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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 5TH RANGER INFANTRY BATTALION  
NEAR IRSCH AND ZERF GERMANY, 23 FEBRUARY - 5 MARCH 1945  
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: RANGER INFANTRY BATTALION  
INFILTRATING THROUGH ENEMY LINES AND SEIZING  
KEY TERRAIN

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 5th Ranger Infantry Battalion during the break-through of the Siegfried Line by XX Corps, 22 February 1945 - 5 March 1945.

In December 1944 the Third Army was poised for a break-through of the Siegfried Line and a drive to the Rhine River. (1) (See Map A) On 16 December 1944 the German Offensive in the Ardennes was launched and upset all plans for offensive action by the Third Army to the East. In a period of a few days the Third Army had shifted from a north-south line to an east-west line and attacked the South Flank of the German Offensive. (2) By the end of January 1945 the German salient had been reduced. (3)

During the Third Army counter offensive XX Corps held the southern flank of the Army from Luxembourg to the Seventh Army near Saarlautern. (4)

From 14 January to 15 February 1945 the 94th Division, a part of XX Corps, launched limited objective attacks against the switch position of the Siegfried Line in the Saar-Moselle Triangle. These had a two-fold mission, to indoctrinate the division which was green and to contain the forces occupying the position and if possible to make him<sup>self</sup> commit reserves intended for the Ardennes Offensive. The attacks were successful in both missions. (5)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

After the German Ardennes salient had been reduced, Third Army was composed of 4 Corps, VIII, III, XII and XX, on a line from north to south along the Our, Sauer, and Moselle Rivers. (6)

(1) A-2, p. 184; (2) A-1, p. 233; (3) A-1, p. 277; (4) A-7, p. 3; (5) A-7, p. 3; (6) A-2, p. 230.

On 29 January VIII Corps crossed the Our River and was followed by III Corps which widened the bridgehead. (7) On 6 February XII Corps crossed the Sauer River and attacked Bitburg. (8) III Corps was ordered to 1st Army on 11 February. (9)

XX Corps launched a coordinated attack on 19 February, with the 94th Division and the 10th Armored Division, to clear the Saar-Moselle Triangle. (10) (See Map B) The 5th Ranger Battalion was attached to the 94th Division for the operation. The 94th Division penetrated the fortified positions near Oberleuken and the 10th Armored Division exploited the break-through. By 21 February all organized resistance had ceased in the triangle. (11)

When the resistance had crumbled and both the 94th Division and the 10th Armored Division had closed up to the Saar River, General Patton directed that XX Corps cross the river and seize Trier. (12)

The only known enemy available to defend the Saar River and the approaches to Trier were the remnants of the 256th Volksgrenadier Division, and 416th Infantry Division, Headquarters and Service Troops, and the 11th Panzer Division, which had been badly cut up in the Saar-Moselle Triangle earlier in February. (13)

Although no plans had been made for a crossing of the Saar, bridging equipment and assault boats were made available during the night of 21-22 February. (14)

The 10th Armored Division, with the 376th RCT of the 94th Division attached, was to cross at Ockfen. (15) The 94th Division less the 376th RCT was to make diversionary crossings below Saarburg near Serrig and Taben. (16)

All along the Saar River the east bank was generally high and dominated the west bank. The fortifications of the Siegfried Line were placed to supplement the natural barriers. At Ockfen where the east bank was low the defenses were in much greater density than normal. While in the vicinity of Serrig and Taben, the east bank rose precip-

(7) A-2, p. 230; (8) A-2, p. 238; (9) A-2, p. 241; (10) A-7, p. 9;  
(11) A-7, p. 10; (12) A-7, p. 11; (13) A-7, p. 11; (14) A-7, p. 12;  
(15) A-7, p. 13; (16) A-7, p. 14.

itiously in steep cliffs and consequently, very few fortifications had been built. (17) The river was varied from 120 to 150 yards in width and all bridges had been blown. (18)

The crossing at Ockfen, initially made by the 376th Infantry, met with little success. (19) On the other hand, the crossings of the 94th Division at Taben and Stadt were very successful and by 25 February Serrig was cleared and two floating treadway bridges had been constructed. (20) The tank elements of the 10th Armored Division used these bridges to cross so that they could start their exploitation. (21)

The part played by the 5th Ranger Battalion in the break-out of the bridgehead and the subsequent capture of Trier is the subject to be covered by this monograph.

#### ORGANIZATION OF A RANGER BATTALION

Before getting further into the operation, it is necessary to explain to the reader the organization of a Ranger Battalion. Its organization differed considerably from that of a standard infantry battalion.

The Battalion was composed of seven companies; Headquarters and Headquarters Company and six lettered companies, A through F inclusive. Each lettered company had an authorized strength of three officers and 62 enlisted men. The company was organized into a company headquarters, two assault platoons and a weapons platoon. The company headquarters had one officer and four enlisted men, a 1st sergeant, radio operator and two runners. Each assault platoon had a platoon headquarters and two nine man rifle sections. Platoon headquarters had six men, a platoon leader, platoon sgt, two runners and a rocket launcher team. The rifle sections were composed of a section leader, assistant section leader, a two man automatic rifle team and five riflemen. The weapons platoon had two light machine guns and two 60 mm mortars.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company consisted of approximately 120 men. It handled all supply, mess and administration for the entire

(17) A-7, p. 12; (18) A-7, p. 13; (19) A-7, p. 13; (20) A-7, p. 14;  
(21) A-7, p. 15.

battalion. There was very little organic transportation and what there was, was in Headquarters Company. There was also a small communication section in Headquarters Company. SCR 300 radios were used in the battalion command net as well as in each company command net. There was no organic communication between lettered company headquarters and the weapons platoons. SCR 536 radios were often used for mortar fire control.

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

At 212400 February 1945 the 5th Ranger Battalion was detached from the 94th Infantry Division and attached to the 3rd Cavalry Group. (22) The Battalion was assigned the mission of securing the west bank of the Saar River from Hamm south to and including the bend near Orscholz. (See Map C) The Battalion Command Post was in Weiten. "C" and "D" Companies were in Orscholz, E Company in Keuchingen, A Company east of Weiten, B Company in Rodt and F Company in Hamm. (23) Each company sent out contact patrols right and left and outposted the river at strategic points.

E and F Companies were at about half strength and all other companies were at approximately full strength.

The attachment to the Cavalry was short lived. At about 221200 February the Battalion less Companies B and F was ordered to assemble in Weiten. Companies C and D were hauled in trucks while companies A and E marched on foot. Companies B and F were assembled in Rodt. (24)

The Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Richard P. Sullivan, went to the Command Post of the 94th Division to receive his orders for a new mission. (25) At 221300 February he returned to Weiten and gave the assembled company commanders the order for the mission.

The Battalion was to cross the Saar River into the 302nd Infantry bridgehead near Taben at about 221800 February, pass through the 302nd Infantry, infiltrate the German positions and cut the Irsch-Zerf Road (22) A-7, p. 40; (23) A-7, p. 31; (24) A-7, p. 59; (25) A-7, p. 31

in the vicinity of Crossroad 492. The mission was to block re-enforcements from reaching the bridgehead and to keep the road free for the 10th Armored Division to use in breaking out of the bridgehead. (26)

All companies except Company C were to turn in their mortars and draw two additional machine guns, ten boxes of ammunition were to be carried for each machine gun and each man not carrying machine gun or mortar ammunition was to carry two AT mines. One K ration and 1/3 D ration were to be carried by each man, and halazone tablets were to be taken to purify water. (27)

After accomplishing all of the above preparations and feeding the troops a hot meal, each company marched to Rodt. The Battalion Command Post moved to Taben during the afternoon. By 221800 February all companies were in assembly areas around Rodt. Company A lost two officers and several men when two large caliber shells landed on the company column while it was moving to Rodt. (27)

At 1800 the Battalion Commander, the S-3 and a platoon from Company B crossed the river on a foot bridge near Taben and contacted the Executive Officer of the 1st Battalion 301st Infantry. His unit was crossing the bridge and would not be clear for two hours. A runner was dispatched to the Ranger Battalion Executive Officer, Major Hugo Hefflefinger, at Rodt to start the battalion across the river as soon as the bridge was clear. The Battalion Commander then went to the Command Post of the 302nd Infantry on top of Hocker Hill. Here the Executive Officer of the 302nd Infantry was contacted and the situation and troop distribution in the bridgehead was learned. (29)

In the meantime at 2000 hours the Battalion had started to cross the foot bridge and had contacted guides from Company B who led the column up the slopes of Hocker Hill. The path was extremely steep, almost vertical in places. Loaded down with mines and ammunition and wearing shoepacs and mackinaws, the men soon became overheated and frequent halts had to be made. The sides of the path were littered with discarded and lost equipment that previous columns had dropped. Constant (26), (27), Personal knowledge; (28) A-9, p. 60; (29) A-7, p. 31.



supervision had to be maintained to make sure none of the vital equipment, necessary to accomplish the mission, was lost in the same manner.

(30)

When the column was approximately half way up the hill, Colonel Sullivan sent for the Company Commanders to join him at the command post of the 302nd Infantry.

Here the final plan was given at 222400 February. The battalion would pass through the 302nd Infantry at 230200 February in two columns. Companies C, F and A on the left under Colonel Sullivan and Companies D, E and B on the right under the S-3, Captain Edward Luther. Each company was to be in single file, one company directly behind the one in front with no interval. This made two long columns approximately 60 yards apart. At the head of each column were two men with automatic rifles and two with submachine guns. No flank security or patrols to the front were to be used. Both columns were to march on a magnetic azimuth of  $10^{\circ}$  until daylight. (31)

At that time the Battalion was joined by a Field Artillery Liaison Officer and three forward observer parties from the 284th Field Artillery Battalion, a Corps Artillery Battalion.

The 302nd Infantry, with one battalion of the 301st Infantry attached, extended around Hocker Hill to the river road and along the road to Serrig. (32)

The enemy situation was very vague at that time. The defenses along the east bank of the river had been manned by two fortress battalions and remnants of the two division which had been badly mangled in the clearing of the Saar-Moselle Triangle. In addition one battalion of the 111th Panzer Grenadier Regiment from the 11th Panzer Division had been committed to cut the defile between Serrig and the Taben crossings. Strong resistance had not developed at that time around Hocker Hill, but was expected at any time. (33)

(30), Personal knowledge; (31), Personal knowledge; (32) A-7, p. 14;  
(33), Personal knowledge.

## THE INFILTRATION

At 0200 hours the two columns moved out very slowly as it was difficult to keep direction on the steep, rock and brush covered slopes. Just as the lead companies started to move, several artillery rounds landed on the rear of the battalion. One forward observer party was completely lost and both Companies B and E had several casualties. Company E lost one officer and its 1st sergeant. (34)

There were frequent stops while the heads of the columns checked the direction of advance. Some men were very tired, not having slept in over thirty hours and consequently, fell asleep at the halts. A rocket launcher team of Company D, which was the last element of the Company, went to sleep during a halt and did not awaken until the column had moved off. The Company Commander of Company E seeing what had happened then started leading the remaining portion of the column on the 10° azimuth. The same thing had happened in the rear of Company E and in the middle of Company B. In each case the new column continued on a 10° azimuth. (35)

All during the first two hours of movement, digging could be heard on both flanks of the columns, but no enemy was directly encountered. Company E captured one prisoner who was trying to find the American lines to surrender. He was taken along with the column. All men were cautioned to hold talking to the necessary passing of orders and to be careful not to make any noise. The mines and machine gun ammunition constantly banged on rocks and scraped on brush, but evidently these sounds were not detected by the enemy. (36)

About 0430 hours the heads of both columns reached a paved road about 600 yards north of Hocker Hill. Here the lead man in the right column ran into an outpost. There was a short exchange of fire and the head man of Company D was wounded and three Germans were captured. (37) Within five minutes the two parts of the right column which had become separated reached the road and rejoined the column. One platoon of Company B was missing. It consisted of one officer and about 20 men. All other elements arrived at the road without mishap. (38)

(34), (35), (36), Personal knowledge; (37) A-7, p. 32; (38), Personal knowledge.

The Battalion then continued on the 10° azimuth for approximately 400 yards. It had begun to grow light by then and the troops were again on high ground. The Battalion halted, formed a perimeter and the Battalion Commander ordered two patrols of one officer and three men each to reconnoiter east and north to accurately determine the battalion position. (39)

While waiting for the return of these patrols, the companies checked men and equipment and the men ate one meal of their K ration. After approximately an hour, both patrols returned and the position was fixed as the high ground approximately 1000 yards north of Hocker Hill. This information and the probable route of advance was radioed to Corps Artillery so that they would not fire on the Battalion. (40)

The Battalion then formed a diamond formation with Company E leading, Company D on the left, Company C on the right, Companies F and D in the rear, and Company B and the command group in the center with the prisoners, which by now numbered about 50. (41) The direction of advance was shifted to the northeast to follow the high ground. Many bunkers and pillboxes were encountered, but many were not manned or were only lightly occupied. Several light skirmishes resulted, but the battalion suffered no casualties and captured or killed all of the enemy actually seen. Movement was slow for security reasons and because of the need to maintain direction. As a result of the interruptions caused by the small fights it was necessary to halt again, after moving approximately 1200 yards, to relocate the actual battalion position. The diamond formation offered an excellent perimeter defense at the halt. (42) The battalion was now in heavy woods and it was difficult for patrols to actually determine the exact location. The artillery liaison officer requested two rounds of artillery fired on the final objective, and when these landed it was possible to ascertain the position very accurately. (43)

The direction of movement was changed to north and again the battalion moved out. The same problems again were encountered with regard to the constant surprising of one and two enemy soldiers hanging out wash, (39) A-7, p. 32; (40) A-7, p. 32; (41), Personal knowledge; (42), Personal knowledge; (43) A-7, p. 32.

carrying messages or just loafing. After moving about 800 yards, three large pillboxes were seen on the left and were investigated. A patrol approached the rear of the boxes and surprised approximately thirty German soldiers. These were taken prisoner and the column moved out again. (44) Several hundred yards farther on, Company E spotted some German infantry on their left. Company D was notified by radio. Almost immediately Company D came face to face with them and a fierce fight ensued. It was apparently part of a company in reserve and they had been surprised by Company D. Forty enemy were killed or wounded and about 10 captured. Company D lost two men killed. (45) At about the same time, Company A captured a German medical officer and an artillery officer in a white staff car. (46) They confirmed the battalion location as about 3000 yards inside the German lines.

The Battalion then moved on several hundred yards to high ground and halted. It was 1600 hours and the objective was visible from the high ground. The men were ordered to dig in as some light artillery fire was being received. (47)

A patrol from Company A was sent out at dark, about 2000 hours, to reconnoiter a group of farm houses at a cross road near Kalfertshaus. They reported them clear except for civilians hiding in the cellars. The Battalion Commander ordered all companies to move to the farm houses individually with a 15 minute interval between companies, and by 2400 hours all companies were in the farm houses. (48) Company F was posted as security and the remainder of the Battalion attempted to rest. The civilians were herded into one barn under guard. A patrol from Company F was sent to search the buildings at Kalfertshaus, which was on the route to the objective. The patrol was fired on from Kalfertshaus and after a short fight, the buildings were cleared and approximately 30 prisoners were captured. (49) They were from an artillery battery which had pulled out just before the patrol approached.

At 0530, just as it was getting light, Companies E and C started for the objective. The battalion command group went with Company C which (44), (45), (46) A-7, p. 32; (47), (48), (49) A-7, p. 33.

was following Company E. They passed through Kalfertshaus and up an <sup>war</sup>improved road to Cross Road 492 on the Irsch-Zerf road. Three pillboxes were cleared but they contained only civilians. A forester was in one box and he confirmed the location. Mines were placed on the main road and an outpost consisting of a rocket launcher team and an automatic rifle team was placed in a hedgeline at the cross road by Company E.

(50) The remainder of the Battalion was brought up and a perimeter defense was set up in a rectangle, approximately 200 yards by 1000 yards.

(51) (See Map D) Company E was on the north covering the road, Company C on the west covering a large open field and the approaching road from Irsch. Companies D and F were on the east covering the approaches from Zerf, Company A was on the south occupying some pillboxes near Kalfertshaus while Company B was in the center guarding prisoners, who now numbered about 150. The Command Post was in a hospital bunker near the center of the perimeter.

#### DEFENSE OF CROSS ROAD

By 1000 hours the positions were consolidated. (52) The main road was being used as a route for walking wounded and stragglers. A large number of prisoners were taken, as a result, by the outpost from Company E. No vehicular traffic was sighted until about 1100 hours. At that time armored vehicle was heard approaching from the West and the troops believing it to be from the 10th Armored Division coming to meet us were very jubilant, but when it appeared it was a German self propelled gun. When the crew saw the mines and outpost they stopped and jumped out of the vehicle. They attempted to set it afire, but the automatic fire starters failed. The crew got away but the vehicle was captured. It was in the middle of the cross road and effectively blocked all traffic. It was set on fire by Company E and left in the middle of the road. (53)

Nothing else of importance occurred for several hours. The time was spent bettering positions and registering defensive artillery fires.

(50), Personal knowledge; (51) A-7, p. 33; (52), (53), Personal knowledge.

About 1400 large numbers of enemy troops marching in columns of twos or threes were observed to the northeast. They were about two miles from the battalion position and moving northwest. They were out of range of the supporting artillery, so no action could be taken other than to report it to Corps. It was estimated at a reinforced battalion. (54)

At about 1530 Company A on the south was attacked by a force of about 200 enemy. They were forced from several bunkers and pillboxes, and were cut off from the rest of the Battalion. They fought their way back to the Battalion after about an hour and formed a new line North of Kalfertshaus re-establishing the perimeter. (55)

At about 1600 Company E on the north was attacked by approximately 400 enemy from the northwest. They used several self propelled, high velocity guns, probably 75 mm, for support. No penetrations were made, although the outpost at the road junction was in the path of the main effort and was overrun. One man was killed and one man severely wounded, and the automatic rifle was captured. Ten dead Germans were found in the position when the outpost was re-established. The combined fire power of defensive artillery and automatic weapons finally forced the enemy to withdraw. All of the machine gun ammunition which Company E had was expanded and additional boxes were obtained from Company C. Four men including one officer were wounded. Several Germans were captured and the unit was identified as the 2nd Battalion, 136th Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Mountain Division which had newly arrived in the sector. The regiment had been assigned the mission of occupying the ridge that the 5th Ranger Battalion occupied as the next major defense line to hold the bridgehead. (56)

The battalion situation was precarious as Companies A and E had exhausted all of their machine gun ammunition and had dipped into the other companies' reserves. A radio message from Corps was received which stated that the Task Force of the 10th Armored Division would not arrive on the 24th as originally planned, but could be expected on the 25th. (54), Personal knowledge; (55) A-9, p. 63; (56), Personal knowledge.

Radio batteries were giving out. The SCR 300 radios in the battalion net could barely be heard at the Command Post, only several hundred yards from the farthest company. All of the artillery radio batteries and the ones from the battalion sets were pooled and rotated so that they would last longer. All communication to Corps Headquarters was through artillery fire control channels. Food and water were scarce. The men were eating captured German rations and drinking bottles of Vichy water found in many of the bunkers. (57)

An aerial re-supply of ammunition, radio batteries and food was requested. At about 1700 hours a flight of liaison planes flew over and ground recognition panels were displayed. As they lost altitude to drop the supplies, which were to be dropped free, a high volume of light anti-aircraft fire was directed at them from the woods, several thousand yards to the northwest. The planes were forced to drop the supplies from about 2000 ft. Only a small percentage landed in the perimeter and none of it was usable. It was later learned that every plane used in the re-supply flight had been damaged by the anti-aircraft fire. (58)

During the afternoon a forward observer with Company C noticed an enemy artillery battery firing about 3000 yards west of the perimeter. They were firing west into the 94th Division bridgehead. Counter battery fire was requested but was refused, as the forward elements of the 94th Division had been reported at that point. The battery continued to fire until dark. The next morning the guns were gone. (59)

Everything was quiet for the remainder of the 24th. At about 250300 February the outposts of Company E started firing. Soon the entire company was engaged in a heavy fire fight. Defensive artillery fires were called for by the Company Commander. The attack was so heavy that the enemy overran the company position at about 0330. The Company Commander, cut off from his platoons, gathered all the men he could find and fell back about 50 yards to the south of a fire break and set up a new line. The available men consisted of the Company Commander, two radio operators, (57), (58), (59), Personal knowledge.

a field artillery officer and two field artillery radio operators. The Battalion Commander sent a platoon of Company A and one from Company C to reinforce Company E. With these two platoons a new line was established at the fire break. Only scattered enemy soldiers attempted to cross the fire break and all were killed or captured. In the meantime, all available artillery fires had been called down on the original company position. (60) Corps Artillery used eight artillery battalions to furnish these fires. (61) After the attack had been stopped, periodic concentrations were fired the rest of the night around the entire perimeter.

At 250630 February Company F with a strength of 26 men, attacked through the new line on the north and regained without opposition, the ground lost by Company E. The Battalion Commander then had artillery concentrations fired on all likely assembly areas north of the Irscherf Road. (62) Three wounded men and fire bodies of men from Company E and the bodies of approximately 160 Germans were found in the area. Eleven men from Company E were missing. The wounded men were so seriously wounded that the Germans had left them. They had talked to a German officer and reported that approximately 400 enemy took part in the attack. When the artillery came in there had been no place for them to take cover, as originally Company E had only had about 35 holes dug. After about an hour the Germans had pulled out taking the eleven missing men with them. A German halftrack had hit a mine on the road during the attack and was destroyed. (63)

With the coming of daylight, units were separated and re-organized. Company E had one officer and four men left. Two ammunition bearers had been after ammunition when their positions were overrun and escaped capture. Company E was ordered to guard prisoners and establish security around the battalion command post. (64)

At about 0900 American tanks were seen approaching from the west along the main road. At 0930 they arrived at the cross road and said

(60), Personal knowledge; (61) A-11 p. 276; (62) A-7, p. 34; (63), (64), Personal knowledge.



their mission was to go on to Zerf. The column consisted of five tanks and four half tracks. With this group was the platoon of Company B which had been missing the morning of the 23rd. (65) About 6 hours later a large armored column arrived and lent the battalion several half tracks to evacuate the wounded. (66) The Battalion had over thirty wounded men, some seriously. No American medical officer was available, but the captured medical officer with the help of the medical technician of the Battalion Medical Detachment did invaluable service. Not one man who reached the aid station died, even though some were at the aid station for over 48 hours before evacuation. (67)

Just before darkness the executive officer arrived with several trucks with food, water, ammunition and radio batteries. These same trucks evacuated the prisoners. (68)

Nothing happened that night, but on the morning of the 26th just before dawn, a report came to the battalion command post that a large patrol had penetrated the perimeter. Company E was sent out to investigate. The company commander heard a very large column going through the brush between the command post and Company C. No fire was delivered until the column reached a point near the center of Company C. At that time three companies opened fire on the column from four directions. It began to grow light just as fire was opened. About 150 were killed and over 200 captured including several officers. The enemy was apparently not aware of the location of the battalion, as they had not dispersed and were talking loudly when surprised by the opening of fire. (69)

All that day nothing of importance took place. The Irsch-Zerf Road was still critical as the armored columns had gone on and no infantry had followed. Unarmored columns could not use the road that day.

During the afternoon four tanks, four tank destroyers and four multiple caliber .50 machine gun mounts on half tracks were attached to the Battalion. They were used to bolster the perimeter.

At about 0500 on the morning of the 27th a line of infantry was observed approaching the perimeter from the north, from the same direction as (65), (66), (67), Personal knowledge; (68) A-7, p. 34; (69), Personal knowledge.

the attack on the 24th. The sentries challenged, it was not immediately answered and the perimeter opened fire. An officer of the approaching unit ran forward and identified himself and stopped the firing. It was Company K, 301st Infantry on a mission to take the high ground to the southeast. They had not been told the Ranger Battalion occupied the woods at the cross roads and was clearing them prior to attacking the high ground. The company lost two killed and eight wounded. (70)

After daylight the Battalion Commander used Company A and the attached tank platoon to assist K Company, 301st Infantry to take their objective, Hill 4, several hundred yards southeast of the perimeter. (See Map C) This was accomplished against light opposition. (71) The remainder of the 27th was spent in the perimeter.

### ATTACK OF HILL 3

On the morning of the 28th the Battalion was assigned the mission of attacking the high ground south of Kalfertshaus. At 0900 Company C sent a combat patrol to feel out the area. They ran into a stiff fight which lasted for about 15 minutes and then returned with about 100 prisoners. (72) At 1130 hours Companies C and D, supported by tanks and tank destroyers, attacked to secure Hill 3. The heights were steep and heavily wooded which channelized the armored vehicles. Initially the attack was unopposed, but about half of the way up the hill, the two companies were hit with very heavy concentrations of rocket and artillery fire. The rockets were about 320 mm caliber and had a tremendous concussion. The companies were forced to halt and dig in as the area covered by the fire was too large to get clear of by continuing on. After the concentrations had stopped the advance continued and the nose of the hill was taken. Company A was sent up abreast of Company C and the advance continued. About 200 yards from the crest of the hill the attack was stopped by heavy small arms fire, and one tank was damaged by a panzerfaust. The enemy launched an immediate counter attack, but this was repulsed. Here the companies dug in for the night. At dusk B and F Companies were brought up and placed on line. All night the pos-

(70) A-7, p. 34; (71) A-7, p. 35; (72) A-9, p. 66.

ition was pounded by the heavy rockets mixed with artillery causing the battalion heavy casualties. The command post was in a bunker near Kalfertshaus. (73)

At dawn on the 29th Companies A and F attacked in an attempt to capture the top of the hill. They followed an artillery preparation by 50 yards and caught the Germans still in their holes and bunkers. They captured 115 prisoners including 10 officers and secured several bunkers on the hill. (74)

The remainder of the battalion moved up and extended a line across the hill and saddle between Hills 3 and 4. This was a sector of about 2500 yards, wider than the five companies could hold. At 1900 the enemy attacked Companies B and C in strength and penetrated part of Company B's positions. The Germans were never entirely thrown out until the following day when Headquarters Company organized into three provisional rifle platoons was brought up and took over the left of the line. This made contact on the left with the 301st Infantry easier and allowed the open right flank to be properly secured. (75)

All was quiet on 1 and 2 March except for the constant rocket concentrations. These came in every 45 minutes like clockwork. (76)

On 3 March Corps Artillery fired a "serenade" on Grimerath, which was the suspected location of the rocket launchers. This quieted them for several hours and the concentrations were never again as large or as frequent. (77)

Also on 3 March the remainder of Company E was attached to Company A and the Company Commander of Company E took over Company B which had a strength of one officer and 19 men. The morning of the 4th small counter attacks were received but were driven off by the tanks and machine gun fire.

#### RELIEF

The afternoon of 4 March an advance detail from the 3rd Battalion, 376th Infantry arrived to reconnoiter for the relief of the 5th Ranger Battalion. (78) At 0100 5 March the relief started. Sections were relieved individually and assembled near Kalfertshaus. The companies then marched individually (73), Personal knowledge; (74) A-9, p. 67; (75), (76), (77), Personal knowledge; (78) A-4, p. 367.

about 2 miles west on the Irsch-Zerf Road to a turn-around where trucks were waiting. The Battalion was then taken to Serrig and placed in division reserve. Two days later the Battalion was placed in corps reserve and moved to Luxembourg to refit, receive replacements and train.

The Battalion had suffered 45 killed, 213 wounded and 11 missing. The enemy dead which were counted on position, numbered over 300 and over 700 prisoners were turned over to the 94th Division. (79)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The use of the 5th Ranger Battalion on the infiltration phase of the mission just described shows a proper use of a ranger unit. The high state of training and morale made possible the carrying out of a difficult operation. Casualties were light for the period which the Battalion was actually cutting the Irsch-Zerf Road. However, in the sustained heavy combat during the attack on Hill 3, the Battalion suffered excessive casualties because of the small units and light weapons. (80) With no mortars and only light machine guns it would have been impossible to withstand the counter attacks or to launch an attack itself without the heavy and accurate artillery support.

The initial infiltration was successful because the enemy had not yet built up a line to contain the bridgehead. However, the platoon from Company B that became lost, tried later the morning of 23 February but could find no gap in the line. A delay of a few hours in the departure of the Battalion would have rendered the mission impossible. *of accomplishment.*

When moving in the enemy rear area efforts were constantly made to keep from running into any large enemy concentrations and becoming engaged so that further movement would be impossible. All enemy soldiers encountered were captured, killed or seriously wounded so that one direction of movement was difficult to establish immediately. Frequent change in direction also aided in eluding any intercepting force which might be sent out.

After reaching the cross road the mines were laid on the surface of the black top road. The morning of 25 February after Company F re-captured the (79), (80), A-7, p. 35.

cross road. The mines were still in place and an enemy half track had been knocked out by a mine. Although the German troops had held possession of the road for several hours, they had not removed the mines, leaving the road still effectively denied to vehicular traffic. The heavy artillery concentrations denied its use to foot elements.

The failure of the 10th Armored Division to make contact with the Battalion within 48 hours as planned, resulted in the exhaustion of radio batteries, ammunition, food and water. These complications should have been foreseen and larger supplies carried by the Battalion. The failure of the aerial re-supply was the result of the use of free drop. If parachutes had been used on the bundles some items would have been in usable condition. Instead every bundle which landed in the perimeter was damaged beyond use. Parachutes were not available because the short time available to get the mission accomplished did not allow Corps to obtain any from other sources.

In establishing the perimeter no depth was available. Because of the small size of the Battalion it was necessary to put all companies on line except Company B which was guarding prisoners and which was short a platoon. Flexibility was obtained by pulling platoons from portions of the line not in contact to bolster heavily attacked portions. Had the 136th Infantry (German) committed their battalions in a coordinated attack rather than piecemeal, they probably could have completely overrun the Battalion position and destroyed the Battalion as a unit. After the Battalion had been in the perimeter 48 hours the enemy was still not certain of its position as indicated by the destruction of one battalion of the 136th Infantry on the morning of 26 February within the perimeter.

The battalion which did penetrate the perimeter on 26 February went through a narrow sector where Companies A and C joined. It was never determined just why the gap was present. If it had not been present, the approaching battalion would undoubtedly have been fired on and then deployed and attacked. As they were equipped with approximately one light machine gun for every three men, it is doubtful whether the perimeter could have withstood the attack.

A factor contributing to the slow movement forward of the 10th Armored Division to contact the Battalion, was the artillery battery which was ob-