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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "G", 16TH INFANTRY (1ST INF. DIV.)
IN THE DRIVE TO THE ROER RIVER, 17-27 NOVEMBER 1944
(THE ALLIED WINTER OFFENSIVE) (Personal experience of a Rifle Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

The action described in this monograph covers the operations of Company "G", 16th Infantry, 1st U. S. Infantry Division, in the initial stages of the Allied Winter Offensive, from the assembling of the Regiment 9 November 1944 to it's relief by the 18th Infantry and the reorganization of the 2d Battalion in the vicinity of NOTHBERG, GERMANY on 27-28 November 1944.

It should be emphasized that the primary point of this narrative is the attempt to show the actions and thoughts of a company commander in combat. The operations engaged in by the Company did not differ in any material way from similar actions engaged in by many other American units during this phase of the war. Therefore they have been used mainly to give coherence and cohesion to the main point of the monograph, namely how one company commander attempted to solve the problems confronting him during a prolonged and exhausting action.

At this point a brief summary of the history of the Company in World War II might assist in providing the necessary background for this narrative. The Company had participated in all of the campaigns of the 1st U. S. Infantry Division from the initial landings of the Center Task Force at ARZEW, ALGERIA through the TUNISIAN, SICILIAN, NORMANDY, NORTHERN FRANCE and RHINELAND campaigns. (1)

At the time this narrative commences the Company had, with the exception of one 4 day rest period in regimental reserve, been in the line since 15 September. During this period it had borne the brunt of the enemy counter-attacks designed to relieve the city of AACHEN on it's positions at EILENDORF, GERMANY. The resultant high casualties and the high ratio of inexperienced replacements were not calculated to increase the combat efficiency of the Company. The Company strength at this time was 6 officers and approximately 165 enlisted men, of whom no officers and not more than 15 enlisted

(1) A-4

men were members of the original Company that had sailed from New York on 30 June 1942. On 28 October the Company Commander, then in command of Company "M", was called into the office of Colonel Frederick W. Gibb, the Regimental Commander, and was told that he was to be assigned to Company "G". He was informed that, in view of the conditions mentioned above, the Company would need considerable straightening out. The Company Commander then reported to 2d Battalion Headquarters and after a short orientation by the Battalion Commander and members of his staff, proceeded to join his new command. The Regimental Commander was right. The non-commissioned officer strength of the Company had been so badly depleted in the past two months that it had been found necessary to transfer six non-commissioned officers from Companies "E" and "F" to the Company to fill key positions of two platoon sergeants, a machine gun section leader, and three rifle squad leaders. The Company had at this time been moved into a comparatively quiet sector on the line where, with the exception of active patrolling by both sides and harrassing artillery fire, no action was taking place. This then was the local situation during the opening days of November, prior to the start of the Allied Winter Offensive. (2)

The planning for this offensive had started on 21 October, when Twelfth Army Group issued a directive for a general attack to the east. The First Army, consisting of the V, VII, and VIII Corps, had been given the mission of advancing to the RHINE RIVER in the vicinity of BONN and COLOGNE and seizing a bridgehead across the RHINE if possible. (3)

This attack was to be launched sometime after 5 November, the exact date depending on the assembly of sufficient stocks of ammunition and also on suitable weather for air operations. This last was of vital importance as a great mass of air power had been made available to the Army Group for this attack and the breaching of the strong enemy position around DUEREN was to be made possible by its employment in support of the ground attack. (4)

(2) Eye witness, self; A-4, p. 158-175. (3, 4) A-5, p. 67.

Beginning 22 October, the regrouping of the First Army for this attack was initiated. The main effort was to be made by the VII Corps on the left or north flank of the Army and was to be coordinated with the attack of the XIX Corps of the Ninth Army, which was to assist the advance of VII Corps and protect the left flank of Twelfth Army Group. The Order of Battle of the major combat units of the VII Corps on 10 November was as follows:

- 1st Infantry Division (plus)
- 3d Armored Division
- 4th Infantry Division
- 104th Infantry Division
- 47th RCT (attached to 1st Infantry Division)
- CCR, 5th Armored Division
- 4th Cavalry Group

The 104th Division was assigned to the main effort on 8 November in order to counteract an enemy build-up which was taking place in front of the VII Corps and XIX Corps of the Ninth Army on the north. VII Corps was also given a heavy allotment of artillery for it's effort, reinforcements consisting of an unusual number of 240-mm gun and 8-inch howitzer battalions. (5)

On 1 November a preliminary attack was to be made by the V Corps in the VOSENACK-SCHMIDT-STRAUCH area to dominate the crossings of the ROER RIVER in that vicinity and to serve as a departure area for an attack to the east to seize the two large dams across the ROER east of MONSCHAU. The importance of these dams was very great as the enemy, by blowing them, could flood the middle reaches of the ROER in the vicinity of DUEREN. This action by the enemy would seriously handicap, if not immobilize, the main effort which was to be made through the DUEREN area. (6)

The plan of attack of the VII Corps was as follows: "The major effort of the VII Corps was to be made by the 1st Division, which would pass through the front of the 47th RCT in the direction of LANGERWEHE to seize the crossings of the ROER RIVER north of DUEREN, assisted by the 3d Armored Division on it's left. The Divisional objective was designated as the town of GRESSE-NICH and the HAMICH-NOTHBERG RIDGE. The 47th RCT was to seize the area NOTHBERG-HUECHELN, south of WELSWEILER on the INDE RIVER. It was later to

(5, 6) A-5, p. 67, 68, 71.

pass beyond and pinch out the 104th Division. Initially supported by the attack of the 1st and 104th Divisions, the 3d Armored Division was to attack when ordered by Corps, in conjunction with the 1st Division, to seize the area HASTENRATH-WERTH and KOTTENICH.

"On the left, the 104th Division was to attack with it's main effort to the north of ESCHWEILER and the INDE RIVER in order to pinch out enemy defenses in the vicinity of ESCHWEILER and WEISWEILER, and to mop up the entire area west of the line of the INDE RIVER from INDEN to WEISWEILER. The 4th Cavalry Group was directed to assemble in readiness, attached temporarily to the 1st Division to be prepared to move to block initial crossings of the INDE RIVER between INDEN and WEISWEILER. These actions in connection with the forward drive of the 1st Division would result in blocking off ESCHWEILER and the region in rear of it from the north, east, and south.

"The 4th Division on the right was to seize the crossing of the ROER RIVER in the vicinity of DUEREN and to the south thereof and to assist the later advance of the 1st Division to seize COLOGNE.

"Artillery preparation was to come in at H-60 and to be continued by some elements as late as H-21. Artillery fire subsequent to H-hour was to be delivered on targets deep in enemy territory." (7)

The 1st Division plan was to attack initially with two regiments abreast, the 26th Infantry on the right and the 16th Infantry on the left. The boundary between regiments in the attacking echelon was to be the WEHE BACH, a large deep-cut creek which ran generally northeastward through the 1st Division zone of action. The 18th Infantry was to be in Division reserve in the woods northwest of ZWEIFALL. The 3d Battalion, 47th Infantry, held the line of departure of the 16th Infantry. Their line ran from SCHEVENHUETTE north along the creek for about 100 yards, thence west about 50 yards inside the woods and generally paralleling the SCHEVENHUETTE-GRESSENICH ROAD to the edge of the woods. This Battalion, when passed through by the 16th Infantry, was to assemble in a position on the left of the 16th Infantry,

(7) A-5, p. 72, 72.

prepared to support the attack of the remainder of the 47th Infantry. This Regiment was to attack to the west, in conjunction with the attack of the 16th Infantry, and to seize the town of GRESSENICH. (8)

The 16th Infantry planned to attack in column of battalions, in the order 1st Battalion, 3d Battalion, 2d Battalion. Extracts from "FO #15, HQ C T 16" are quoted as follows:

"2 b Troops:

1st Bn rein

1st Bn, 16 Inf
Plat AT Co, 16 Inf
Plat Co C, 634 TD Bn
Plat Co A, 745 Tk Bn
Plat Co D, 745 Tk Bn
Det Serv Co, 16 Inf
Plat Co A, 1st Engr C Bn
Det Co A, 1st Med Bn

2d Bn rein

2d Bn, 16 Inf
Plat AT Co, 16 Inf
Plat Co C, 634 TD Bn
Plat Co A, 745 Tk Bn
Plat Co D, 745 Tk Bn
Det Serv Co, 16 Inf
Det Co A, 1st Med Bn

3d Bn rein

Plat AT Co, 16 Inf
Plat Co C, 634 TD Bn
Plat Co A, 745 Tk Bn
Plat Co D, 745 Tk Bn
Det Serv Co, 16 Inf
Det Co A, 1st Med Bn

Regtl Troops

HQ & HQ Co, 16 Inf
Serv Co, 16 Inf (- Dets)
At Co, 16 Inf (- Dets)
Cn Co, 16 Inf
Med Det, 16 Inf
Co A, 1st Med Bn (- Dets)
Det 1st Sig Co
745 Tk Bn (- Cos A, B, C, and D)
Co C, 634 TD Bn (- Flats)
Co A, 87 Cml Mort Bn

"3 a 1st Bn rein:

(1) Pass thru the 3d Bn, 47 Inf at H-hr, D-day, atk, seize and hold Obj #1. (The woods southeast of HAMICH and the town of HAMICH.)

(2) Upon being passed thru by the 2d Bn and the 3d Bn, and on order of CO 16 Inf be prepared to atk, seize and hold Obj #4. (The town of HEISTERN and the high ground to the northwest.)

(3) Gain and maintain contact with 26 Inf on R.

b 3d Bn rein:

(1) On order of CO 16 Inf pass thru 1st Bn, atk in it's zone of action, seize and hold the ridge NW of HILL 232 (Obj #2).

(2) Gain and maintain contact with 47 Inf and 3d Armd Div.

(8) A-1, p. 55

c 2d Bn rein:

- (1) On order of CO 16 Inf pass thru 1st Bn, atk in it's zone of action, seize and hold the wooded area N of HILL 232 (Obj #3).
(BOVENBERGER WALD)
- (2) Maintain contact with 3d Bn.

e Cn Co:

Initially fire concentrations in accordance with Arty Plan Annex #3. Thereafter support the advance of the 16 Inf to Objs 1,2,3, and 4 on call.

h Co A, 87 Cml Mort Bn:

Initially fire concentrations in accordance with Arty Plan Annex #3. Thereafter support the adv of the 16 Inf to Objs 1,2,3, and 4 on call.

x D-day, H-hour to be announced."

The artillery plan, which was covered in Annex #3 to the field order, provided fire support for the attack generally as follows:

- 1) The supporting artillery consisted of:
 - a) 1st U. S. Infantry Division Artillery with
5th Field Artillery Battalion (Medium), in general support
7th Field Artillery Battalion (Light), in direct support
32d Field Artillery Battalion (Light), in general support,
reinforcing the fires of the 7th Field Artillery Battalion
 - b) 3d Armored Division Artillery neutralizing that portion of
the HAMICH RIDGE not under attack initially, until requested
to lift by 1st U. S. Infantry Division Artillery
 - c) 18th Field Artillery Battalion (Medium), in general support
 - d) 84th Field Artillery Battalion (Light), in general support,
reinforcing the fires of the 7th Field Artillery Battalion. (9)

As will be shown during the narrative, changes in the plan of attack were caused by unfavorable terrain and the unexpectedly heavy enemy resistance.

TERRAIN EVALUATION

The terrain in the 16th Infantry's zone of advance had been well-chosen by the enemy for the defense of what he rightly considered to be

(9) A-1, p. 55

the most logical route for a thrust towards the open ground leading to the COLOGNE PLAIN. To the north, on his right flank, lay ESCHWEILER, imposing the obstacle, which a large city places in the path of the attacker, to our advance. While to the south, on his left flank, were the dense, wooded hills of the HUERTGEN FOREST.

The dominant feature of the terrain was the ridge running from a point approximately 200 yards north of SCHEVENHUETTE, northwest to HILL 213. This ridge was known as the HAMICH RIDGE. About equally spaced along the crest of the ridge were three knolls, HILL 213 on the northern end, HILL 232 (the highest piece of ground in the zone) roughly in the center, and HILL 225 at the southern end, just northeast of and overlooking HAMICH.

From each end of the HAMICH RIDGE there ran a long gently sloping finger of ridge to the north. From the northern tip, in the vicinity of HILL 213, the BOVENBERGER WALD ran due north to within 500 yards of the ESCHWEILER-DUEREN railroad. On the southern tip the ridge ran northeast to a point approximately 600 yards north of HEISTERN, where it forked, the right fork continuing on in a northeasterly direction and the left fork bending around to the northwest and terminating in the dense woods which ran up to the ESCHWEILER-DUEREN railroad tracks at HUECHELN. This left fork and the forest covering it will be called, for convenience sake, the HUECHELN WOODS.

The right boundary of the Regiment was initially along the large creek called the WEHE BACH, which was followed generally by the only paved road running through the Division zone along the axis of advance. One of the main hazards during the initial stages of the operation was caused by the bottleneck at SCHEVENHUETTE, along the only road in the area suitable for use as a main supply route. At this point the road ran through a narrow defile, which could be placed under fire by the enemy from positions to southeast, east, and north, and until GRESSENICH was taken there was no other route which could be used. However, once GRESSENICH was taken, the zone had an excellent dry weather roadnet, although in wet weather most of the secondary roads in the area were wholly inadequate to support military traffic. This was particularly true of the roads and trails running through the woods which covered

the ridge lines running to the north from the base of the HAMICH RIDGE.

The villages and towns laying within or adjacent to the Regimental zone of advance were: ZWEIFALL, SCHEVENHUETTE, GRESSENICH, HAMICH, SCHERPENSEEL, WENAU, HEISTERN, and HUECHELN.

The key features in the initial stages of the attack were HILL 232 and HAMICH. Hill 232 was an almost perfect natural observation post from which the enemy could see any and all movement from SCHERPENSEEL to the west, WERTH and GRESSENICH to the south, and HAMICH to the southeast. The only concealed route of advance into the position was from SCHEVENHUETTE on the southeastern tip of the HAMICH RIDGE and thence through the dense woods to within 300 yards of HAMICH. The town had been well fortified by the enemy and the houses were so situated that almost each one had to be individually assaulted under fire from those surrounding it. HILL 232 itself was easily defensible, as the following quotation from "Selected Intelligence Reports, Vol. I, First United States Infantry Division" will show: "The hill itself was a position from which he (the enemy) could not be dislodged easily, since the crest commanded all open approaches, and the slopes were creased and scored with quarrying cuts, providing defilade from any direction. The face of the hill was covered with low scrub brush and trees which afforded considerable concealment but no interference to fields of fire." Another excellent and well sited enemy observation post was located on HILL 213, which supplemented the HILL 232 position and afforded observation to SCHERPENSEEL to the west, to NOTHBERG and ESCHWEILER to the northwest, and to WEISWEILER to the north.

One of the main difficulties of the operation was caused by the fact that the peculiarities of the terrain forced the attack northeastward. The enemy artillery, as was mentioned in the discussion of the SCHEVENHUETTE bottleneck, was able to place fire on us from points ranging initially all of the way from the northwest, north, northeast, east, southeast, and south. When units, as some of them occasionally did, were attacking to the northwest, the enemy was able to place fire on them from positions directly to their rear. This was most confusing and several times during the attack in the HUECHELN WOODS the Regimental Commander of the 16th Infantry was forced to request that all

friendly supporting fires cease, in order to ascertain that the fire falling on the attacking echelon was not coming from our own artillery. (10)

THE ASSEMBLING OF THE 16th INFANTRY

On 9 November 1944 the 16th Infantry was relieved from its positions in the vicinity of BRAND-STOLBERG by the 415th Infantry, 104th Infantry Division, and moved to temporary assembly areas which were assigned in "Operations Instructions #24, 1st U. S. Infantry Division." The 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, remained in an assembly area in the vicinity of BRAND, where it had been in regimental reserve carrying on rest and rehabilitation for the past day. At about 1200 hours on 10 November the 2d Battalion moved from BRAND to an assembly area in the vicinity of ZWEIFALL which had been vacated by the 3d Battalion. The Regiment was now assembled. (11)

The wait for the weather to clear now began. An elaborate code system was to be used to indicate the day for the attack. It was never known before midnight whether the following day would be D-day or not. The wait was an extremely unpleasant one, with men sleeping in the open, often covered by snow before morning which melted during the day and filled their trenches with water. (12)

On about 13 November the 2d Battalion was subjected to the additional strain of being bombed by our own planes. A flight of four P-47 fighter bombers dive-bombed the assembly area, dropping what appeared to be four 500-pound bombs. The craters measured roughly 30 feet across by 15 feet deep. This was the more inexcusable as the assembly area was approximately 10000 yards behind the front lines. Fortunately no casualties were caused, although the explosions threw 6-inch logs, 3 to 5 feet long, within 20 feet of the Company mess line. (13)

Late on the evening of 15 November the word came in. D-day was 16 November. (14)

(10) A-2, p. 88, 90; Statement, Colonel Gibb, Regimental Commander, March 1947; Personal Reconnaissance, November 1944. (11) A-1, p. 13; A-3, p. 1.

(12) Eye witness, self; Colonel Gibb, Regimental Commander, November 1944.

(13) Eye witness, self. (14) A-1, p. 16; Eye witness, self.

COMPANY "G", 16th INFANTRY, IN THE BATTLE OF HAMICH, 16-20 NOVEMBER 1944

On 16 November the Regiment, with Companies "A" and "C" in assault, attacked as ordered per Field Order #15, dated 8 November 1944. By 1515 hours the 1st Battalion was fighting on a portion of its objective against strong enemy resistance, characterized by continuous heavy counterattacks, supported by accurate and effective fire from mortars and heavy artillery. At 1530 hours the 3d Battalion moved to the forward assembly area vacated by the 1st Battalion. In the meantime the 2d Battalion Company Commanders had received orders to be prepared to move their companies to the area vacated by the 3d Battalion, company commanders to report to Battalion headquarters in ZWEIFALL at once to receive final instructions. The time was then about 1500 hours. (15)

Before leaving their company areas, the Company Commanders made arrangements for the Company Executive Officers to move the Companies to a rendezvous in the vicinity of VICHT on order. There the Company Commanders would meet their Companies and conduct them forward to the assembly area. The route to be followed by the Companies on this initial stage of the move had been reconnoitred and marked with engineer tape (the use of engineer tape in marking critical and difficult routes had been a common practice in the 16th Infantry since the initial invasion of North Africa). (16)

THE MARCH TO THE FORWARD ASSEMBLY AREA

At approximately 1600 hours the order was given to the Company Commanders to move out under their own control. All companies were immediately notified by telephone to move out at 1630 hours. The order of march, previously agreed on between the Company Commanders, was to be Company "F", Company "E", and Company "G", followed by the foot elements of Company "H". After a further short conference with the Battalion Commander, the Company Commanders proceeded to VICHT to meet their companies. It had been expected that the head of the leading company column would reach the rendezvous at about 1715 hours. When there was no sign of the leading Company at 1745 hours, considerable concern was felt. A short conference was held to determine the advisability

(15) A-1, p. 16; Eye witness, self; Personal knowledge, Colonel Gibb, Regimental Commander. (16) Eye witness, self.

of trying to find the troops. It was decided that, in view of the darkness, it would be best to remain down at the rendezvous and have the drivers patrol the road in either direction to prevent the troops crossing the road and losing themselves in the woods on the other side. This proved to be a wise decision as the leading elements appeared at approximately 1800 hours. Company "F, followed closely by Company "E", was soon assembled and ready to continue the move. After about a 20-minute wait, another column appeared. On contacting this column it was found to consist of the Company "H" elements. Where was Company "G"? The Executive Officer of Company "H" was contacted and questioned. He stated that he had seen the tail of Company "G" column take a side trail about 1000 yards back up the trail. Seeing that they had left the marked route he attempted to contact the tail of the column and find out the reason. Unsuccessful in this, he had decided to continue on the marked route as ordered.

The Company Commander, who had his weapons platoon leader and runner with him, decided to return back up the trail and attempt to find his Company. His driver was told to continue to patrol the main road and if he found the Company to tell the Executive Officer to assemble them at the rendezvous and wait for the Company Commander.

The group then started up the trail to try and find the troops. After arriving at the turnoff described by Company "H", they took the trail the Company was reported to have followed. After proceeding down this trail for about 400 yards, they were greatly relieved to find what appeared to be the tail of the column halted along the trail. This relief was premature. After proceeding up the column they found its head at another trail junction. This column consisted of only the weapons platoon and two squads of the third platoon. In moving down the unmarked trail, the lead man in the second squad of the third platoon had lost contact with the preceding squad. On arriving at the trail junction, he halted and sent for the platoon sergeant to find out what to do. This was a mistake, as by the time the platoon sergeant arrived it was too late to find the Company. Had the squad leader merely halted the column and sent a small patrol down each trail to tell the rest

of the Company to wait until the lost elements could catch up, he would undoubtedly have succeeded in rejoining the column. As soon as the Platoon Sergeant arrived he immediately proceeded to do just this. Shortly after the Company Commander joined this group, both patrols returned, reporting no success. The Company Commander then decided to take the men he had found down to the rendezvous area as further searching through these woods at night was useless and he was fairly certain that the driver would succeed in halting the remainder of the Company on the main road. His confidence in the driver was not misplaced, as on reaching the rendezvous area he found the Executive Officer with the rest of the Company.

On being pressed for an explanation of his actions, the Executive Officer stated that in looking at the map he had decided that there was a better route down to the road than the one selected by the Company Commander and that he had decided to take that one. After pointing out to the Executive Officer the mistake of such an action, as shown by the loss of approximately one-half of the Company on the march and the resultant delay of almost three hours, it then being 2100 hours, the Company Commander informed him that since he had shown himself to be incapable of exercising proper judgement, he would in the future confine himself to the execution of orders given him. No further action was contemplated against the officer at this time, however he was to consider himself as being on probation until otherwise notified.

The column now crossed the road and headed further into the woods along a narrow dirt (or rather mud) road, which was to be the Regimental main supply route. As the column was passing the Regimental command post, a messenger from the Battalion Commander stopped it and said that the Company Commander was wanted inside. The Company was to be committed prior to the rest of the Battalion to occupy positions on the right flank of the 1st Battalion and protect that flank, which was exposed. It was to relieve a company of the 3d Battalion which was to be committed in the attack the morning of 18 November.

After a short conference, the Company Commander rejoined the column and led the Company on towards the assembly area. This was reached without further incident and the Company closed in its area at approximately 2300

hours. Plans were made to feed the Company in the morning and for an early reconnaissance of the positions to be occupied the following afternoon. (17)

The reason for describing the march of the Company to the assembly area in such detail lies in the lessons contained therein. Here were two incidents of poor judgement. The first one was the completely unjustified and whimsical decision of the Executive Officer in deciding, without notifying his Company Commander, to change the route of a night march on the basis of a map reconnaissance, with no better reason than the fact that he considered his route to be shorter and better. Had this happened under fire during a march to a line of departure, rather than an assembly area, serious consequences would undoubtedly have resulted from the delay and the loss of control. The second incident of poor judgement was contained in the lack of initiative shown by the Squad Leader of the Second Squad, 3d Platoon, when he failed to take active measures to reestablish contact with the rest of the Company. This decision could well have been taken without waiting for the Platoon Sergeant as it was the normal and proper thing to do under the circumstances. As was mentioned above and will be brought out later, serious consequences can result from such failures on the part of subordinate leaders.

On 17 November the 1st Battalion, which had been under heavy fire all night and had received several counterattacks, continued its attack. It was able to move forward slowly, under much the same conditions as the previous day, but was stopped at the edge of the woods south of HAMICH. (18)

It was necessary to change the Regimental plan. This was caused by several factors:

- a) The failure of the 47th Infantry to take GRESSENICH
- b) The failure of the 3d Armored Division to commence to move
- c) The 26th Infantry moving away from the 16th Infantry, thus creating a gap between the two regiments and leaving the right flank open

Enemy were taking advantage of a) and b) to infiltrate our flanks on the left and cause considerable trouble for the heavily engaged 1st Battalion. Therefore the 3d Battalion was given the mission of passing through the 1st Battalion and seizing HAMICH at 0800 hours on 18 November. Company "G" was detached from the 2d Battalion and ordered to relieve Company "L". This relief

(17) Eye witness, self. (18) A-1, p. 17.

was effected at about 1500 hours. Enemy shelling was heavy throughout the whole Regimental area. Company "G" casualties for this day were 1 enlisted man killed and 1 enlisted man wounded. (19)

THE SECURITY MISSION AT HILL 232

On 18 November the 3d Battalion attacked and by 1300 hours had seized HAMICH. GRESSNICH had fallen and the 3d Armored Division had moved into the open country on the left. The 2d Battalion, less Company "G", attacked from the edge of the woods southwest of HAMICH to seize HILL 232 and by 1505 hours had secured its objective. In making this attack a lightly wooded draw on the Battalion's left flank had been bypassed and it was decided that Company "G", in rejoining the rest of the Battalion, should move through this area and clean out any enemy remaining therein. At approximately 1200 hours the Company was relieved of its security mission on the right flank by Company "L" of the 18th Infantry and alerted for a move. At 1500 hours the Company Commander was ordered to report to the Battalion command post, which had been established in GRESSENICH that morning, for orders. Immediately on the issuance of the instructions, the Company was notified by telephone of the proposed mission and the Executive Officer instructed to move the Company by route "A" to the Company "M" command post in the woods about 200 yards south of the line of departure. The Company Commander would go on reconnaissance and meet him there at 1630 hours. The Company Commander then went on his reconnaissance and, on completion, returned to the rendezvous to await the arrival of the Company. (20)

The time for the Company's arrival passed and at 1700 hours there was still no sign of it. The Company Commander then set out to find the Company and at 1730 hours succeeded in locating it about 1000 yards back on the road. The Company was immediately moved up to its line of departure (the Company "A" elements in the forward edge of the woods) and after a very short briefing, it being by now too dark for the terrain to be pointed out to the subordinate leaders, the attack moved out. (The word attack is used here for want of a better word, it having been stated at Battalion headquarters that there were

(19) Eye witness, self; Statement, Colonel Gibb, Regimental Commander, April 1947; A-1, p. 18, 42. (20) Statement, Colonel Gibb, Regimental Commander, April 1947; Eye witness, self; A-1, p. 18.

no known enemy in the area and that the move was being executed as a security measure rather than an actual attack.) The formation selected for the move was 1st and 2d Platoons deployed on the line, 1st Platoon on the right. The lead Platoons were followed without interval by three columns. These columns consisted of the Company Command Group in the center, the 3d Platoon on the right, and the Weapons Platoon on the left. Intervals between columns to be approximately 20 yards. The formation was chosen so as to provide maximum control for the move in darkness and also as much dispersion as possible in view of the danger of artillery and mortar fire in the area. About 200 yards from the line of departure and in the middle of an open field, word was passed up to the Company Commander that the Support Platoon on the right had not followed the Company into the open and was still in the woods to the rear. The area was covered with shell holes which, due to the softness of the wet ground, were of quite sufficient size to accommodate from two to four men. The Company was ordered to halt and take cover in these holes while the Company Commander returned to the line of departure to find the missing Platoon. The Platoon, under a new and inexperienced leader, had gotten mixed up in the woods and become separated in the dark. It was soon found sitting amongst the ruins of a house, waiting hopefully for someone to come and pick it up. Just as the Company Commander rejoined the rest of the Company with the lost Platoon and was getting the move started again, an extremely heavy and devastating concentration began to fall on the area in which the Company was located. (Fortunately unknown to both officers and men at this time was the fact that this fire was coming from friendly troops on our left flank, namely task force Lovelady of the 3d Armored Division which thought it was assisting in repelling another counterattack on Company "A".) There was but one thing to do and that was to run like H..l. The two leading Platoons, parts of Company headquarters and of the Weapons Platoon responded nobly (following their commander's often repeated admonition that it is safer to go forward in an artillery concentration than to attempt to withdraw) and were soon out of the zone of fire. The remainder of the Company stayed in place and then attempted to withdraw to the rear and return within our lines. (21)

(21) A-1, p. 18; Eye witness, self.

The results, which follow, were a rather strong vindication of the theory outlined above:

	Killed in Action	Wounded in Action	Missing in Action	Sick
1st Platoon	0	1	0	2
2d Platoon	0	0	0	3
Company Headquarters	0	2	0	*
3d Platoon	1	9	23	7
Weapons Platoon	0	2	9	9

* Both Wounded in Action did not advance. All of the personnel missing in action and approximately 17 of the sick were among the group that elected to either stay under the concentration or attempt to withdraw through the heaviest part of it. Needless to say almost all of the sick were victims of shock or psycho-neurotic cases. (22)

That part of the Company under control of the Company Commander was halted in a ditch about 500 yards further on, reorganized, and continued on to fulfill its mission. It rejoined the remainder of the Battalion and, as it had no sector assigned it for the night, reaped virtue's reward by being allowed to sleep in a factory building occupied by the Light Tank Platoon, which had been in support of the Battalion attack earlier in the afternoon. Necessary patrols were sent out, as ordered, and security was provided by the tankers, who were happy to have some infantry occupy their area with them. (23)

At 2100 hours the enemy counterattacked the 3d Battalion in HAMICH with tanks and infantry and at 0530 the 2d Battalion on HILL 232 with infantry. Both counterattacks were repulsed, in the case of the 3d Battalion with some difficulty and not until the enemy had penetrated well into their positions in the village. While not properly a part of this narrative, there is a rather remarkable circumstance concerning the counterattack on the 2d Battalion which is of sufficient interest to warrant inclusion as demonstrating the effectiveness of well emplaced machine guns and riflemen in the defense.

The counterattack on the 2d Battalion hit the left flank of Company "F"'s position, which was held by a platoon from that Company, reinforced by a platoon of heavy machine guns. The Platoon Leader called his Company command post and informed the Company Commander that he was being counterattacked but

(22) A-1, p. 43. (23) Eye witness, self.

that he had taken no casualties to date and that it appeared that he would be able to repel the attack without assistance. The Company Commander, having just been awakened out of a sound sleep, replied rather shortly that since that was the case not to bother him further and call back only if assistance was needed. No further assistance was needed and the rest of the night passed without incident.

One can well imagine the surprise of all concerned to discover at daylight the next morning the whole slope of the hill littered with dead and wounded Germans. Survivors reported that the counterattack had been executed by the 1st Battalion, 104th Infantry, 47th Volksgrenadier Division, a newly formed unit which had, in the words of its own officers, the pick of the remainder of the youth of Germany, including "a quota of excellent men, even trained pilots from the Luftwaffe and a large group of trained Navy men. The majority of the officers and non-commissioned officers were drawn from the ranks of experienced Russia fighters. The Division had new equipment and the most modern weapons in large quantities." In the 1st Company, 104th Infantry, there were but 13 survivors, 12 enlisted men who were with the Company trains, and the Company Commander, who was captured. This officer was later reported to have stated: "The heavy machine guns were excellently sited and did a thorough job of destroying the attack."

It was reported that the count of the enemy dead had reached 396. While this figure may appear excessive and may well include both dead and wounded, the fact remains that during the next three days, while the Company "G" command post was within 600 yards of this same area, four 2½-ton trucks, in which enemy dead were stacked like cordwood, were counted leaving the area. These results were obtained with the loss of three men lightly wounded from Company "F". (24)

(24) Personal knowledge, self; A-2, p. 95.

THE ATTACK ON HILL 213

At 1400 hours on 19 November, the 2d and 3d Battalions resumed the attack to complete the clearing of the enemy's main line of resistance in this area. The 2d Battalion attacked in column of companies in order of Company "F", Company "E", and Company "G". Company "F" was to attack across the open ground to seize the woods directly to the north of HILL 232. Company "E" was to follow Company "F", turn to the right 50 yards within the woods, and clear them to the western edge. Company "G" was to follow Company "E" through the woods, then attack to the south and seize HILL 213, which was the last high ground from which the enemy could have observation on GRESSENICH and the main supply route. It was to leave one platoon to occupy HILL 213 and have the remainder of the Company move to occupy positions along the western edge of the woods, tie in with the left flank of Company "E" and protect the left flank of the Battalion against counterattack from the northwest. (25)

Preceded by an intensive preparation on HILL 213 and the edge of the woods, the attack jumped off on schedule. All objectives were gained without casualties by 1547 hours. Company "G" took 8 prisoners on HILL 213, which turned out to have been a well prepared observation post consisting of deeply dug-in log and dirt emplacements with accurate panoramic views of the terrain to the front painted on the inside walls. While the Company was halted here momentarily to reorganize before continuing on its mission, it was the recipient of an accurate and heavy shelling by enemy artillery, which caused 4 casualties. The Company continued on its mission, contacting Company "E", and digging in for the night. During this latter phase 6 more casualties were suffered by the 3d Platoon, including the Platoon Leader. This Platoon had the mission of guarding the crossroads at the southwest corner of the woods and protecting the Battalion's left flank, which was wide open. In these thick woods, holes afforded little or no protection from the numerous tree-bursts, unless covered by three inch or heavier logs with at least a foot of earth over them.

At about 1700 hours the Platoon on HILL 213 was relieved by a company from

(25) Eye witness, self; A-1, p. 19.

the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry. The platoon thus released was placed on the line in a gap which existed in the center of the Company. In the meantime the command posts of Companies "E" and "G" were set up in the cellar of the house about 200 yards east of HILL 213. The enemy on the hill had apparently used this cellar for a personnel shelter as the first floor was reinforced with layers of 6-inch logs crisscrossed on top of each other. It was a very convenient location and the Company command post stayed there until the Company moved to the vicinity of HEISTERN on 23 November. (26)

Total casualties for Company "G" for 19 November were one officer and nine enlisted men wounded in action. (27)

THE BOVENBERGER WALD

Before daylight on the morning of 20 November, the Company Commanders were awakened and told that a Lt. Colonel wanted to see them. Somewhat taken aback at this, Lt. Colonels not normally being in the habit of visiting company command posts at that hour and in that area, they aroused themselves and went up to meet him. The officer was Lt. Colonel Clayman, commanding the 3d Battalion, 47th Infantry, which was to attack in conjunction with the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, to the north at 0800 hours that morning to take that portion of the BOVENBERGER WALD extending to the road running approximately along the 46 north-south. He requested to be permitted to move in and establish his command post in the cellar with the rest of us. As Captain Karas of Company "E" had decided to move his command post forward to follow the attack of his Company, room was available and this request was (obviously) granted. As the plan of attack placed Company "G" in reserve, with no greater mission than to move two platoons to the east edge of the BOVENBERGER WALD, occupy the positions formerly occupied by Company "F", and protect the right flank of the Battalion, there was no need to displace the Company "G" command post, particularly in view of the fact that the 3d Platoon was to be left in position to protect the crossroads in the southeast corner of the woods. This arrangement resulted in some crowding but was workable.

(26) Eye witness, self. (27) A-1, p. 43.

This day the Company received word that it would be requested to furnish two officers as replacements for the 1st Battalion, which had suffered heavy casualties in the woods south of HAMICH in the initial stages of the attack and which was in the process of being reorganized in the old assembly area vicinity (98.5-40.8). As Company "G" at this time had six officers, this would cut the officer strength to four, which was the number at which the Regimental Commander wanted to equalize the rifle companies. After the loss of one officer on the previous day, the Company Commander had attempted to get permission from Battalion to have the figure reduced to one, but had received an unequivocal NO! When one of the officers being considered for transfer became a casualty on the afternoon of 20 November, feelers were put out to Battalion to see if the Battalion Commander could be induced to request Regiment to cut their requirements by one. The same answer was given as on the previous day. Instructions were therefore given to the 1st Sergeant not to notify Battalion that Lt. Chandler had been wounded and to submit his name for transfer as originally planned. No embarrassing questions were asked by Battalion as to the nonarrival of this officer until the following morning, at which time the S-1 was notified that the officer had been a casualty and that no other officer was available at this time to replace him. The Company Commander decided that this was an excellent time for him to inspect his platoons. This took up the remainder of the morning and a good part of the afternoon. During this time he was of course theoretically out of communication with his command post, although he had arranged to be in continuous contact with it. As no calls other than administrative ones came in for him, he decided to let those wait until such time as he should get back to the command post. By the time this happened the storm had died down. The above was brought up to show that a company commander must occasionally resort to expedients which in normal situations might be characterized as unethical in order to preserve the efficiency and integrity of his command. (28)

This was one of the quieter days during this action but, although no attack

(28) Eye witness, self.

was made, casualties were again taken due to the harrassing fire being placed by the enemy on the crossroads and the east edge of the woods. The casualties were one officer and seven enlisted men wounded in action.. (29)

This day, 20 November, saw the end of the fighting for the HAMICH RIDGE, in the engagement commonly called the "BATTLE OF HAMICH". The fighting in this area had been characterized by some of the strongest and fanatical resistance the Division had encountered on the continent of EUROPE. Another distinguishing factor was the weight of artillery fire encountered, which was the heaviest experienced todate. Had our own artillery not broken up the enemy communications and had his experience equalled his fighting spirit, the cost of seizing this ground might well have been considered exhorbitant. As it was, the casualties suffered in the engagement were appallingly high. The 16th Infantry had lost 34 officers and 883 enlisted men. Of that figure 6 officers and 70 enlisted men had been killed in action. Company "G", which had been comparatively lightly engaged during this period, had suffered the following casualties:

Killed in Action	0 Officers - 3 Enlisted Men
Missing in Action	0 Officers - 38 Enlisted Men
Wounded in Action	2 Officers - 34 Enlisted Men
Sick	0 Officers - 19 Enlisted Men
Total	2 Officers - 94 Enlisted Men

Of the figure of 38 enlisted men missing in action, 32 had returned within two days of their being lost. The enemy had lost even more heavily, and the 47th Volksgrenadier Division was finished as an effective fighting unit. (30)

THE ATTACK ON HEISTERN AND LANGERWEHE

21 November was the quietest day in this area todate. The 2d Battalion attacked to the north to secure limited objectives, which consisted of more favorable terrain from 200 to 300 yards to their front. As the formation was the same as on the preceeding day, Company "G" had only to make minor adjustments on its left flank in order to tie in with the right flank elements of Company "F". This was accomplished by moving the 3d Platoon over to take up positions on the left and extending the present line of the other two platoons. This Platoon was no longer needed at the crossroads due to advances made by the

(29) A-1, p. 44. (30) A-2, p. 90-95; A-1, p. 42-44.

1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, on the Division's left flank. The mission was accomplished without incident, although further casualties were suffered, caused by the enemy's accurate artillery fire. The count of casualties for the day was:

Killed in Action	1	
Wounded in Action	9	
Total	10	(31)

22 November was again very quiet. No changes in dispositions of any kind were ordered and plans were laid for a different and infinitely more pleasant operation. The following day was Thanksgiving Day. As no move was contemplated for the Battalion on that day, plans were laid for a regular "Thanksgiving Dinner", with all of the fixings, to be served the troops at the evening meal. All of the necessary food had been received and plans were laid to make the most of G-4's foresight. The Mess Sergeant had also exercised a great deal of foresight and at this time, in one way or another, accumulated enough marmite-type hot food containers (both allied and enemy) to be able to serve a hot dinner of that type to each platoon in its platoon area. Plans were completed and the whole Company was licking its chops in anticipation of a very welcome change from the dullness of the daily menu, when at 1900 hours word was received from Battalion that the Company was alerted to make an attack at 0700 hours the following morning to seize the town of HUECHELN about 1000 yards to the north beyond the tip of the BOVENBERGER WALD. G-2 had stated that the enemy was pulling out of that sector and the Division Commander wanted this terrain seized as soon as possible. Attachments of two light tanks, three medium tanks, and two tank destroyers, all of the remaining armored strength left the Battalion at that time, were to be made to the Company effective at 2000 hours this evening. Deep gloom gripped the Company headquarters at this news, not so much at the prospect of the attack, although needless to say that did not cause delirious happiness to anyone, but at the thought of the probability of not being able to enjoy the planned dinner. The Company Commander immediately went into a huddle with the Mess Sergeant, who was at the command post, having come up with the evening chow to get last minute coordination for

(31) Eye witness, self; A-1, p. 21, 44.

tomorrow's feast, and with some misgiving it was decided to serve the dinner for breakfast instead of for the evening meal. This would involve a great deal of work for the kitchen in the way of drawing extra rations for the 30 to 40 men of the armored attachments, cancelling plans for breakfast, and working all night long to get things ready for the following morning. Fortunately, due to the fact that the kitchen crew was about the only part of the Company that was composed in the majority of men who had been with the Company since it left the States, and who formed a very close-knit and well-working team, the job was not too much to expect. The first cook was informed by telephone relay through S-4 of the change in plans and told to begin preparations at once and the Mess Sergeant was dispatched back to the kitchen immediately. The breakfast was to be at the command post at 0530 hours the following morning and when one considers that it was a good hour's trip over treacherous mud roads from the kitchen area to the Company the magnitude of the task given the kitchen crews can be appreciated. During the afternoon the Company Commander was called by the Battalion Commander and informed that 34 replacements had been assigned to the Company. These men had arrived at the train bivouac the previous evening. The question was asked whether the Company Commander desired to have these men join the Company now or whether to hold them at the train bivouac until such time as the Company was taken out of the line to reorganize. Due to previous unfortunate experiences caused by attempting to absorb green replacements into units while in contact with the enemy, it was decided to follow the latter course. During the conversation the Company Commander was informed that the Battalion Commander had been notified that between 50 and 60 more replacements were to be assigned to the Company in a day or so. The same decision was reached in regard to these men. (32)

On this day no casualties were suffered, with the exception of one man sick. This was due to the appreciable lessening of artillery fire and further improving of the overhead cover of the individual holes of the men. (33)

(32) Eye witness, self. (33) A-1, p. 45.

THE MOVE TO THE ATTACK ON THE HUECHELN WOODS

Early in the morning of 23 November a call was received from Battalion to the effect that the chow was on the way. Mess Sergeant Schuler and his assistants had done it again. Promptly at 0530 the chow jeeps rolled in. The Company had been assembled in platoon assembly areas within 500 yards of the command post and carrying parties from the platoons were on hand to insure the rapid delivery of the food. Needless to say, the usual early morning grumbling of the men was reduced to a minimum this day. At 0630 everyone had had his fill of turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, etc. and last minute preparations for the coming operation were made.

At this time it might be well to review the orders for this attack. In reality it might better be termed a reconnaissance in force, as the orders were to send first the two light tanks, with one platoon of infantry riding on them, into the town via Route "B". This force was commanded by the Weapons Platoon Leader, who had volunteered for the assignment as the 3d Platoon had no officer in command. If the town proved to be unoccupied and this force succeeded in getting in, it was to cover the advance of the rest of the Company into the town. The remainder of the Company was disposed as follows: Company Command Group, 1st Platoon, and Weapons Platoon on the three medium tanks and the two tank destroyers. They were to follow the 3d Platoon by 15 minutes. The 2d Platoon was to be notified by radio when the Company was established in the town and follow on foot with a wire party. The attack jumped off as planned. The 3d Platoon got within 100 yards of the railroad when it came under a heavy and accurate concentration of medium artillery. The lead tank advanced to the railroad and as soon as it reached the top of the embankment it was greeted by mortar and small arms fire from the outskirts of the town. The Company Commander, from his position on the lead tank of the main body, was able to observe this and attempted to cover the withdrawal of the lead light tank with fire from the medium tank. The Battalion Commander was immediately notified of the situation and agreed that the mission, as far as finding out the status of the enemy in the town, was accomplished and that G-2 had been slightly mistaken in his

estimate. He ordered the immediate withdrawal of the Company, as it appeared that it would take more strength than was available to force the enemy position and conservation of both men and tanks was a prime necessity at this time. The firing by the lead medium tank had, in the meantime, caused a rapid shift of the artillery fire from the light tanks to the medium tank group. The infantry immediately dismounted and took cover in the woods. This shifting of fires enabled the Weapons Platoon Leader to extricate himself and his force and return to the edge of the woods. The two light tanks returned up the road at all speed and the infantry made their way back through the woods. After a slight delay caused by difficulties in turning the medium tanks and tank destroyers around in the narrow woods trail, the whole force withdrew and reoccupied its original assembly area. After having been subjected to considerable casualties during the preceding quiet days, the Gods of fortune decided to smile on the Company and, with the exception of one enlisted man missing in action, no casualties were inflicted on the Company during this short but exciting little action.

Back in the assembly area instructions were received for the Company not to reoccupy its old positions on the right flank but to remain in the present assembly area until ready to move out late that afternoon. The Company Commander was to be prepared to report to Battalion command post, which had moved to HEISTERN, to receive the order for an attack to be made the following morning at daybreak. While there he was to conduct a reconnaissance of the terrain and of the Company assembly area. This call was received at 1500 hours and the Company Commander left the Executive Officer in charge, with instructions to bring the Company up via Route "C" on order.

On arrival at the Battalion command post the Company Commander was oriented and informed that Companies "E" and "G" abreast, Company "E" on the right, were to attack and seize the HUECHELN WOODS. One platoon of medium tanks was attached for this operation. The road running through the woods and generally bisecting them along their long axis was to be the limit of the Company zones. The assembly area selected for the two Companies was a system of abandoned

enemy trenches to the east of and parallel to the road running north from HEISTERN. The Company "E" Commander, Captain Karas, was also at this conference and the Commanders decided to make a joint reconnaissance. Before leaving on reconnaissance the Company "G" Commander called his Executive Officer and ordered him to move the Company out at 1700 hours, via Route "C". The Company Commander was to meet the Company at HEISTERN and guide it to the assembly area. On looking over the assembly area, both agreed that the trenches would accommodate not more than one Company and that due to the almost continuous artillery fire falling in the area, it would be suicidal to attempt to assemble there without the cover of the trenches. There was nothing left to be done beyond ascertaining a tentative route from the assembly area to the edge of the woods. The reason for this was that the woods were occupied by the enemy and no accurate information on the enemy dispositions in the south edge was available. To have attempted to reconnoiter up to and into the woods would have been, to say the least, foolhardy if not worse. The reconnaissance party returned to the Battalion command post and informed the Battalion Commander of the results obtained. It was there decided that Company "E", as the lead company, would assemble in the area reconnoitered and that the Company "G" Commander would select another area to assemble in.

As the time was now 1800 hours and the Company was due to arrive in HEISTERN between 1800 and 1830 hours, there was no time to be lost in making a reconnaissance for an alternate area. The Battalion Commander gave the Company Commander "carte blanche" in the selection of his area, the only restrictions being that it could not be in HEISTERN, which was overcrowded with troops at the time and the Company must be in position to make a coordinated attack with Company "E" at 0730 the following morning. This was all the Company Commander needed. On his way to HEISTERN he had noticed a deserted monastery or school at WENAU. To jump in his jeep and rush down there was the work of but a few minutes. The Company column was found about 100 yards past WENAU, immediately halted, and told to fall out on the side of the road to await the return of the Company Commander. A quick reconnaissance of the buildings showed them to be

occupied by several units, including the Regimental Headquarters of the 26th Infantry. All cellars and ground floors were occupied. The reason that the second and third stories were not also taken was the danger from the frequent harrassing fires placed on the area by the enemy, who were well aware of the desirability of cover in the terrible weather prevailing at this time. While the Company Commander was attempting to find a safe place for the men to stay, it commenced to rain. That decided the question for him. Artillery or no artillery, the Company needed shelter for the night if it was going to be worth a tinker's dam in the attack the next morning. The men had not slept under cover since the night of 19 November and needed a chance to get on some dry clothes and a good night's sleep (God and the enemy artillery willing). He sent his runner out to get the men back on the road and into the grounds. The usual grumbling at having to countermarch changed to grins of happy anticipation when the Company was halted in the monastery grounds. Two school rooms had been found in the only undamaged wing of the building and details were sent up to clean them out immediately. As it was completely dark by now and no lights could be used, this consisted of clearing out the debris and giving the floor a lick and a promise with some brooms borrowed from earlier arrivals.

In the meantime, the Executive Officer had been sent to the Battalion Command Post in HEISTERN, about 500 yards to the front, with instructions to get through to the train bivouac and tell the Mess Sergeant our new location and to start preparing a hot meal immediately and get it up to the Company as soon as possible. (Due to the location of the previously selected assembly area, it had been deemed too dangerous to feed a hot meal there and the men had been issued "K" rations for their evening meal.) The kitchen crew was, as usual, equal to this challenge and the Mess Sergeant, rather than complain about this unexpected task, sounded happy that it had been made possible for the kitchen to do its part to improve the hard lot of the men. The Executive Officer was also to tell the Supply Sergeant to round up all the clean socks he could lay his hands upon and send them up with the individual rolls, as the men had been getting along with their combat rolls, consisting of two

blankets and a shelter-half, ever since the attack started on 17 November.

He was then to inform the Communications Officer of the Company's location and request a wire party to lay a wire to the Company assembly area, but to avoid all other members of the staff if possible. As it was SOP for the Communications Officer to lay wire to all company assembly areas if possible, that officer had the wire laid without bothering to make any further checks. The first thing the Battalion command post knew of the location of the Company assembly area was when the Company Commander called at about 2000 hours and reported the Company bedded down for the night. As he had suspected, his selection of an assembly area did not meet with the Battalion Commander's complete approval, but since he had presented the Battalion Commander with a "fait accompli" he was told, after some slight grumbling, to stay where he was but under no circumstances to be late for the attack in the morning.

At 2200 hours the long-awaited food and individual rolls arrived. The men had utilized the time in between to make their beds and rest. After the Company had been fed, the men settled for their first good night's sleep in four days. The Mess Sergeant, without giving the Company Commander a chance to give him orders for breakfast, asked what time the Company Commander wanted the chow to arrive, stating that he had left instructions for its preparation when he started out to bring up the evening meal. It was decided that if the breakfast were to arrive between 0530 and 0600 hours, that would leave sufficient time for the Company to eat, move out, and be in position to jump off with Company "E" at 0730 hours. (34)

It was now 2300 hours, the end of a long and, for some men, an unexpectedly happy Thanksgiving Day. The night passed without further incident. This was the second day that had passed with the Company having lost but one man (this man was not an actual casualty but was carried Missing in Action). (35)

(34) Eye witness, self. (35) A-1, p. 45.

THE ATTACK THROUGH THE HUECHELN WOODS

On the morning of 24 November the Company arrived at the Company "E" assembly area as Company "E" was moving out. The Company Commander told the leading platoon to follow Company "E" and went up to join the Company "E" Commander at the head of his column. About half way up the Company "E" column, he noticed the Company "E" elements had ceased their forward movement as the Company began to enter the woods. He thereupon sent his runner back to the head of the Company "G" column, with instructions to the leading platoon leader to move the Company column up abreast of Company "E". This was a fortunate move as the rear elements of the Company had barely cleared the Company "E" assembly area by 100 yards when the enemy laid an artillery concentration into the area. Luckily, the enemy artillery had the range correct and no short rounds fell. As a result, no casualties were sustained by the Company.

The Company Commander continued on to the head of the Company "E" column, where he joined the Company "E" Commander. It was decided to deploy the companies along a small stream and jump off as soon as the deployment was effected. The tanks were to follow as soon as the road was cleared and, after catching up with the attack, be on call for any missions which might come up. The formations adopted for each company were identical. In both cases the attack echelon consisted of two platoons abreast, with the support platoon in each case on the exterior flank, and the command groups, followed by the weapons platoons, behind the interior platoons. This formation enabled the command groups to advance on either side of the road, delimiting their respective zones, thus keeping within visual and voice range of each other. Company "G" had its 3d and 2d Platoons in the attack echelon, 3d Platoon on the right.

Shortly after the attack jumped off and about 200 yards inside the woods, Company "G" contacted the enemy on its left flank. The report that reached the Company Commander was to the effect that the enemy main line of resistance appeared to run along the west edge of the woods, generally perpendicular to our direction of advance, with a series of short positions running into the woods and at right angles to the main line of resistance. The enemy had obviously expected the attack to come from the BOVENBERGER WALD across the

valley but, as a safety measure, had also prepared these secondary positions to protect himself against an attack such as was being launched at him now. He appeared to have grasped the situation shortly after contact was made and quickly moved his forces into his secondary positions. While the leading platoons were tackling the first of these positions, the support Platoon was given the mission of checking that portion of the original main line of resistance which lay behind the Company's present position, to make sure that no small groups of enemy had been bypassed by the leading platoons in the initial phase of the attack. This was found to be a necessary precaution as about 15 enemy were flushed out of these positions and taken prisoner. Had these been left in our rear, they could have raised havoc with our communications later on.

The Company continued on its slow advance throughout the day, successively cleaning out five of these positions as they came to them. Due to the thick growth of young timber in this part of the woods, it was usually impossible to see these positions until the lead elements were fired on, often at ranges of 20 yards or less. Firing on both sides was usually by sound, as visibility was restricted to less than 20 yards at most times. The Company's use of 60-mm mortars was considerably limited by the necessity of finding clearings in which to put them in position. Once in, communication was the great difficulty as the 536 radios were very unreliable and wire was next to impossible to maintain due to mortar and artillery fire. The enemy defended his positions with from 5 to 20 men, depending on the number who had been manning the main line of resistance on the edge of the woods. His defense was stubborn and every position taken had its quota of dead and wounded in it. His casualties were considerably heavier than ours, due to the poor visibility which forced him to fire at the sound of our men to his front, who then took cover and engaged him by fire, thereby fixing him in place and allowing the flanking groups to work up close, pick him up and knock him out.

When the initial objective was reached at 1500 hours, permission was requested from, and granted by, Battalion to halt and prepare the objective for defense for the night. In the meantime Company "E", on the right, had been able to advance with less difficulty, due to the enemy dispositions,

and was halted on a line forward of the road and about 200 yards to our front.

The Company Commanders got together and decided to set up a joint command post in that end of the deep gully just east of the axial road and within about 20 yards of the junction of the flanks of the two companies. The Support Platoons of both Companies were placed on the open flanks to provide security. Weapons Platoons were also placed in similar positions, with Mortar Sections left in their last areas and Light Machine Guns placed on the line of riflemen.

Shortly after the men were properly dug in, the enemy followed his usual custom of shelling our positions with medium and heavy artillery as soon as he found that movement had stopped. In this case Company "E", having elements further to the front, got the brunt of it and, in spite of being in much less action during the attack, wound up the day with about double the casualties that Company "G" suffered.

The attached tanks had halted about 200 yards to the rear, having been held up most of the day in removing obstacles from the axial road, which in reality was little better than a dirt trail and was obstructed with felled logs for considerable stretches.

In the command post, the wire from Battalion had come in and steps were taken to get ammunition and food up to the two companies.

Due to the condition of the road, which had not been improved by the passage of the tanks, it was necessary to get the ammunition and supper brought up by weasel, the Battalion having recently been issued three of these very useful vehicles. The Mess Sergeants were told to halt the weasel when they got to the tanks and that a roadguard would be awaiting them at this point. In the meantime, while the Company Commanders were inspecting their dispositions for the night, the command groups were collaborating in constructing the joint command post. A tree in the bottom of the approximately 30-foot deep gully had been hit by artillery fire about 5 feet above the ground and knocked over at right angles to it. This was used as the support for a thick layer of smaller trees, which leaned against it from either side. The original plan had been to cover the whole with a thick layer of earth, however,

this was changed when the Company Commanders returned to find that the men were just beginning to throw on the earth and had, up to that time, been able to do no work on their individual holes. This lean-to provided very satisfactory protection from the weather but no cover, other than morale, from the artillery fire. The morale protection, however, was sufficient to allow the Company Commanders, with their Executive Officers, to spend a fairly comfortable but rather precarious night. Actually, most of the moral support was provided by Lt. Phillipini, the recently assigned Assistant Battalion Surgeon, who came up with the litter-bearers and donated a bottle of gin he had saved from his last liquor ration to the two Company Commanders. This was a God-send and did immeasurable good in helping them to relax and forget for the moment the bleak prospect that faced them on the morrow.

The next thing to do, having ascertained that as much as possible had been done to provide for security and make the men comfortable pending the arrival of food and extra blankets, was to relax and wait. All arrangements for feeding had been satisfactorily completed, with carrying parties waiting in the vicinity of the command post for the word to move to the mess area and pick up the food. At least that was the opinion of the Company Commanders. That would have been the case had the guard been alert. However, he was not and by the time he had jumped up and tried to flag down the weasel it was well past him. The next thing the Company Commanders knew it had stopped at the command post and the cooks had the food unloaded and were set up to serve before they could be stopped (no one there daring to talk at more than a murmur). If the Company was to get a hot meal it had to be served there or not at all. With the front line about 20 yards away and no definite knowledge of the enemy's exact location, it was a risky business at the best. However, our patrols had been out for about 30 minutes and had apparently made no contact as yet, so it was decided that the gain from feeding a hot meal outweighed the risk. It was a case of another lucky gamble that succeeded.

The system used in the Company at this time was for one man to carry two messkits to the mess location, use one to eat from, wash it, and then carry back both messkits filled for two men who had stayed on the line. Coffee was

brought up in five-gallon cans, two for each platoon, and carried back to the platoon area. Empty cans from the supper meal were brought back at breakfast time and the empties from breakfast were dumped at the Company command post to be picked up later on in the day. This normally resulted in the men staying on the line being assured of at least a warm meal. The coffee cans were wrapped in blankets to preserve heat and prevent noise and proved a very satisfactory means of distributing sufficient coffee to the men for each man to get approximately two canteen cups full. In the type of weather prevailing in this area during the month of November, this was a very important factor in preserving what little morale the men were able to hang on to.

As was mentioned before, there was considerable risk involved in feeding the Company in such an exposed location and 30 anxious minutes were spent, literally "sweating out" the departure of the weasel.

The night passed quietly, with only an occasional scattered shelling to remind the companies that they were occupying a rather precarious position, with friendly units on either flank echeloned well to the rear, the nearest being the 3d Battalion elements about 800 yards to the right rear. (36)

The casualties for the day were lighter than had been expected, although the count of missing in action was mounting to the point where it was becoming a cause for grave concern. This was due to a great extent to the difficulty of maintaining control in the type of terrain the companies were operating in, which made it next to impossible for the Squad Leaders to exercise control over more than two or three men at a time, at the most. The casualty count follows:

Company "G"	Killed in Action	0 Officers - 1 Enlisted Man
	Missing in Action	0 Officers - 12 Enlisted Men
	Wounded in Action	0 Officers - 3 Enlisted Men
	Sick	0 Officers - 0 Enlisted Men
	Total	0 Officers - 16 Enlisted Men
Company "E"	Killed in Action	0 Officers - 3 Enlisted Men
	Missing in Action	0 Officers - 13 Enlisted Men
	Wounded in Action	1 Officer - 8 Enlisted Men
	Sick	0 Officers - 1 Enlisted Man
	Total	1 Officer - 24 Enlisted Men

The officer listed as wounded in action in Company "E" was a replacement who

(36) Eye witness, self; A-1, p. 24.

joined at 1200 hours this date and at 1230 hours had been severely wounded. He might well have been listed as killed in action as he died before 1330 hours, while being evacuated to the Battalion aid station. Prisoners taken by Company "G" on this date numbered about 45, which was more than three times as many as had been taken by the Company in the whole action prior to this time.

(37)

On 25 November, at about 0200 hours, the Company "G" Commander was awakened by the duty non-commissioned officer and told that there was a messenger from Battalion to see him. Somewhat disgruntled, the Company Commander saw the man. "The Battalion Commander wants to see you at once. I have a weasel up on the road to take you back." Much grumbling and a seemingly endless ride ensued, with two delirious casualties bouncing around in the bottom of the vehicle.

On arrival at the command post, a dry, warm, heavenly cellar, the compliments and back-slapping which usually preceeded unpleasant news was gone through. As a couple of drinks were also forthcoming, the attendant noise was borne in fairly good humor.

Then the news came. Company "G" will assist Company "F" in clearing the woods west of HILL 203. The attack will jump off at 1600 hours, after Companies "E" and "G" have finished their joint mission, which should be done by 1000 hours. The Company Commander warned that the physical condition and morale of the men was getting dangerously low. He reminded the Battalion Commander that he had made a definite promise that, after the HUECHELN WOODS were cleared to the railroad tracks, Companies "E" and "G" would get a rest. After arguing for almost an hour, everything was settled. At the end the Battalion Commander assured the Company Commander that this would be the final attack. "We know what it's like up there!" "Do you?" said the Company Commander.

The Battalion Commander now suggested that, as it was after 0330 hours, the Company Commander spend the rest of the night at the command post. The weasel could take him back to the Company when it took the breakfast to the troops at 0630. After calling his command post and being assured that all was quiet there,

(37) Personal knowledge, self; A-1, p. 24, 46.

the Company Commander agreed to stay. He rejoined his company at 0700 hours.

The plan for this morning's attack was as follows:

1) The main attack was to be an assault along the axial road. Company "E" on the right, 1st Platoon, Company "G" on the left. Tanks in column along the road in the center.

2) The 2d and 3d Platoons, under Lt. Dey, the Company Executive Officer, were to mop up along the edge of the woods on the left, knock out the reported strong point in the northwest corner of the woods, and then proceed east along the railroad tracks to the objective of the main attack, assisting the main attack by flanking fire if necessary.

3) After both objectives were taken, the woods were to be checked for any enemy bypassed during the attack.

4) As soon as the attack was successfully completed, Company "G" was to assemble in the vicinity of the old command post and rest, pending instructions to move to join Company "F" for the afternoon's mission.

The attack to the railroad tracks was to be resumed at 0830 hours. At 0815 hours a very heavy concentration began falling immediately to the front, in that portion of the woods through which the attack would have to pass in order to get on the objective. This information was called back to Battalion and permission was requested and granted to delay the attack until such time as this fire should lift, particularly as from the sound of the shells coming over the fire appeared to be friendly. Shortly thereafter, the artillery fire began to move in on the Company "E" positions on the right, but stopped moving before actually falling on these positions. It appeared as though it were a preparation by the enemy prior to an attack on our position.

At this time a call came in from Battalion stating that the fire was a part of the preparation for an attack by the 3d Armored Division across our front. As this attack was not scheduled to jump off until our forces had cleared the woods to our front, this preparation caused some mild surprise. Battalion was immediately requested to get the "G.....n" fire moved away from Company "E" as several rounds had fallen in their position, fortunately without causing any casualties.

Exhaustion caused by the wet, cold weather, plus the nerveracking woods attacks, had brought about a serious lowering of morale. The added suspense of being under our own fire, even though scattered, was causing a further stretching of the tension. This had progressed to the point where one Company "E" officer had come back to the command post and demanded that his platoon be moved back, stating that if the Company "E" Commander did not accede to his demand he would bring his platoon back anyway. This officer was placed under arrest at the command post and forbidden to rejoin his platoon. After the Company "G" Commander, on request of the Company "E" Commander, had talked to the officer and as a disinterested (?) third party had pointed out to the Platoon Leader the consequences of his action, he apologized to his Company Commander and was allowed to rejoin his platoon and participate in the attack when it finally got started.

During this time, periodic calls were coming in from Battalion stating that all attempts were being made to stop the fire on the woods to our front and not to attack until we were definitely assured by Battalion that liaison had been established with the unit that was doing the firing. The firing started to let up at about 0915 and by 0945 had ceased completely. Within a very few minutes a call came in to the command post to the effect that the artillery battalion doing the firing had been contacted and that they had guaranteed not to resume firing without first receiving a clearance from Battalion.

During this period two of the supporting tanks had been brought up, after great difficulties due to the blocking of the road, which was very narrow at this point, by a knocked out enemy self-propelled gun. The tanks had first to go back down the road for about 300 yards and then smash their way through a growth of small trees to a position approximately on line with the command post, then head back for the road.

Just before the tanks got into position, at about 1000 hours, considerable activity was observed among the enemy to the front. The enemy intentions were not too clear, however, all small arms fire the two units were capable of, including the command groups, which had excellent observation down the road,

was immediately placed on them and succeeded in stopping this activity.

In the meantime, the 2d Platoon of Company "G", which had been ordered to move out on its assigned mission on the left flank, reported fast progress with little opposition. The Platoon reported itself within 100 yards of the enemy strong point in the northwest corner of the woods and had to date taken five prisoners. Five minutes later another report was received: "Enemy soldiers coming out of strong point. Krukas (2d Platoon Leader) is going in to take them." This was followed almost immediately by another message: "Strong point taken and eleven prisoners, including one warrant officer - are moving out to complete clearing north edge of woods."

While these encouraging reports were coming in, things began to pop on the right. The 1st Platoon under Lt. Wilmot, who had requested to be allowed to lead the attack as acting platoon leader, had come up on line with the Company "E" elements. The tanks were lined up on the road and at the agreed signal (a round fired from the 75-mm gun of the lead tank) the attack jumped off. The enemy situation now clarified rapidly. After an advance of about 50 yards, with all weapons firing at rapid rate, the tanks firing both machine guns and cannon, the enemy gave up. It was all over in a matter of minutes and upon the arrival of Lt. Krukas with his group and 19 more prisoners, it was reported to Battalion that the objective had been seized.

All that remained was to send patrols through that portion of the woods bypassed by the two Company "G" groups to search out any hidden enemy and organize for the temporary defense of the area taken until we should be pinched out by the 47th Infantry passing across our front in support of the 3d Armored Division attack. Shortly thereafter, friendly infantry was observed advancing parallel to our front from the outskirts of HUECHELN and Company "G" was pulled back to get ready for its next mission.

Orders to move out at 1400 hours were received from Battalion at 1345 hours and at 1400 hours the Company was on the road. As the advance elements were moving past the command post and just as the company command group started to join the column, the Company Commander was called back to answer a call from Battalion. The S-3 was on the line and after making some very

complimentary remarks, calculated to put the Company Commander at ease but which achieved the opposite purpose, the bad news came. "After you have completed the mission assigned you by the Battalion Commander this morning, you will assemble your Company and launch an attack through Company "F" to the group of farm buildings at GUT MARBERICH. There are practically no enemy there and we want to occupy it." This was the pay-off. After arguing for over an hour that morning against the futility of expecting the Company to execute the attack we were then moving out on, we were to do not only that but make another attack immediately following that one. The Company Commander told the S-3 to put the Battalion Commander on the phone: "Colonel, it is no use. If only some of you people would come up to see these troops you would realize how futile your orders are. The men are passing by me now and they look worse than the dead Heinies that have been lying beside the road for two days. I've never refused an order yet and don't intend to start now, but if you want this objective taken you had better be prepared for a fiasco." The Battalion Commander: "Now listen John, don't let it get you. I know we promised you relief but we've got to do just this one more." Company Commander: "All right, we'll do it. In fact we'll make any G.....n attack you tell us to, but for C..... sake tell 'em to lay off, will you." Battalion Commander: "Thanks, John. Let me speak to Karas." The Company Commander handed the phone to Company "E" Commander. "They want to speak to you, 'Nose'." The Company "E" Commander took the phone and snarled: "I don't want to speak to you ***** people" and threw the phone across the command post. 1st Sergeant (later 2d Lieutenant) Fitzsimmons of Company "E", one of the few oldtimers left, came up to the Company "G" Commander and said: "Captain, I've never heard truer words more feelingly spoken. Thank you." Fortunately, the Company "G" command group had been left waiting along the road and did not know of the conversation reported above. The Company Commander decided that it would do no good to mention the bad news now, on the way to an attack, and accompanied by Lt. Shelby, the Company "H" Mortar Platoon Leader, who was to go with the Company on this next mission as a forward observer, rejoined his command group and moved out.

The Company followed Route "D" and was deployed and ready to jump off at 1600 hours, the time ordered for the attack.

Just as the Company Commander raised up the 536 radio to order the attack, an unusually heavy artillery concentration came in just short of the line of departure. Everyone hit the ground. Lt. Shelby later stated that he thought he would have to take over at that moment. "I thought that one got you for sure, particularly when you didn't move for about half a minute." A shell had exploded in the tree directly over the Company Commander's head. In less than five minutes the fire stopped. The order to attack was given and on the double. A 200-yard obstacle race through the woods resulted. The Company Commander remembers giving one soldier, who was lagging a little, a whack on the posterior. A blank look. "You don't want to be caught in these woods when the next load comes in, do you?" Bewilderment, a weak grin of comprehension, and off he went as though the devil himself were on his tail. The Company Commander, on reaching the edge of the woods, found men digging like fury. He took a walk to the left flank, insured himself that the Company was tied in with Company "F" on its left, then returned back down the line to the other end. There was no trouble in getting the men to dig as they knew their lives depended on it. All three platoons were on line.

In the meantime the 1st Sergeant had selected the command post location. It consisted of a shallow shell hole about six feet across and three feet deep. It was located in a fire-break running through the woods and all the tree around it had been knocked down. It was deepened to about five feet and roofed over with branches. Again it was decided not to throw dirt on top as all the branches were too thin to support the dirt and the men were too tired. The Battalion wire at Company "F" command post was extended down the line to Company "G" command post. The Company reported itself in and the Company Commander started to think about the next mission. The Battalion Commander and S-3 had not been available when the initial call was made and no one else could give any more information than had been received previously. There was nothing to do but wait. It was now 1630 hours. Another half hour and it would begin to get dark.

Sporadic shelling had produced three casualties in the right platoon. This followed the recently established pattern: attacks with fewer than normal casualties, followed by semi-static situations in which the enemy artillery caused higher casualties than was normal. This can be ascribed to the exhausted state of the enemy infantry which, if anything, was in a much worse state of morale than ours, due mainly to their slow realization of the fassity of their propaganda and the inevitability of eventual defeat. Another factor was the approximate equality in number of the enemy artillery to our own during the latter part of period, which constituted a distinct departure from the normal.

As it got later, further attempts were made to get some sort of definite word from Battalion. By the time darkness fell no word of any sort had been received and it appeared that no further move would be ordered that day as night attacks over this type of terrain, with the troops in the condition of Company "G", were a direct invitation to disaster. However, the order for the afternoon's operation had not specified whether the Company was to remain in place and hold the ground taken or merely clear it out and then move to a different location, so that it was most necessary to find out the Battalion Commander's plans before it got too dark to move.

It should be pointed out at this time that the difficulty of communication was not in any way due to the lack of desire by either Battalion or Company to communicate, but rather due entirely to the almost impossible task of keeping wire in. Radios were next to useless because of the location of the Company in a sort of small pocket in the terrain and the ridge running between it and the Battalion command post. Also, the long use of the radios in this wet weather had resulted in wear and tear to the point where the built-in waterproofing was no longer effective. This trouble was now becoming apparent for the first time.

At about 1730 hours word was finally relayed down from Company "F" by runner that the Company was to remain in its present position for the night and be prepared to execute the previously assigned mission the following morning. A hot meal was on the way up and the necessary guides were to meet

the "chow" party at Company "F" command post in the woods about 600 yards to our position. It was too late to accomplish anything in the way of a reconnaissance at this time, however, the message had tentatively set the hour of attack at 0830 hours, which would allow time for a very hasty reconnaissance in the morning before the jump-off.

At about 1900 hours the food arrived and was served with but minor interruptions in the way of artillery fire. The Company then prepared to settle down for the night. The reason for lack of any opposition the previous afternoon now became apparent. There had been no enemy in the woods for the pure and simple reason that any prolonged occupation was rendered next to impossible by the swampy nature of the terrain. The heavy rains of the preceding few weeks, and poor drainage, had caused the ground to become so water-logged that some of the holes had between six and twelve inches of water in them by the time the men were ready to crawl in for the night. This became so bad during the night that by midnight many of the men decided to forego the at best doubtful protection of their slit trenches and slept by the side of them. They would roll in if the shelling grew heavy enough to awaken them and then go back to sleep on the top of the ground as soon as things quieted down a bit.

The Company command post fared little better, in spite of being on slightly higher ground than the platoon position. At first it was thought that throwing a layer of fir-branches in the bottom of the hole would help, but after repeating this procedure four times during the night it was found that the command group was sleeping on the ground level, with the approximately 24-inch parapet being all that remained of the once 5-foot deep command post hole. The thick layer of fir-branches covering the command post continued to give a false sense of security, however. (38)

The casualties for this day were as follows:

Killed in Action	1	
Missing in Action	15	
Wounded in Action	4	
Sick	0	
Total	20	(39)

(38) Eye witness, self. (39) A-1, p. 46.

On the morning of November 26 the Company was alerted for the probable mission and, since communications with both Company "F" and Battalion were out and the report had been rendered that the wire had been cut in three places within 200 yards of the command post, the Company Commander decided to check the situation at Company "F" on his way to make his reconnaissance. Here he was able to reach Battalion and was informed to keep his Company in position as no attack was contemplated for that morning. This was good news, although by this time most of the Company "G" positions could be made tenable only by continuous bailing with helmets and a move to another position was most desirable.

At approximately 1000 hours, a runner from Company "F" brought the welcome news that the Company could expect to be relieved that afternoon and to be prepared to move out any time after 1200 hours.

The Company Commander, taking into consideration the area occupied by the Company and the sporadic shelling to which the Company was still being subjected to, decided to go to the Company "F" command post at once and request permission to move his company into the Company "F" area, which had the one advantage of being on slightly higher and considerably drier ground. The Battalion Commander was not at the command post and no one else was willing to give the necessary permission. About 20 minutes later, while the Company Commander was still talking with the Company "F" Commander, a call came in stating that Company "F" was to be relieved as soon as it was passed through by the 1st Battalion and that Company "G" was to follow Company "F". Permission to move the troops was, however, not granted at this time. Arrangements were made to have Company "F" notify Company "G" as soon as they started to move.

The Company Commander returned to his command post and, at about 1230 hours, was notified that he was now permitted to move his Company into the vicinity of the Company "F" command post. The Company was immediately notified and was on the move within a matter of a few minutes. On arrival at the Company "F" command post it was found to have been vacated. After attempts to contact Battalion proved useless and patrols had ascertained that Company

"F" was no longer in their old position, the Company Commander decided to move his Company back to the south edge of the woods on the route to the Battalion command post. When about 400 yards on the way, he was met by the Battalion S-2, who told him that the Company was to go into an assembly area in the vicinity of NOTHBERG. "It's not too good a spot and you'll have to share it with Company "F". "Does it have a roof?" "Yes, it's an abandoned factory." "That's all I want to know. Lead me to it."

On arrival at the road on the south edge of the woods, the Company was turned over to the Executive Officer for the move and, after a short conference at Battalion headquarters, the Company Commander was taken over to the new area. The place was badly battered, but in spite of that appeared like the next thing to Heaven. It was divided into two approximately equal areas, after a slight altercation with the Company "F" Executive Officer, who was under the impression that it was to be for the exclusive use of Company "F". This officer, who had taken no part in the fighting during the last two weeks, his Company Commander preferring to use him as Executive Officer and letting the senior non-commissioned officers in those platoons without officers act as platoon leaders, was quickly put in his place. The Company "F" Commander arrived soon thereafter and concurred in the plan agreed on by the Battalion S-2 and the Company "G" Commander. (40)

The Company arrived at about 1600 hours and within an hour the men were settled and were enquiring about their individual rolls, mail, and "chow."

The casualties for the day, caused by the usual artillery fire, were as follows:

Killed in Action	1	
Missing in Action	0	
Wounded in Action	4	
Sick	0	
Total	5	(41)

THE REORGANIZATION OF COMPANY "G"

On the morning of 27 November the first activity after breakfast was an arms inspection. The result of this was the ordering of another inspection for that evening. The men were told to clean up and shave and the usual round

(40) Eye witness, self; A-3, p. 2. (41) A-1, p. 47.

of rehabilitation was started.

That afternoon 88 replacements joined the Company, plus 10 men returned from the hospital. This brought the Company strength up to 4 officers and 167 enlisted men.

The replacements were given a short welcoming talk by the Company Commander and then immediately broken down and assigned to platoons. This was done by breaking them down into groups classified by the training they had received as: BAR men (a bad shortage), machine gunners, mortar men, and riflemen. From these sub-groups men were chosen for the various platoons by allowing them to volunteer in groups, such as: three BAR men for the 2d Platoon. This enabled those men who had formed friendships at the Replacement Depot or earlier to be together in the same platoon and alleviated to some extent the feeling of strangeness and inferiority which was inevitable when combining them with as close-knit a group as the survivors of the fighting constituted. The Platoon Leaders and Sergeants were cautioned, however, not to heed personal wishes in squad assignments as it was not desired that the forming of small cliques within squads be fostered. Later that afternoon the arrival of a Red Cross Clubmobile occasioned the remark: "We must be way back in ComZ!" (42)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

A study of the action presented in the preceding narrative shows that the tasks assigned Company "G" were not beyond those which a rifle company might reasonably be expected to complete successfully.

The main difficulties were caused by the generally low morale of the Company due to the effects of the crippling losses in non-commissioned strength suffered in the action around EILENDORF, the lack of qualified replacements developed within the unit, and the resultant lack of self-confidence among the men.

Other factors which contributed to a general lowering of morale were the conditions under which the action was fought. The terrain was less difficult to advance over than other terrain previously encountered. However, coupled with the abominable climatic conditions prevailing at this time of the year,

(42) Eye witness, self.

plus the increased effectiveness of the enemy artillery, caused by its greater numbers and tree-bursts, it became a synonym for the worst imaginable.

To sum up some of the more important criticisms:

1) The Company Commander failed to utilize the time granted him prior to the attack to become sufficiently familiar with the personnel weaknesses within the organization, particularly among his key assistants, and was reluctant to be ruthless and get rid of those whom he had found wanting at that time. In extenuation, it might be stated that had he known then that there were individuals within his organization who could be trusted to perform the functions of these personnel, he would have undoubtedly have made some immediate shifts.

2) The previous Company Commander can be quite severely criticized for his failure to develop within his unit non-commissioned officer replacements. That this could have been done was evidenced by the fact that a successor to the 1st Sergeant was selected from among the original members of the Company within two days of the Company's relief from action. This man was a senior non-commissioned officer who, by his very quiet efficiency and steadiness under pressure, had failed to impress over more flamboyant men.

3) The Executive Officer is to be severely censured for taking the risk of losing the whole Company by deciding to disobey the orders given him by his commanding officer for what, in view of the situation, can most kindly be characterized as insufficient reasons.

4) Both the Battalion and Company Commanders might have been criticized for their failure to use the abundant replacements received by the Company during this action, when the Company strength was at such a low state. However, the Commanders had learned through bitter experience that to attempt to bring green replacements into a unit engaged in combat was to court disaster, through the loss of seasoned personnel while trying to control and set an example for the new men. As leaders were the greatest shortage and control was so extremely difficult in the type of terrain over which the action was fought, it was felt that the risk of losing the few remaining leaders more than offset any gain to be derived from the increase in the front line strength of the unit.

5) The Battalion Headquarters should be criticized for its loss of contact

with the troops during this action. It would have aided immeasurably in securing more willing compliance with difficult orders had occasional visits been made to the troops on the line. To the best of the writer's knowledge this was not done. As a result, the Companies felt that they were being requested to perform tasks beyond their capabilities and, as Battalion Headquarters had no way of refuting these ideas and took no steps to see the condition of the troops for themselves, command suffered.

6) The Battalion Headquarters might further be criticized for making promises to its subordinate commanders which, while they were made in good faith, it could not carry out.

7) Another possible criticism lies in the fact that commanders of subordinate units in actual contact with the enemy should, wherever possible, not be required to report to rear installations for orders, particularly not under the conditions described.

8) It might be said that too great an emphasis has been placed on the administrative side of the Company command function as regards food and shelter. This can best be refuted by the fact that this was the only positive way the Company Commander had to try to maintain morale. As morale was the weakest point in the Company set-up, it is felt that his preoccupation was amply justified.

9) The Company Commander might further be criticized for being too critical of the next higher headquarters and too independent in his method of dealing with it. While this criticism would be entirely justified, there is a certain excuse in the seeming lack of that headquarters to show the proper interest in the welfare of the men.

Before summarizing this action, it must be emphasized that nothing which has been said herein should be construed to detract from the achievements of the soldiers of the Company. That they were able, in spite of the handicaps and hardships mentioned in this account, to take their assigned objectives must stand to their credit anywhere.

During this action Company "G", fighting over difficult terrain and in almost unbelievably bad weather, took its objectives against stiff and at times

fanatical resistance. With but one exception, the first mission, it was fully committed with no opportunity to hold out a support element. It had, during the 11 days it was in contact with the enemy, suffered 2 officer and 138 enlisted casualties. Of this number, 2 officers and 51 enlisted men were killed and wounded. Of the remainder, 66 were missing in action of whom 47 returned to duty. Of the remaining 19 mission in action, it must be assumed that a high proportion were later picked up by the Graves Registration Detachments policing the battle fields. In the type of heavy woods encountered during this action, it was easy for a man to be killed during the fighting and not be missed until a later lull made a check-up by squad leaders possible. That no more than 21 men were carried as non-battle casualties can, under the circumstances, be considered as a vindication for the Division and Regimental policy of strict supervision over the health of the command. That the Company continued to advance, in spite of its losses, reflects great credit on its "Esprit de Corps", which was its greatest motivating factor after its morale was gone.

LESSONS

The following are some of the lessons which were learned or re-emphasized during this action:

- 1) Units must not allow themselves to be immobilized by artillery fire, but must continue to move forward and out of the artillery concentration.
- 2) Only under conditions of gravest emergency may a change be made by subordinates in orders received.
- 3) A well-sited defense by riflemen and machine guns can break up unsupported attacks by far superior infantry forces.
- 4) When fighting in woods, individual noles or trenches must be provided with overhead cover.
- 5) In order to properly gauge capabilities of their troops, commanders should attempt to visit their subordinate units whenever possible. Visits by higher commanders are also potent morale factors for the troops, particularly when the going is tough.
- 6) During times of stress any expedient is justifiable which aids the

commanders to maintain morale and health, and which does not impair discipline within a unit.

7) Replacements should not join an attacking unit that is heavily engaged with the enemy. The main reason for this is that a squad leader, in particular, cannot control his men under the stress of battle without at least being sure of their names. Also, the shock of suddenly being thrust into the heat of combat, with strangers on either side of him, can and often has caused a new man to completely lose all powers of thought or action. Often he was incapable of even such a natural and instinctive act as hitting the ground and had to be given impetus by a push. Once on the ground force was again often necessary to get him started moving. That these abovementioned factors can be supremely costly in non-commissioned officer casualties is fairly obvious. Pre-action indoctrination, through the use of simulated battle training, helped to partially eliminate this but was far from being completely successful. Given a few quiet days, the squad leader can get to know his men and the new man can gain a feeling of security by beginning to think of himself as a member of the squad team.

8) "Esprit de Corps" and a feeling of not wanting to let down his comrades were the most potent and at times the only considerations which kept a man from giving up when he felt that he had reached the limit of his endurance.

9) The selection and training of non-commissioned officer replacements within a unit is a primary and continuous function of command in the company. It is felt that commanders who fail in this function should be removed from command, regardless of their other qualifications. Whenever possible, a company commander should have in his mind selected at least three or more replacements for his key non-commissioned officers throughout the company.