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OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 324TH INFANTRY REGIMENT  
(44TH DIVISION) IN THE BATTLE OF BUCHEN BUSCH WOODS,  
15-17 FEBRUARY 1945 (RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN LIMITED OBJECTIVE ATTACK

Major Joseph M. Flesch, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | <u>PAGE</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Index .....   | 1           |
| Bibliography .....  | 2           |
| Introduction .....  | 3           |
| General Situation .....                                     | 4           |
| Planning for the Attack .....                               | 7           |
| The Battalion Plan of Attack .....                          | 11          |
| The Attack .....  | 13          |
| The Counterattacks .....                                    | 16          |
| Analysis and Criticism .....                                | 19          |
| Lessons Learned .....                                       | 21          |
| Map I - Seventh Army Front 31 December 1944                 |             |
| Map II - G-2, Seventh Army, Estimate of the Enemy Situation |             |
| Map III - XV Corps Plan of Attack                           |             |
| Map IV - Terrain Map Buchen Busch Woods Area                |             |
| Map V - Boundary Changes 44th Division, 13-15 February 1945 |             |
| Map VI - 2nd Battalion, 324th Infantry, Plan of Attack      |             |
| Map VII - Enemy Counterattack 17 February 1945              |             |

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2nd Battalion, 324th Infantry, 44th U. S. Division in the battle of the Buchen Busch Woods, France, 15-17 February 1945.

In order to orient the reader it will be necessary to summarize the actions of the Seventh Army and review the events leading up to 31 December 1944.

Due to the rapid advance of the Seventh Army from the beaches of southern France and an increase in strength from three divisions to eleven divisions by 31 December 1944, the supply lines were hard pressed and stretched to the limit. The Seventh Army had been having hard fighting and covered much more distance than had been anticipated during the planning phase of Operations Dragoon. The army needed rest and regrouping and all factors indicated that the army was going to be forced to defend the territory it had gained. (1)

On 31 December 1944 the Seventh Army held a front 84 miles long from the Rhine River to a point a few miles west of Saarbruecken and a flank along the Rhine River north and south of Strasbourg. (2) (See Map I) Two main enemy threats existed in the Seventh Army zone of action; in the north between Lauterbourg and <sup>Not on Map I</sup> Saarbruecken, and the Colmar pocket in the south. (3) <sup>enemy in the</sup> The Colmar pocket threatened the right flank and rear of the army, while the concentration of enemy troops between Lauterbourg and Saarbruecken constituted a threat which, if successful in an offensive, could split the Seventh Army. If the two enemy forces could break through and meet in the rear the entire army could be destroyed. (See Map II)

(1) A-1, p. 529; (2) A-1, p. 563; (3) A-1, p. 503.

Due to these threats, the wide front and known enemy information, the entire Seventh Army was forced to assume the defense. (4) By New Year's Eve reserve battle positions, counterattack plans to reduce penetrations, and plans for withdrawal in some sectors had been prepared. The army was defending the line with VI Corps on the right, the XV Corps on the left, two task forces along the Rhine River, and a very limited reserve. (5) (See Map I)

On 31 December 1944, the German Army launched its offensive and within a period of a few hours entire divisions were engaged in fierce fighting. (6) The attack was repelled in some sectors, the defending troops were forced back in other sectors, and withdrawal plans were executed in still other sectors. (7) Due to the excellent G-2 information and foresight of the high command in the Seventh Army the enemy attack was ground to a halt before serious damage was done. (8) (See Map II)

On 8 January 1945 the AXI Corps was released to the Seventh Army from SHAEF reserve which enabled the regrouping of forces and shifting of boundaries to strengthen the thinly held defensive line against further enemy attacks. (9) During the month of January 1945 Seventh Army, occupying a defensive position was busy relieving and shifting units in the line while aggressive patrol action and raids were carried out against the enemy. (10)

#### GENERAL SITUATION

About 1 February 1945 the high command conceived the idea of a grand scale, limited objective attack to straighten and thus shorten the present front line in the western sector of the Seventh Army front. (11) Shortening of the line would make for economy of forces, as fewer

men would be required to man the defenses. (12) In addition, the objec-

(4) A-1, p. 559-563; (5) A-1, p. 560-561; (6-7) A-1, p. 563-624;  
(8) A-1, p. 503-624; (9) A-1, p. 583-585; (10) A-1, p. 659-665;  
(11-12) A-1, p. 665.

tives to be gained represented terrain from which the launching of a future great offensive would be more favorable. (13)

This sector was held by the XV Corps with divisions in line from left to right as follows: 101st Cavalry Group, 70th, 63rd, 44th, and 100th Infantry Divisions. (14) (See Map III) Two great reentrants were prominent in the XV Corps sector, the Gros Rederching reentrant in the 44th Division sector and the Welferding reentrant in the 63rd Division sector; these two reentrants would have to be eliminated if the lines were to be straightened and shortened. (See Map III) To reduce these reentrants it would be necessary for the 44th and 63rd Infantry Divisions to execute limited objective attacks while the 70th Division on the left would have to advance to keep abreast of the 63rd Division. (15) (See Map III)

On 1 February 1945, the 324th Infantry Regiment relieved the 71st Infantry Regiment on position. The 1st Battalion relieved the 71st Infantry's 1st Battalion on the left and the 2nd Battalion relieved the 71st Infantry's 3rd Battalion on the right. (16) (See Map V)

During the period 1-14 February 1945 the 324th Infantry Regiment was busy at aggressive patrolling. Enemy positions, mine fields, and strength had to be fixed. Maps and aerial photos were brought up to date by extensive patrolling and raiding parties from all units. (17)

Freezing and thawing during the period of 1-14 February 1945 made the fox hole a poor sort of "home", with trench-foot a serious threat which had to be fought daily by constant inspections. Strict disciplinary measures were taken against officers and non-commissioned officers who failed to enforce the necessary safeguards to prevent trench-foot. (18)

(13) A-1, p. 665; (14) A-1, p. 564-565; (15) A-1, p. 664-666;  
(16) A-2, p. 70-72; (17) A-2, p. 70-74, A-10; (18) A-13.

The objective assigned to the 44th Infantry Division was a general east-west line from a point south of Eppingen-Urbach west to the northern fringes of the eastern third of the Bliesbrucken Woods. (See Map III)

When the 324th Infantry Regiment moved into the Buchen Busch Woods sector on 1 February 1945 the troops and officers of the regiment felt that an attack on the woods would soon be forthcoming. Although the attack was not ordered until 13 February 1945, division, regiment and battalions were busy planning.

The regiment obtained detailed information of the enemy by employing numerous patrols, questioning prisoners of war, by aerial reconnaissance, studies of aerial photographs and from higher and adjacent units. The 324th Infantry Regiment was opposed by the 37th (Panzer Grenadier) Regiment of the 17th German SS Division, an outstanding combat unit.

It was believed that this unit's tank strength had been depleted by previous operations, as not more than four or five tanks of the tiger class had ever been observed to our immediate front at any one time. However, tank movement had been heard on the roads in the enemy's rear areas. The 38th Panzer Grenadier Regiment was identified on the left of the 37th Regiment.

The 37th Panzer Grenadier Regiment relieved the 17th SS Reconnaissance Battalion, which was opposing the 324th Infantry Regiment, during the early part of February. The strength of the 17th SS Reconnaissance Battalion was estimated to be between 400 and 500 men. It was highly mobile and capable of striking hard and swiftly at any time. After this unit was relieved we lost contact with it, thus it constituted a continuous threat to our positions. (19)

The terrain in the area of the Buchen Busch Woods is generally flat to the south as far as Bettviller. The key terrain feature of this

(19) A-2, p. 72-74.

area is the hill mass just south of Utweiler. A ridge line extends north and south from this hill mass which is bounded by streams on either side which flow generally north. The Buchen Busch Woods controls this ridge line to the south and the Utweiler hill controls the terrain north of the woods. (See Map IV)

Our patrols located many enemy positions that were occupied one night and unoccupied the next, which indicated that the enemy was shifting outpost personnel constantly. The open ground to the west and east of the Buchen Busch Woods was usually lightly held by enemy sentinel posts, while the bulk of the defending troops were concentrated in the organized localities within the woods and towns. Raids on Rimling were always met by machine gun fire and our patrols were never allowed to penetrate the Buchen Busch Woods. However, at one time an I & R patrol approached to within 300 yards of the woods in broad daylight. (20) The enemy frequently used illuminating flares during the night and placed artillery and mortar fire intermittently on our positions. He also fired machine guns from positions along the south edge of Buchen Busch woods at night. The enemy did very little patrolling in our sector (the 2nd Battalion, 324th Infantry Regiment) but we always found him ready and willing to fight when pressed. (21) On 9 February 1945 an enemy plane dropped three small bombs on F Company's positions. (22)

#### PLANNING FOR THE ATTACK

Division issued an order on 8 February 1945 which outlined the plans for the attack to straighten and shorten the lines on or about 15 February. Due to the extended front the division held, the tentative plan of attack called for the employment of all three regiments abreast, with the 324th Infantry Regiment on the right, the 71st Infantry Regiment in the center and the 114th Infantry Regiment on the left. This would

(20) A-2, p. 72-74, A-11; (21) A-11, A-13; (22) A-11.



allow a normal frontage for each regiment in its respective zone of action. To accomplish this, the 71st Infantry Regiment would relieve the 1st Battalion of the 114th Infantry and the 1st Battalion of the 324th Infantry Regiment during the night 12-13 February 1945. (23) (See Map V) The 324th Infantry Regimental sector was further reduced in width by the 71st Infantry, sideslipping to the right, taking over two platoon positions of L Company, 324th Infantry on the evening of 14 February 1945. (24) (See Map V) In order to provide for a division reserve each regiment of the division was directed to hold out one battalion, which would be committed on division order only. (25)

Upon receipt of the above plan from Division, Colonel K. S. Anderson, Commanding Officer of the 324th Infantry Regiment, and his staff made tentative plans for the attack by the regiment. These plans were given to the battalion commanders and they were directed to submit tentative plans for the attack by their respective battalions by 10 February 1945. The battalion plans of attack were submitted to and studied by Colonel Anderson and his staff, and the exact scheme of maneuver was decided upon. On 11 February 1945 Colonel Anderson submitted a letter to the division commander outlining the proposed scheme of maneuver for the attack for the regiment.

Due to the fact that the enemy had been habitually withdrawing his outpost sentinels one hour prior to daylight, it was believed by the commanders and staffs of the 324th Infantry Regiment that the attack should be made at this time. It was also generally believed that an artillery preparation should not be used prior to the attack as it would destroy the element of surprise. Consequently, Colonel Anderson in his letter to the division commander made the following statement:

(23-24) A-2, p. 75; (25) A-1, p. 667.

"I cannot but believe that a preliminary artillery barrage will only alert the enemy and definitely destroy the element of surprise, without commensurate results. I also believe that strong offensive groups should attempt to infiltrate to key positions in the rear of enemy main defensive line prior to daylight, to cut off reinforcements and support the main attack; this to be followed by the actual breakthrough in force occurring just prior to daylight, with fight to take positions from flanks coming closely behind the breakthrough." (26)

A base of fire was to be organized on the high ground in the vicinity of the Melingerhoff Farm. This fire was to consist of Cannon Company, Anti-Tank Company, the remainder of H Company, D Company, the M-36 Tank Destroyers and the .50 caliber machine guns of the regiment. The fire was divided into two parts, one to cover the eastern half and the other to cover the western half of the woods. (See Map VI) Two fire control stations were to be established commanded by the Heavy Weapons Company Commanders of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, and the Company Commander Anti-Tank Company would coordinate the fire between the two control stations to insure safety to the advancing troops. If tactical surprise was not gained we would be forced to assault the enemy from the front and the fire could be called upon to pin him in his holes until the advancing troops could close with him. It could also be used on the enemy strong points if surprise was gained, and the assaulting troops from the northeast were stopped by enemy defenses in the northern edge of the woods. One rifle company of the 1st Battalion and one rifle platoon E Company were assigned the mission of protecting the base of fire.

Radio and wire were to be used for communication and each leading battalion was to have distinguishing pyrotechnics and code words for the control of fire.

(26) A-3.

The artillery would fire concentrations to prevent enemy from bringing up reinforcements from Eppingen-Urbach, Utweiler, and Guderkirch and to protect the combat outposts and outer flanks of the attack. (27) (See Map VI)

The general plan of attack was for the two attacking battalions to advance in a column of companies with the leading company to be organized into at least two strong combat outpost groups. These companies were assigned the mission of infiltrating, or pushing through the enemy lines to seize key terrain in rear of enemy lines and outpost same. The remaining companies were to follow closely and attack enemy positions from the rear and flanks, and to organize a main line of resistance. One platoon of heavy machine guns of each attacking battalion was to be prepared to move forward to the new main line of resistance as soon as advancing troops had masked their fire from positions in the base of fire. (28) (See Map VI)

The 1st Battalion, less one rifle company and the heavy weapons company, were to be held in mobile reserve in the vicinity of Bettviller. (29) (See Map VI)

The tentative plan of attack of the 324th Infantry Regiment was approved by division without exception. Field Order Number 12 was issued 12 February 1945 by the 44th Infantry Division and Field Order Number 35, 324th Infantry Regiment, was published the same day.

The 749th Tank Battalion, the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 895th Anti-Aircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion, the 493rd, 494th, and 495th Armored Field Artillery Battalions (105mm How) and the 693rd field Artillery Battalion were attached to the division for the attack. The division order stated that the 324th Infantry Regiment would attack on D day at H hour minus 60. For planning purposes we were to consider (27-28-29) A-3.

D day to be 15 February 1945, and H hour to be daylight of the same day.

The regimental order stated that one platoon of tanks would support each attacking rifle battalion at daylight, on call. The tank destroyers were to support the attack by fire, from positions located in the base of fire area initially, and be prepared to move forward to the new main line of resistance rapidly to repel any enemy armored attack. Mines were to be carried forward by personnel who were to take up combat outpost positions to protect their positions from enemy tank attack. The Engineers, A and P Platoons, and the Regimental Mine Platoon were made available to move engineer tools, mines, and tactical and protective wire forward closely behind the attacking echelon. Possessing this information, we were now able to prepare detailed plans, issue orders, and discuss them with all troop leaders in detail.

#### THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

Our estimate of the enemy in front of the 2nd Battalion was that he held the Buchen Busch Woods with one rifle company, reinforced by many machine guns, mortars, and artillery support. Our patrols had located mines and tactical wire near the edge of the woods, and all indications were that the woods was held in strength. An enemy reserve was maintained in the vicinity of Eppingen-Urbach which we estimated not to exceed one rifle battalion with some tanks and self-propelled guns. (30)

In the 2nd Battalion we believed that we could gain the northern and eastern half of the Buchen Busch Woods by stealth just before dawn and attack to the south, thus hitting the enemy from the right rear. If such an attack were successful in surprising the enemy, we could accomplish our mission without entering his protective fires or mine (30) A-11.

fields. To accomplish this we believed that we could move forward just prior to daylight, after the enemy had withdrawn from his night positions, and attack the woods from the north.

The scheme of maneuver decided upon was to have E Company lead the attack with two platoons, one of which would seize and establish a combat outpost at the crossroads about 500 yards northeast of the woods, the other platoon to seize and outpost the nose of the hill about 400 yards to the right of the crossroads. When these two platoons arrived on their respective objectives, they were to take up perimeter defense positions which would block enemy movement of reserves from Utweiler, Eppingen-urbach and urbach. These two combat outposts would have a secondary mission of preventing the escape of enemy from the Buchen Busch Woods. (See map VI) F Company, with one section of heavy machine guns attached, was to follow E Company closely to a position north of the eastern half of the Buchen Busch Woods, from which it would deploy to assault the woods from the northeast. (See Map VI) G Company, with one section of heavy machine guns attached, was to follow F Company closely to seize, organize and hold the nose east of the Buchen Busch Woods. (See Map VI)

We requested and obtained permission to establish a battalion observation post in the 100th Infantry Division's sector on the right.

(See Map VI) The battalion plan of attack followed orders and directives from regiment, and was readily approved by Colonel Anderson. (31)

We could now explain the attack plan in detail to the company commanders, and they in turn to their companies. Aerial photos and maps were issued down to and including all platoons. Officers and enlisted men alike studied the terrain, maps, and aerial photos. Each platoon received detailed instructions covering its mission in the attack.

(31) A-11, A-5.

The men were questioned and everyone knew the what, when, where, and why of what they were to do. The enlisted men had complete confidence in the attack plan and it was not uncommon to hear them make boisterous remarks, among themselves, as to what they were going to do to the "Krauts" in front of them. This was a healthy situation as far as morale was concerned, but a source of headaches for the S-2's of the regiment. Two days prior to the attack the French civilians in the regimental area were well informed about the attack, and it was not uncommon for them to ask the officers about it. However, the exact time of the attack was not known and it was felt that tactical surprise could still be gained. On 14 February 1945 Colonel Anderson stressed that the element of surprise might be lost but changes in the plan of attack would not be made. (32)

On 13 February 1945 Colonel Anderson published additional written instructions which emphasized the importance of detailed plans, control, coordination between units, and aggressive execution of the attack. The last paragraph of these instructions reads as follows: "When the enemy alarm is given, speed and vigorous execution of plan, is the most essential element to success, and only by rapid, aggressive movement can attack succeed with minimum casualties." (33)

At about 1200 hours 14 February 1945 we received an order from regiment that we would attack at H hour minus 60 minutes, H hour 0645, 15 February 1945.

#### THE ATTACK

At 0530 15 February 1945 the 1st Battalion, 324th Infantry, the Regimental Reserve, was in position in the vicinity of Bettviller and the attack was ready to jump off. (See Map VI) The 2nd Battalion (32) A-2, p. 76, A-13; (33) A-6.

'crossed the line of departure on time.

In order to outline clearly the attack for the reader, the actions of each company will be described separately.

Captain Delbert O. Berry, Commanding Officer of E Company, led his company, less one platoon, with one section of heavy machine guns attached, through the enemy lines east of the Buchen Busch Woods. The company moved past the enemy strong point in the woods unchallenged by enemy sentries. By 0630, E Company, less one platoon, was digging in on its objective. Staff Sergeant Al De Marco, of E Company, discovered and cut the enemy telephone lines at the crossroads northeast of the woods upon his arrival at the platoon objective. This no doubt, added confusion to the enemy's already confused situation. (34)

(See Map VI)

Captain William H. Applegate, Commanding Officer, F Company followed closely behind E Company, to a previously-designated assembly area northeast of the Buchen Busch Woods, and was prepared to assault the eastern half of the woods by 0639. F Company, while moving into position to deploy for the assault, ran into one enemy sentry who fled without firing a shot or sounding an alarm. At daylight, 0645, F Company attacked the enemy positions from the right rear, with the 1st and 2nd Platoons abreast, followed by the 3rd Platoon, with the light machine gun section between the leading platoons. (See Map VI) The suddenness of this attack and the volume of small arms fire pinned the enemy in their holes, making them easy targets for hand grenades and bayonets. Lieutenant Richard Shattuck, F Company Executive Officer, attacking with the 1st Platoon, made the following statement: "We moved into the northeast edge of the woods using marching fire. The Kraut was stunned with the force of the assault. We were scared but kept moving in. There were

(34) A-2, p. 77-83, A-10, A-11, A-13.

positions all through the woods including several covered machine gun positions. Those who did not surrender withdrew to the southern edge of the woods. There they ran into their own wire and mines. By the time we reached the edge of the woods, we were out of ammunition as we had covered everything with fire. The last group we ran into was in a bunker at the extreme edge of the woods. We went after them with bayonets - I had my knife. After I worked one over, the rest surrendered. Bradshaw got a few, too. By 0820, it was all over." The enemy whom Lieutenant Shattuck worked over with his knife had his throat cut from ear to ear. F Company could now move to, prepare, and occupy the positions on the new main line of resistance. (See Map VII)

In order to keep the events of the attack clear for the reader, it is necessary to look in on the 3rd Battalion who had the responsibility of clearing the western half of the woods. L Company, the assault Company in that sector, was equally as successful as F Company; they were slightly behind F Company, which was not a part of the plan, but added enemy dead to the operation. Some of the enemy were trying to withdraw to the west to get away from F Company, which allowed L Company to catch them in the open with their fire.

G Company, commanded by Captain Carl Clardy, followed E Company closely through the enemy lines, killed an enemy sentry to its front and occupied its assigned objective with the mission of protecting the right flank and rear of the battalion. (35) (See Map VI)

By 0820, the 2nd Battalion had accomplished its mission and was rapidly digging in on the new main line of resistance. Engineer tools, anti-tank mines and wire had already been moved forward and the battalion was rapidly preparing for the enemy counterattacks which were sure to come.

(35) A-2, p. 74-83, A-10, A-11.



The tactical surprise was so complete that at 0639 the enemy fired his protective fires south of the Buchen Busch woods into the field, which an entire battalion had completed crossing about fifteen minutes earlier. (36)

The results of this attack for the battalion were as follows: wounded in action, 17; missing in action, 1; killed in action, 0; meanwhile, the enemy suffered 40 killed in action; 60 prisoners of war, and the loss of considerable arms and equipment. (37)

The 3rd Battalion had also been successful and the count for the entire regiment was: killed in action, 3; missing in action, 1; wounded in action, 28; prisoners of war, 161; enemy killed in action, uncounted; however, many dead Germans were evacuated. Fifty five automatic weapons were taken from the eastern and southern edge of the woods. (38) This indicates that our patrolling had been accurate and substantiated our belief that a frontal attack would have been a costly one.

#### THE COUNTERATTACKS

At about 0710 a small counterattack developed from the direction of Eppingen-Urbach against the E Company outpost at the crossroads which was broken up with the aid of mortar fire. At 0800 Lieutenant Colonel Collin P. Williams, Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, inspected the positions on the new main line of resistance and coordinated the tie-in with the 100th Division on the right flank and the 3rd Battalion on the left. (39) Throughout the day positions were improved and counterattack plans prepared to eject enemy in case of penetration. Plans were made to construct tactical wire to our front that night. At about 1900, a battalion observation post was established in the E Company combat outpost position at the crossroad.

(36) A-10, A-11; (37) A-11; (38) A-2, p. 79, A-11; (39) A-11.

At about 0215, 16 february 1945 the enemy opened up with heavy artillery preparations on our new positions. At 0320, an estimated 75 enemy attacked from the north astride the north-south road extending through the E Company combat outpost. The attack was smothered with artillery and mortar fire and was broken up before it reached our battle position. (40)

The enemy continued to harass us with artillery fire through 16 february. During the late afternoons of 15 and 16 february 1945, enemy were observed preparing positions on the hill to our front. (41) (See map VII) Our outposts reported considerable vehicular traffic in Eppingen-Urbach during the night of 16-17 February and tank movements were heard in the southwest edge of the town at about 0445. We requested artillery fire on the estimated location and a heavy concentration was fired. The accuracy of the artillery fire on the tanks is borne out by an entry in the regimental IPW report of 16-17 February, in which a prisoner of war stated that between 0500 and 0600, 17 february he saw our artillery hit several of their tanks and that he personally saw one burning. Our outposts also reported large fires in this area during the same period. (42)

At about 0750, 17 february 1945 the enemy again counterattacked our positions, screened by a dense fog. A platoon from F Company that occupied night positions to the left rear of the E Company outpost had withdrawn to their daylight positions without orders, thus leaving the rear and flank of the outpost unprotected. (See Map VII) At about 0805 Lieutenant Rollin J. Barra, Platoon Leader of E Company's 3rd Platoon, and his men were surrounded in the E Company combat outpost at the crossroads. This position consisted of a group of mutually supporting fox holes, without overhead cover, linked into an all around (40-41) A-11; (42) A-2, p. 89, A-11.

defensive position with tactical wire to their rear. The attack was on the outpost before they knew it due to the limited visibility in the dense fog, but the platoon opened up with all the fire power they had. Lieutenant Barra called for artillery and mortar support. He then called battalion and gave an accurate report as to what was going on. Lieutenant Barra brought the 81 and 60 mm mortar fires in closer and closer to the position until some of the rounds were falling as close as ten yards. Supporting artillery fire was placed deep into the German's rear area, right and left of the combat outpost position. By this time some of the enemy had come up to within small arms range of G Company's left platoon where a fire fight was raging. At about 0825 C Company was attached to the 2nd Battalion to be used as needed. At about 0907 another platoon from E Company was ordered to attack the enemy between the main line of resistance and the combat outpost platoon. The enemy dropped an artillery concentration on this platoon and by the time it reached the outpost everything was under control. By about 1225 we were able to report to regiment that the German counter-attack had been broken up. (43) (See Map VII)

During this attack the Germans fired the bulk of their artillery concentrations on L Company's positions, in the 3rd Battalion sector. This kept L Company under cover but allowed each of the 2nd Battalion riflemen, who had a target, to bring his fire to bear on the counter-attack. (See Map VII) The German leading elements hit the combat outpost deployed around it, and extended down in front of G Company, which brought them under deadly fire. (See Map VII)

From prisoners of war we learned that the attack was launched by the 1st Battalion from the 1125th Volksgrenadier Infantry consisting of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Companies supported by tanks and artillery. However, they did not use tanks in this counterattack, this was probably (43) A-2, p. 88-89, A-11.

due to the accuracy of our artillery concentration previously mentioned. It was estimated that this battalion suffered 200 casualties, a fact which later was confirmed by prisoners of war reports, one of which stated that only ten men remained in one of the companies after the counterattack. (44) This was the last attempt made by the Germans to regain the ground lost as a result of our attack two days previously. Our new main line of resistance was secure and the reentrant that had existed in the XV Corps line had been eliminated. (45)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The amount of time required to gather enemy information, make detailed plans, issue adequate orders and discuss them at all levels of command is seldom available as it was in this operation. This eliminates the confusion of battle and reduces the number of hasty decisions commanders are often required to make.

Our patrols had sought the enemy out, located his positions, discovered his habits, the strength and the weakness in his line. This information, in conjunction with terrain analysis, established a firm foundation on which to base tactical decisions.

Tactical surprise was complete and aggressively exploited. This is borne out by the rapidity with which the objective was seized and the fact that the enemy did not call down his final protective fires until after the last man of the attacking troops had passed through the zone of these fires.

The willingness with which the troops carried out orders, aggressively and to the letter, is an indication of good discipline and high morale. Their complete knowledge of the tactical plans no doubt contributed immeasurably to the success of this attack.

The attack was coordinated and well planned, which leads to smooth

(44) A-2, p. 89, A-10, A-11; (45) A-2, p. 89.

and rapid execution, lessening the possibilities of failure and casualties. This operation is an excellent example of the use of darkness as a cover to gain surprise and to avoid attacking the enemy's strength.

The E Company outpost platoon which repelled the counterattack on 17 February by staying in their holes, using their weapons and rendering accurate reports demonstrated the fighting ability of a small determined group of riflemen. The accurate reports to higher headquarters enabled the supporting arms to be used efficiently and promptly.

Unobserved artillery fire can be used effectively against armor. During the enemy attack 17 February 1945, no enemy armor appeared to our front, although it is definitely known that his plans called for the use of armor.

The division commander's foresight in using all three regiments in the attack to allow normal zones of action for the regiments and announcing his plan well in advance is an indication of his appreciation of the problems of subordinate commanders. This was a sound plan under the circumstances, due to the information we had gained of the enemy's strength and disposition.

The F Company platoon leader, who withdrew his platoon while a dense fog limited the visibility to a few yards, can be criticized for lack of appreciation that during periods of low visibility tactical dispositions must be the same as at night. Had this platoon stayed in its night position it could have supported the combat outpost by fire and prevented the outpost from becoming surrounded. The enemy was also guilty of the same offense.

Had the German's sentinel and warning system been adequate, we would not have been permitted to surprise and confuse him so completely. This is an inexcusable error in any command.

The enemy had become habitual in the routine of occupying his

defenses. These habits were the contributing factor to our scheme of maneuver which cost him dearly at a time that he could least afford losses.

The enemy had selected key terrain, organized it strongly against a frontal attack, but failed to organize in depth and all around. Consequently, he was totally unprepared to meet an attack from his rear and flanks.

The German reserves who were held mobile in towns to the rear and flank of his defensive position were of no value to him. Their approaches to the battle position were blocked by our combat outposts and artillery concentrations.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

1. Detailed plans and adequate orders are essential to eliminate confusion, save lives, and assist units in the accomplishment of their mission.

2. Active and aggressive patrolling is mandatory for units in the defense. The lack of such can lead to disaster.

3. When troops are thoroughly oriented on an operation, their morale will be high, their discipline good, and they will have confidence in their ability to accomplish the assigned mission.

4. During periods of low visibility, defending troops must occupy a tactical locality the same as they would during darkness.

5. Defending troops must not become habitual in their actions, because an alert enemy will take advantage of these habits and use them to his advantage.

6. A small group of riflemen, dug in, who appreciate the value of their weapons and are determined to fight, can hold ground against a much superior force.

7. Definite steps must be taken to control trench-foot during cold, damp weather.

*weak forces  
more aware*