reserve, raised the curtain on the campaign for Lorraine. (29) Forty five minutes later, 26th Division artillery began hitting the tactical targets in front of the assault troops. During the preparation, the G Company commander, aided and abetted by Colonel Lyons, who was practically by his side, pushed the company forward towards the town to take advantage of the concealment of the last minutes of darkness. As the guns were silenced, the company picked up the speed of its advance. Just south of the town, the road turns almost 45 degrees to the left, then runs straight up the axis of the town. (See Map C) This brought the G Company attack line into the flank of the town, headed across the fields through the back walls of the town. About 200 yards from the outskirts of town, they

(28) Personal knowledge; (29) A-2, p. 8



found themselves confronted by an enemy outpost with machine guns in position. They continued to within 50 yards of the position where they threw smoke and fragmentation hand grenades. The company destroyed the strong point, and advanced to the edge of the town. In an open field, just inside the edge they surprised thirty German soldiers in the act of eating breakfast, and made them prisoner. As they entered the edge of the town, Lieutenant Schoentag noted that the leaders of the troops near him had become casualties. He organized them hastily and lead them through the town in the mopping up process. He had gone 200 yards when a sniper's bullet in the thigh stopped him. The troops advanced through the town, cleaning up the remnants of a surprised German battalion command post. The captured medical officer and his aid personnel, were put to work at once taking care of his own wounded, and working side by side with our own medical section, when our aid station moved into town. G Company advanced through the town to the bridge, and established a command post just west of it after outposting the town. It was 0900. (30)

Back at the line of departure, the battalion commander was waiting, after G Company had crossed, to check the companies as they went by him. E Company crossed on schedule, following G Company to the town, and passing to the right (east) of it. The F Company commander, Captain Gizinski, waited with the Colonel until his time came. The colonel held F Company until firing was heard from the town, then told Captain Gizinski to

(30) A-9

circle Moyenvic to the right, (The plan had been for F Company to go to the left) and go on to the previously assigned objective, thus putting both E and F Companies on the same side of town. It was still dark when F Company crossed the line of departure. As they drew abreast of the town, they began to receive machine gun fire from their right. They continued on, cutting their way with wire cutters through wire fences obstructing them. When they reached the river, they found it in flood with no apparent way across nearer than the bridge. One F Company Automatic rifleman tried to wade the stream but found it too deep, losing his automatic rifle and his helmet for his pains. Captain Gizinski, unable to find a way across where he was, moved toward the town and came on Captain Dando, commanding E Company, who was having the same trouble. They could see no solution but the bridge. Both companies were signalled toward the bridge, advancing on it together, where they interrupted a group of Germans preparing to destroy it. A sharp fire fight ensued, but with the concentration of the two companies in this area, the enemy began to give up. The company commanders had the prisoners started toward the rear, and pushed their men across the undamaged bridge. The bulk of the force was no sooner across than the bridge was shelled. The companies moved off to the road fork where they were separated, E Company moving off to the east end of hill 310. (31)

(31) A-10

F Company started off up the western end. The fields were deep in mud, which slowed the men down, and made movement up the steep slope very difficult, but they continued to go forward, firing as they went. As the company approached, the Germans would come out of their positions with their hands up. They were disarmed and sent to the rear. On the lower part of the hill, in a curiously concealed depression, on the west edge of the 20 meter high point guarding the southwestern corner of hill 310, they captured a battery position of two 75 millimeter direct fire type cannon together with the observation post and the command post. These guns commanded the slopes from which the battalion had just come, and was able to cover the bridge at a range of less than a thousand meters. Part way up the main slope, F Company came under mortar fire one round landing within 5 yards of Captain Gizinski, and wounding him lightly in the leg. He was able to continue. Three of the company's officers had been wounded previously that morning, and had been evacuated. The company pressed on with marching fire against developing hostile small arms fire from the upper slopes of the hill. As they reached the crest, ~~the individual men~~ exhausted from their hard climb in the mud, they were met with heavy small arms and automatic weapon fire from the far edge of the small plateau on top of the hill, as well as sniper fire. F Company radioed to battalion requesting artillery fire to their front. This was fired, but without perceptible effect. Elements of the company being unable to move farther forward, and being on his assigned objective, the

company commander organized a firing line on his side of the top of the hill, and had the company dig in. (32)

Captain Gizinski was joined in a few minutes by Captain Dando, whose radio was out of order, and who had come over from his side of the hill to report to the battalion command post over the F Company radio.

E Company had the same story to tell over on the east. They had gotten up hill 310, clearing it as they went, extending with their right flank as far east as the Cote de St Jean, now only a battered ruin. As they began to break over the top of the hill, they too had been met by withering small arms and machine gun fire from the reverse slope of hill 310, and from their right flank, the reverse of the eastern slope. This fire as had been the case in the F Company sector, brought the advance to a halt before it had actually reached its objective, the securing of the top of the hill, and the control of the reverse slope. The company built up a firing line and dug in. (33)

The top of hill 310 was now under intense hostile mortar and artillery fire. Casualties were heavy. The machine guns of F Company went into position and dug in to fire to the north. During a lull in the shelling, Captain Dando returned to his company. In the midst of another heavy barrage, Lieutenant John Cook, executive officer of H Company, arrived on the hill with heavy machine gun support. F Company had been evacuating

(32) A-10; (33) A-10

their wounded to the company command post dugout, as evacuation down the hill was out of the question at this time. Captain Gizinski, whose wounded leg was beginning to bother him, started over to check the wounded, when he was hit again in the left arm, and was unable to get up. He was taken to the dugout where he was administered morphine by the company aid man. He turned the company over to Sergeant Furniss of the Weapons Platoon who commanded it until the First Sergeant, Walter J. Wythe, arrived, no other officers being on duty with the company.

The two companies were on top of hill 310 by 0915. Moyenvic and the top of the hill together with an intact bridge, an enemy battery, an enemy battalion commander and 442 other prisoners of war had been taken in the first three hours of the attack. (34)

With the rifle companies on the objective let us return to the line of departure and the engineers and tanks. The attached engineer platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Light, had been given one of the most ticklish jobs. With no infantry preceeding them along the road itself, they were to keep abreast of the leading assault company, and sweep the main road to Moyenvic for mines. Other platoons of the engineer company in support of 101st Infantry would follow some minutes later, one with the mission of re-constructing the bridge across the Seille River, which it was anticipated would be destroyed,

(34) A-11

and the other to construct two foot bridges across the river to get the support troops across. As the attack left the line of departure, the platoon leader of the mine sweeping platoon, evidenced the reluctance to move frequently associated with supporting troops who believe they should be preceded by infantry. Colonel Lyons ordered him to move his platoon down the road. With great intrepidity he did so, without mishap until the center of town was reached. Here the platoon was briefly pinned down by machine gun fire, until G Company coming in from the flank had relieved the pressure. They had advanced a few yards farther, when a barrage of mortar shells cut down ten of the group including Lieutenant Light, who was seriously wounded. In the ensuing demoralization, two men had the presence of mind and the sense of mission to assemble the remnants of the platoon and continue the sweeping operation through the town to the river. (35)

The supporting tank unit took positions on the high ground to the north of the Bois de Piemont. (See Map C) As the artillery preparation reached its height, their enthusiasm began to exceed their discretion, and they began to fire with both their main armament and their machine guns in the general direction of the town. By the time the town was taken, they had expended their prescribed load of ammunition. When the regimental commander ordered them to move forward, they were unable to do so, until they had been resupplied with ammunition.

(35) A-1, p. 250

As the morning wore on, more violent enemy reaction began to develop. E and F Companies on the top of the hill, found that what should have been their rear, was completely enfiladed by enemy direct fire weapons from the moated city of Marsal, down in the valley, and from enemy positions to the southeast. The companies began taking casualties from this artillery fire in an area where they were most vulnerable, their line of communications and their rear. During the afternoon, any wireman, messenger, aid man or ammunition carrier that ventured across the slope toward the companies became the target of intense, direct, personal artillery fire. E Company, in coming up the hill had not secured the terrain which controlled the eastern slope, and as a result were flanked by automatic weapon fire from close range. Evacuation suffered severely from the difficulties imposed by the exposed line of communications, and line of drift. E Company called for and received concentrations of artillery fire timed to air burst on the reverse slope in front of them. These were effective, but did not panic the enemy, or cause him to withdraw. (36)

Down in Moyenvic, G Company which had reverted to battalion reserve, upon being passed through by the other two companies, was not having it much easier. Something over an hour after the town was lost to him, the enemy began a violent reaction with mortars. The 2nd Battalion command post had moved into  
(36) Personal knowledge

town about noon along a highway on which one had to hop, skip and jump to avoid the direct fire artillery in the Marsal area. The battalion ammunition and pioneer truck with its normal load, moving up along this road about 1400 hours, hopped when it should have skipped, took a direct hit, destroying the truck with its cargo, and setting the remnants on fire, but sparing the drivers in the front seat. (37)

The regimental command post followed battalion into town by mid-afternoon, just as the Germans got the range to the main square in town. In a particularly heavy concentration, the regimental communications officer was killed while installing his switchboard. A few minutes later, Captain Cosgrove of G Company, walked down to the bridge to check his security, and to see what he could of the fighting on the hill, and was fatally wounded by a mortar shell. (38)

When the companies on the hill had been given time to reorganize, they were ordered to continue the attack to gain full possession of the top of the hill. F Company, having lost all its officers, was assigned the assistant battalion operations officer, as company commander. He joined the company on the hill, together with the battalion motor officer, who was being pressed into service as a rifle company officer. Both companies reported that they were unable to move in daylight because of the heavy fire, both artillery and small arms. By mid-afternoon, the two companies of the 2nd Battalion had been reinforced by L Company and elements of M Company from

(37) Personal knowledge; (38) Personal knowledge



the 3rd Battalion, under their own battalion control. By darkness, neither E nor F Companies had been able to move, and they had not been able to make reconnaissance for a night attack. Shortly before dark, the battalion operation officer was sent to the hill to find out why the attack had not been made and see what could be done to get it going. He visited the F Company commander in his command post dugout, a few yards from the front lines, and talked by phone to the E Company commander a few hundred yards down the ridge. The troops were beginning to feel the effects of being soaked for twenty four hours. The rain, which had let up during the day, was falling again. The men were forced to stand in foxholes in six inches to a foot of water in some cases, and were unable to bail them out because of the nearness of the enemy. To add to the miserable outlook, it had turned colder. The men, being down to minimum equipment for the attack, had no protection from the cold. The companies had not been able to prepare for a night attack, and the enemy had kept their heads down during the daylight hours. Darkness did bring with it a reduction in the volume of artillery fire. The operation officer reported these facts to the battalion commander, together with his recommendation that the attack not be carried out that night, by telephone from the F Company command post. (39)

Evacuation of the wounded from hill 310 had been almost negligible during the day, because of the long litter haul,

(39) Personal knowledge

and the fact that the aid station was fully employed in treating the casualties that the litter squads could pick up close by. The wounded company commander of F Company together with one of the seriously wounded non-coms, and several others were still lying in bunks in the dugout, awaiting evacuation since morning. After the operation officer returned to town, he conducted 1/4 ton ambulances with personnel from the battalion aid station up the trail as far as the 1/4 ton trucks could go and then on to the dugout where these wounded were evacuated together with several others who had been picked up on hill 310. By midnight these casualties were back in the battalion aid station in Moyenvic. (40)

The next morning at daybreak, the first sergeant of F Company, who had commanded it briefly the first day, stepped out of the dugout to look over the situation and relieve himself. A sniper caught him in the act, and he had to be evacuated with a broken leg. Daybreak brought with it also a resumption of the artillery fire, though not with the same intensity. The suffering among the troops who had spent the night in water-filled foxholes became intense, and 36 hours of wet cold feet began to have its effect on the casualty report. The battalion command post was moved from Moyenvic to the depression on the southwest corner of the hill, and the aid station was moved to the farm buildings, just southwest of it known as Dead Cow Farm, because the dairy herd had been

(40) Personal knowledge

caught by artillery fire and lay stiff and bloated in their pasture. (41)

During the day, the 1st and 3rd Battalions attacked to the north and east, making sufficient headway, to relieve the battalion of small arms fire, but not to reduce the artillery fire. The battalion at this point was holding the critical ground on the right flank of the division attack, which was driving to the north and northeast. (42)

On 10 November, the artillery fire which in the first two days had put some 3500 rounds on hill 310, lessened in intensity. E Company, which had been the greater sufferer from trench foot, was relieved by G Company. The attack of the 1st and 3rd Battalions had relieved the pressure on the 2nd Battalion, which continued to hold the position. The 2nd Battalion attack had been successful. (43)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In studying this operation, the first fact that meets the eye is that the battalion carried out a carefully conceived and coordinated plan with aggressiveness, vigor and dispatch. In spite of the difficulties which they later encountered after getting on their objective, they did get there, and with less difficulty than had been expected. In this respect, many factors paid off.

The most important of these was probably surprise. In March of 1946, as a prisoner of war, Major General von

(41) Personal knowledge; (42) A-2, p. 9; (43) A-11

Mellenthin, in November 1944, Chief of Staff to German Army Group G, prepared a monograph on the operations of his unit during this period. He writes in part:

"On 8 Nov 44, after a heavy artillery barrage lasting several hours, American infantry and tanks began to attack about 0800 on a broad front in the 48th Inf Div and 559 Volks Gren Div sectors and on the right flank of 361 Volks Gren Div. In spite of our information obtained from prisoners, radio interception, and ground reconnaissance that the attack was scheduled to begin about this time, the enemy had made his final preparations with such cleverness and with such excellent deception, that our local forces were taken by surprise." (44)

In a similar manner one can find in this operation, examples of most of the other principles of war as applied to small units. The principle of mass was demonstrated in the plans of both regiment and battalion in their concentration of forces at one point, Moyenvic, to assure that at that one point superior combat power would be concentrated. The principle of simplicity was illustrated in the uncomplicated plan given to the companies. Application of the principle of the offensive can be seen in the aggressive manner in which the companies continually pushed on to their assigned objectives, and in doing so destroyed more of the enemy in three hours than they had in the four weeks previously. The principle of movement is shown in the manner in which the

(44) A-5, p. 40-41

companies were moved from their positions on the line, where their combat power was dispersed, to the line of departure, where the full force of their combat effectiveness could be turned on the enemy at Moyenvic. Economy of force was demonstrated in that portion of the plan which called for the troops to assemble off their extended line, taking a calculated risk that the enemy would not attack it, in order to concentrate the maximum number of troops in front of Moyenvic. Cooperation was used as a principle by the two company commanders as they solved by mutual support and combined strength the problem of forcing the Seille River bridge. The enemy force in this action presents a graphic illustration of the failure to observe the principle of security. Adequate security would have warned him of our attack in time to take more aggressive means to stop it. These illustrations amply indicate that the principles of war have not been repealed.

Tactical principles as laid down in field manuals were followed in this operation and proven sound. The distribution in depth to provide flexibility of maneuver and continuity of attack were demonstrated in this operation in the decision to order an attack formation of column of companies. When the battalion commander found it necessary to make a new decision in changing the route of attack of F Company, he was taking advantage of the flexibility inherent in his plan.

There were other factors that helped. Experienced non-commissioned officers for one thing. The squad and platoon teams that initiated the attack had been working together for

nearly eight months, and as much as possible, without actual combat behind them, "knew the score". The lack of being battlewise, while it did not affect these men's leadership and experience in handling their units, caused them to expose themselves unduly, resulting in a much higher casualty rate among these non-commissioned officers than was experienced in later actions of the battalion.

Thorough briefing was another seed of success. These troops had been carefully briefed on the plans of the unit at least two steps above them. Every soldier knew the plan of his company, every platoon leader knew the plan of the battalion. Each man and officer had been able to observe and examine the ground over which he would attack. Each man felt that he was a trusted part of the team, and he gained confidence to go forward, an important consideration when he had been fighting from a foxhole for a month.

Esprit de corps played an important part. For the old timers in the division, those who had served in National Guard days, this was the moment they had been looking forward to for years. From the first World War, the Yankee Division had gained a reputation second to none. This reputation, carefully nurtured during peacetime by World War I veterans in the Guard, assisted by the fortuitous circumstance that the division was enabled to have a unique peacetime continuity developed a strong esprit among these old timers, amounting almost to snobbishness when comparing themselves to other divisions. This is a desirable

trait in soldiers, for it enables them to team together to accomplish results that they might not otherwise do. The newcomers had been amply imbued with this spirit.

Aggressive leadership played a vital part. When the battalion commander and the G Company commander led their troops close up under the artillery preparation, over terrain which they knew might become fire swept at any moment, they were leading aggressively. They realized that a more timorous movement would permit the enemy time to recover from his battle shock, and man his defenses. When the F Company commander continued to lead his company onto the objective after being wounded, he was displaying aggressive leadership. The intelligence officer, Lieutenant Schoentag, taking command of troops in his vicinity and leading them in the mop-up of Moyenvic is another example. There were countless others.

The decision for the troops to leave their overshoes behind unquestionably induced more cases of trench foot than would otherwise have been the case, but the result of bogging down the troops in the heavy mud, and their consequence slowing down and exhaustion might have caused many more battle casualties.

The conduct of the engineer platoon assigned to the mission of mine-sweeping on the road to Moyenvic was exemplary. They served in this operation as combat engineers in every sense of the term.

Poor control was exercised over the tank support. They

fired without definite targets, and without affecting in any way the course of the action they were supporting. This control should have come from their own unit commanders.

Sufficient planning was not devoted to reorganization plans once hill 310 had been taken. The early success of the battalion caught it short of plans as to what to do next in order to best further the attack, in my opinion.

### LESSONS

1. Surprise is a potent weapon.
2. Aggressiveness in small unit leadership is one of the most important keys to success.
3. ✓ Marching fire is an effective way to combine fire and movement.
4. Control must be exercised over all phases of an operation to keep any part from going astray.
5. Esprit de corps is an asset to any organization.
6. Planning must be continuous, and cover every contingency, including success.
7. Briefing must be complete and thorough. Men who know the plan of a higher unit, can act more intelligently in carrying out their share.
8. A rear slope defense, carefully prepared, is a tough nut to crack.
9. Avoid exposing the rear of your position to the enemy.
10. The process of making a unit battlewise is an expensive one.