

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1947 - 1948

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 8TH INFANTRY  
(4TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE HURTGEN FOREST,  
GERMANY, 16-22 NOVEMBER 1944 (RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 1

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INTRODUCTION

The Battle of the Hurtgen Forest, Germany, which took place in November and December of 1944, will undoubtedly take its place in history along side such epic encounters as those that occurred in the Battle of The Wilderness in the War Between the States and the Battle of the Argonne Forest in World War 1. First Lieutenant Bernard F. Ray, Company F, 8th Infantry, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously, for his action in the assault of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, against the prepared positions of the Germans in this forest on 17 November 1944. Two days later on 19 November 1944, Lieutenant Colonel George L. Mabry, Jr. (then Major), Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, personally led the Battalion in extremely difficult fighting in such a manner that he too was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

This historical account will deal with the action of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, during the period 16-22 November, 1944 in the Hurtgen Forest. Between 1245 hours on 16 November 1944 and dark of that same day this battalion, a veteran combat unit which had led the assault on Utah Beach in Normandy on 6 June 1944, had lost approximately 135 officers and enlisted men, killed or wounded. These figures, together with the examples of courage and leadership listed in the above paragraph, will give the reader an indication of the type of resistance encountered in the cold, damp Hurtgen Forest. The fact that this attack was finally successful, although every foot of ground was stubbornly contested, is a monument to the leadership and courage of the officers and grim determination and fortitude of the soldiers of the United States Army.

In order to orient the reader for this operation it is

necessary to go back to the Battle of France. ~~With~~ the defeat in Normandy the Germans had suffered severe losses in both men and material. These losses continued to grow throughout the withdrawal across France and Belgium. The Seventh German Army had suffered the brunt of the defeat in Normandy but its withdrawal, although greatly hampered by the constant air and ground attacks of the Allied Forces, was a planned withdrawal and was as orderly as possible under the existing conditions. The Fifteenth German Army, which was disposed along the coast in the Calais area of France, continued to hold the Scheldt Estuary on 15 September 1944 even though most of its armor had been withdrawn. The intent here was to deny the Allies the use of the great port of Antwerp, Belgium. In order to slow the advance of the Allies and to cover the withdrawals, The Fifth German Panzer Army had been moved into France and Belgium and successfully accomplished its mission, especially on the northern flank. (See Map A) (1)

The withdrawing German Armies were closely pursued and by the middle of September 1944 the Allied Armies were disposed along the German border facing the Siegfried line. (See Map A) The vaunted line had actually been penetrated in two places without too much difficulty -- in the Schnee Eifel Forest east of St. Vith, Belgium and in the Hurtgen Forest southeast of Aachen, Germany. (See Map B) However, even though enemy resistance was relatively light, it became necessary to halt the advance. This halt was necessitated by two factors. First, the supply lines were greatly over-extended; The advance had been so rapid that the supply installations could not maintain the pace. Secondly, the units along the front were greatly over-extended and there were wide gaps between the front line

(1) A-1, p.131

divisions. Many commanders at this time thought that the end of the war was in sight and the morale of the troops was of the highest order. However, the only alternative was to halt, consolidate and ~~maintain~~ (2)

German losses in France had been great. Their casualties, including killed, wounded and captured had reached one million men by the end of September 1944. This total included the losses of the First German Army to the Sixth United States Army Group in the Southern France Campaign. However, the enemy's will to resist had not been destroyed. Rather, it was strengthened by the knowledge that he was now fighting on the soil of his homeland. He was desperately in need of an opportunity to reorganize and re-equip and our poor logistical situation, together with the poor weather conditions of this period, gave him that ~~opportunity~~ (3)

Even though the difficulties were great, the Allies made some gains during October 1944. After several weeks of fierce resistance by the Germans and determined attacks by the Allies, Aachen was captured by units of VII United States Corps on 21 October. This was the first large German city to fall but fighting here was to characterize the determined resistance to be later encountered in this area. A foothold was gained in the city of Stolberg during the period but nowhere along the front could a major operation be mounted. (See Map B) (4)

By 22 October 1944 the supply situation of the First United States Army had eased somewhat. Railheads had been pushed forward and the "Red Ball" highway had been in operation for some time. It now began to appear that the logistical situation would be able to sustain a ~~major offensive~~. The zone of action of the (2) A-1, p.131; (3) A-2, p.69-71; (4) A-2, p.71

First United States Army at this time extended from Aachen, Germany on the north; south generally along the German border to a junction with the Third United States Army where the French, German and Luxembourg borders intersect. (See Map B) (5)

The Allied High Command had not been idle during the build-up period. In spite of the opinions of many military experts that a major offensive during winter is impossible, plans were laid for just such an operation. The "big picture" strategy was to strike at the important industrial areas of Germany, the Ruhr and the Saar, thereby forcing the German High Command to commit its General Reserve. This would afford the Allies the opportunity to destroy this reserve, to overrun Germany proper and thus to end the war in Europe. In support of this strategy, the First United States Army and the Third United States Army were to advance eastward to the Rhine River. Then the Ninth United States Army and the British Second Army were to attack to the north. The major attack was to be made along the front from Roermond on the north to a point about ten miles south of Aachen. In this attack the First United States Army was to make the main effort on its left. Seven Corps, three British and two of the Ninth United States Army and <sup>the</sup> VII and V Corps of the United States First Army, were to make a coordinated attack early in November 1944. (See Map A) (6)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The winter offensive was planned for early November 1944. The exact date of D-Day was to be dependent upon the availability of ammunition and supplies and also upon suitable weather for air operations. A tremendous air effort was planned with the mission

(5) A-3, p.63; (6) A-4, p.64-65

of blasting a path through the enemy defenses protecting Duren.

(7)

It was known by the end of October that numerous enemy reinforcements had been brought into the line opposite the First United States Army. Therefore, in order for the main effort to be successful, it became evident that additional troops would have to be provided in the area opposite Duren. Accordingly, the 104th Infantry Division was assigned to the VII Corps and the 99th Infantry Division to the V Corps. Corps boundaries were not changed as a result of this regrouping so the zones of the divisions were considerably reduced. To further strengthen the main effort, which was to be made by VII Corps, the 4th Infantry Division was transferred from V Corps to VII Corps. Therefore, on 10 November the order of battle of the First United States Army was as follows:

<u>VII CORPS</u>	<u>V CORPS</u>	<u>VIII CORPS</u>
1st Inf. Div.	8th Inf. Div.	2nd Inf. Div.
4th Inf. Div.	99th Inf. Div.	28th Inf. Div.
104th Inf. Div.	102nd Cav. Gp.	9th Armd. Div.
47th RCT	5th Armd. Div. (-CCR)	83rd Inf. Div.
3rd Armd. Div.	9th Inf. Div. (-47 RCT)	14th Cav. Gp.
CCR, 5th Armd. Div.		
4th Cav. Group		

Dependent upon the weather, D-Day was to be between 11-16 November. If the weather had not cleared by 16 November sufficiently for the major air effort which was planned the attack was to begin regardless. (8)

The 9th Infantry Division had broken the Siegfried Line early in September and by 17 September, when the advance was halted, had reached a line which extended from Schevenhutte, Germany, south to a point east of Lammersdorf and thence to Hofen. (See Map B) This part of the front then remained static and inactive (7) A-3, p.67; (8) A-3, p.71-74

from that date until the winter offensive began. The halt was called for the same reasons that the other divisions had been forced to halt. The divisions along the front were spread too thin and there were not sufficient supplies available to sustain the drive. Even though at this time the division was meeting only slight resistance and practically no prepared defensive positions, further advance was out of the question. (9)

Next page The Germans used the period of inactivity from 17 September to the first part of November to good advantage. They were not idle during this lull in the fighting. Troops were moved into the Hurtgen Forest sector and work on fortifications was begun. It was about this time that the independent Fortress Battalions appeared along the front. These units were placed under the command of headquarters of divisions which had been badly mauled in France. Their mission was to prepare and hold the line while the divisional units were withdrawn to the rear to reorganize and be refitted. (10)

In addition to the Fortress Battalions, the enemy made extensive use of labor battalions and the civilian populace in preparing field fortifications to plug the gap the Allied Forces had punched in the West Wall. With very little interference from our forces, the enemy set about digging extensive trench systems in depth, building underground shelters and preparing automatic weapons positions which were provided with overhead cover. Barbed wire was put in all along the front and around strong points and extensive communication systems were installed. And last but by no means least, mine fields were laid -- mine fields of all sizes and all types, anti-tank mines and anti-personnel mines. The entire area was literally strewn with ~~Schu~~

(9) A-3, p.50; (10) A-3, p.57

mines and other anti-personnel types. Every road, trail and fire break was blocked with Teller, Riegel and Box mines as well as abatis. It was by no means unusual to find the few roads in the area blocked every hundred yards or so by mines and trees felled across the road. To make these blocks difficult to remove, liberal use was made of anti-personnel mines and booby traps. Anti-personnel mine fields followed no general pattern and were emplaced along the front and in depth. Few of these mined areas were marked and it is doubtful that even the German troops knew their exact location and extent. (11)

144 The Germans knew that the Hurtgen Forest played a vital role in their defenses protecting the Cologne plain and the Ruhr. They knew that so long as they held the forest and thereby the Roer River dams, the invasion of Germany in this region would be slow and costly. Therefore, the forest was included in the defense of the Siegfried line which ran along its western edge and extended into it in depth for several miles. (12)

#### THE DIVISION SITUATION

The relief of the 4th Infantry Division by the 9th Infantry Division in the area of Bullingen, Germany was completed on 6 November. The division began moving north to VII Corps zone that night. The movement was classified secret and all divisional insignia were removed from personnel and vehicles. All personnel were informed of the importance of security and instructed not to reveal their organization or destination. At 1500 on 6 November the 12th Regimental Combat Team was attached to the hard-pressed 28th Infantry Division and moved at once to relieve the 109th Infantry just south of the village of Hurtgen. The

(11) A-6, p.27-28; (12) A-7

8th Regimental Combat Team moved on the night of 7-8 November and went into assembly areas in VII Corps zone about 3500 yards east of the village of Zweifall. (See Map C) The 22nd Regimental Combat Team moved on the night of 8-9 November to complete the move of the Division. (13)

The 12th Regimental Combat Team was relieved from attachment to the 28th Division on 10 November and moved to assembly areas in VII Corps zone that night. Once again the "Famous Fourth" was assembled and preparing for the attack. (14)

There followed a period of inactivity while waiting for the weather to clear. This period was characterized by the efforts of the troops to keep warm. The assembly areas assigned to the 8th Infantry contained no buildings or shelter of any kind except for an occasional pill box and these were used for regimental and battalion command posts. Log cabins were constructed for protection against the weather and long range artillery, stoves were improvised and the command settled down to waiting for the day when they would once again move to the attack. (15)

The mission of the 4th Infantry Division, which was to attack on the right of VII Corps zone, was "to seize the crossings of the Roer River near Duren and to the south of this city and be prepared to assist the advance of the 1st Infantry Division in the capture of Cologne." (See Map B) (16)

The plan of attack of the Commanding General, 4th Infantry Division, was to have the three regiments advance abreast, the 8th on the left, the 22nd in the center and the 12th on the right. The initial objective was to cut the Hurtgen-Duren highway. (See Map C) The regiments whose sectors were very narrow were to attack in a column of battalions. (17)

(13) A-5, p.292-298; (14) A-5, p.304; (15) A-7; (16) A-3, p.73;  
(17) A-6, p.27, A-7

## TERRAIN ORIENTATION

In order that the reader may better visualize the action that took place, it is deemed desirable to orient him on the Hurtgen Forest, the terrain, and the weather conditions that prevailed during November and December of 1944. All of these factors played a vital role in the actions of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, and had a direct influence on its successes and failures.

- The Hurtgen Forest covers an area of some 50 square miles in the shape of a rough triangle. The points of this triangle are anchored in the vicinity of Aachen, Duren and Monschau. (See Map B) The forest is a vast expanse of tall, closely packed fir trees and dense hardwood trees. By and large the area is covered with entangled undergrowth though some areas are thinned out and open. A vast majority of the forest is so dense that the rays of the sun never reach the ground even on a clear day. Reforested plots of small fir trees are scattered through the forest and here the trees are so close to each other and the branches so close to the ground that a man has to crawl on his hands and knees to pass through. The floor of the forest is covered with fir needles and hardwood leaves and is soft and spongy. Numerous fire breaks, straight and narrow, criss-cross the entire forest and offer perfect fields of fire for machine guns and anti-tank weapons. Serene and beautiful in peace, the Hurtgen Forest was a cold, damp and depressing hell-hole in the fall and winter of 1944. (18)

The terrain in the forest consists of very heavily wooded hills and deep ravines. Numerous small streams and washes drain the area into the Roer River. The hills, though small, are steep and numerous and difficult to negotiate even on foot. Roads are practically non-existent except for the small trails along

(18) A-7

the fire breaks and these were never meant to sustain military traffic. However, they were the only means of vehicle movement, for the forest was much too dense and the terrain much too rough for cross-country movement. Occasionally small clearings appear in the forest and nearly always these clearings contain small villages such as the village of Hurtgen from which the forest is named. (19)

~~As always during the war~~ the weather in northwestern Germany in the fall and winter of 1944 was the worst in the memory of this generation of Germans. Never had they seen so much rain nor had it ever been so cold ~~before as far back as they could remember~~. The rains began early in September and continued almost unceasingly until they turned into sleet and snow early in November. When the rain wasn't falling the clouds persisted and ~~camp~~ cold fog and mist clung close to the ground. The first heavy snow fell about 10 November and it covered the ground to a depth of four or five inches. It remained on the ground and on the fir trees for three or four days, melting slowly and making the soil even wetter than it was previously. Snow flurries continued through-out November but seldom did the snow last longer than a few hours before it had melted. When it wasn't snowing, it was sleeting and when it wasn't sleeting it was raining. The few days that the sun broke through the clouds and mists could be counted on the fingers of one hand. (20)

The village of Schevenhutte, Germany lies roughly eight miles southeast of the city of Aachen. (See Map D) It is strung out along a north-south road which winds its way through a deep ravine and is located well into the Hurtgen Forest. The sides of the ravine rise abruptly at an angle of about forty-five

(19, 20) A-7

degrees. The distance from the road along the bottom of the ravine up the slope to the top is about 300 yards. Here the terrain flattens out somewhat and although the trees are relatively scattered, the undergrowth is exceedingly dense. The surrounding area is rough, heavily wooded and well suited to the defense. ~~422~~ advantage was to be with the Germans because a man moving in a dense forest is much more easily seen than one in a small, well camouflaged, machine gun position.

The thick undergrowth that existed in this area made the prepared positions and barbed wire entanglements practically impossible to locate until the attacker was within ten or fifteen yards of ~~them~~. The heavy matting of fir needles and leaves on the floor of the forest made it impossible to locate the small wooden Schü mines. Yes, the Germans knew the importance of the Hurtgen Forest area and recognized its inherent defensive strength. (21)

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

On 13 November the 2nd Battalion was still in its initial assembly area east of Zweifall. For the past several days the foremost question in the mind of every man in the battalion had been as to when and where the coming attack would be made. And now on 13 November the answer to this question was forthcoming. Late in the afternoon the Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Langdon A. Jackson, was called to the Regimental Command Post to receive the attack order. (22)

The order called for the regiment to attack in a column of battalions in the order of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Battalion and 1st Battalion. The zone of attack of the 2nd Battalion was left to  
(21) A-7; (22) A-8

the discretion of Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, as long as his attack remained within the zone of action of the regiment. This zone of action extended from the road running east from Schevenhutte, inclusive, to a point about 2500 yards to the southeast. (See Map D) The 2nd Platoon of Company A, 70th Tank Battalion, was to be attached to the 2nd Battalion and the 2nd Platoon of Company A, 4th Engineer Battalion, was to support the attack. The attack was to begin on the first suitable day for air operations and not later than 16 November. (23)

At 0900 on 14 November, the Battalion Commander of the 2nd Battalion, together with his Executive Officer, S-3 and Company Commanders, departed for the Command Post of the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, which was holding the line in the regimental zone of action. From this point the party was to proceed on a reconnaissance of the future zone of action of the Battalion after obtaining all available information from the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry. (24)

On arriving at the Command Post of the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, a conference was held with the Battalion Commander and the staff of that unit. It was learned that F and G Companies were holding the sector through which the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, was to attack and that information of the enemy defenses was very limited. The front line positions of 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, ran generally northwest to southeast about half way up the east slope of the ravine in which Schevenhutte is located and extended from a point east of Schevenhutte southeast to the rock quarry and thence south across the road. It was learned that the enemy position ran generally about 200 yards back from the top of the hill, that this position included (23) A-8; (24) A-8

barbed wire entanglements of unknown extent or type and log bunkers, whose exact locations were unknown. No information on mine fields was available except that the road running east from Schevenhutte was mined and blocked. (See Map D) (25)

Lieutenant Colonel Jackson, realizing that this information was insufficient, requested of the Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, that his battalion send out reconnaissance patrols to secure additional information of the enemy position. Lieutenant Colonel Jackson was prohibited from sending out patrols from his battalion by orders which had been necessitated for security reasons. The risk of having a prisoner from the 4th Infantry Division fall into the hands of the enemy, thereby revealing the coming attack, could not be taken. However, the request could not be complied with by the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, since personnel was not available because of the greatly over-extended front of this unit. (26)

The Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion and his party then proceeded to reconnoiter the front line positions of the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry. This reconnaissance was completed by mid-afternoon but the results were disappointing. Observation was very limited because of the thick woods and because of the fact that the commanding ground was in the hands of the enemy. No locations of enemy positions were obtained except for that of a machine gun which fired on the party from Hill 280 on the right flank of the sector. However, the opportunity to study the terrain over which the battalion was to attack proved of great benefit. Especially noted were the two rock quarries located about half way up the slope of the ravine, one in the center of the sector and one on the left flank, and the two trails leading up to them. Both of these quarries were located just within the

(25, 26) A-8

lines of the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry. (See Map D) (27)

The Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, and his party returned to the Battalion Command Post late on the afternoon of 14 November and began laying plans for the attack. About 1800 orders were issued for the movement of the Battalion from its present location to a forward assembly area in the vicinity of the village of Bend. This movement was to begin at 0900 on 15 November. The Command Post of the 2nd Battalion was to be established in Bend and was to displace early on the morning of 15 November. (See Map D) (28)

The Battalion closed into the forward assembly area at 1100 on 15 November and the companies began preparations for the coming attack. Weapons and equipment were checked, ammunition was issued and all the other details taken care of. Routes forward to the line of departure were reconnoitered by platoon leaders, and squad leaders were oriented on the terrain and general situation. A location for the Battalion Observation Post was selected on the east slope of the ravine southeast of Schevenhutte. During the day, this observation post was dug in and communication lines were laid. The 81 mm Mortar Platoon selected firing positions just northeast of Bend, dug in the mortars and dumped ammunition on the position. These preparations were well under way when the Battalion Commander issued the order for the attack at 1200 hours at the new Command Post in Bend. (See Map D) (29)

The bad weather which had heretofore prevented air operations continued through 15 November. Plans for the vast air attack had been completed several days prior to this time and the Air Forces were waiting for clear skies to launch the attack. (27, 28, 29) A-8

A complete and detailed plan for marking the front lines had been prepared and disseminated. It was hoped that this plan would prevent the bombers from dropping their loads on friendly troops. These thorough preparations all seemed in vain since the weather forecast for 16 November was for continued cloudiness with fog and mist. It was feared that the attack would have to be made without the planned air support. (30)

#### THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK - 16 NOVEMBER

The 2nd Battalion's plan of attack was to move from the forward assembly area to the line of departure in a column of companies in the order of E, F, and G Companies. The line of departure was to be the front line positions of the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry. At this point the Battalion was to deploy and attack with E and F Companies abreast with E Company on the right. G Company was to be in battalion reserve and was to follow the attack by bounds on order and protect the left flank of the Battalion. The zone of attack of the Battalion was to extend from the road running east from Schevenhutte southeast to the large rock quarry. (See Map D) The Battalion Command Group was to follow the advance of F Company as the attack moved forward. Initially, the Battalion Commander would control the attack from the Battalion Observation Post on the east slope of the ravine. H-hour was to be 1245 16 November.

One platoon of heavy machine guns from H Company was to be attached to each of the assault companies. These platoons were to follow closely behind E and F Companies as there were no positions from which they could fire in support of the attack.

The 81 mm Mortar Platoon of H Company was to support the  
(30) A-3, p.73-74

attack from positions in the vicinity of Bend. This platoon was to fire a fifteen minute preparation beginning at H minus fifteen minutes. These preparatory fires were to be placed along the fire break about 200 yards back from the top of the east slope of the ravine. The platoon was to lift this fire on call and then be prepared to fire in support of either E or F Company.

The 2nd Platoon of A Company, 70th Tank Battalion, was to be in battalion reserve in an assembly area in the vicinity of Bend since the only road by which the platoon could advance was blocked. There were no positions from which the tanks could support the attack by fire and it was very doubtful that they could move across country up the steep slope of the ravine.

The 2nd Platoon of A Company, 4th Engineer Battalion was assigned the mission of clearing the road running east from Schevenhutte along the left flank of the battalion zone. One rifle squad from G Company was to be attached to this platoon to furnish local security while the platoon was engaged in clearing the road. It was vital that this road be cleared as rapidly as possible since it was the only road in the battalion zone which could serve as a route of advance for supplies and ammunition.

The artillery, which was to begin its preparation at H minus one hour, was to shift its fire at H minus fifteen minutes to the same fire break along which the 81 mm mortars were to fire. This area was to be blasted with battalion concentrations in the hope that this fire would soften up the enemy defenses and pave the way for the assault of E and F Companies.

It was realized that control in dense woods would be very difficult. The communication plan included both radio and wire lines which were to be supplemented by runners. It was doubtful

that the radios would be very effective because of the rough terrain and thick woods. A Battalion Wire Team was to accompany the advance of F Company laying a wire line as the attack progressed. The Battalion Command Group was to move forward along this wire line and tap into the line to contact F Company in the event radio contact was broken. It was hoped that contact with E Company could be made through F Company by means of the wire line if radio contact with E Company also failed. Messengers were to be used in the event both radio and wire communications failed.

The administrative plans for the attack were made in great detail. It was known that if the engineers did not succeed in opening the road running east from Schevenhutte that all supplies would have to be hand carried until such time as this road was opened. In order to prepare for this possibility the Battalion Ammunition Supply Point was to be established well forward. The Battalion Medical Section was to establish a forward collecting point in a house in the southern edge of Schevenhutte and was to be prepared to evacuate casualties back to this collecting point by litter teams. Evacuation from this collecting point back to the aid station located in Bend was to be by vehicle. The Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon was alerted to be prepared to assist in the hand carry of ammunition and supplies and the evacuation of the wounded. (31)

By night fall on 15 November all plans had been completed and all orders issued. Every man in the Battalion from the commanding officer to the last private realized that they faced an extremely difficult task on the following day. However, spirits were high and the morale of the troops was excellent.

(31) A-8

The possibility that within a few days they would be out of the cold, wet and depressing forest brought some little comfort to the men. Little did they know how long it was to be before this possibility was to materialize.

#### THE BATTALION ATTACK - 16 NOVEMBER

The morning of 16 November dawned cloudy and overcast. After a hot breakfast the troops of the 2nd Battalion occupied themselves with last minute preparations for the attack and with watching the skies, hoping that they would clear. They well knew that the air support would make the advance much easier and less costly. And their hopes were not in vain. By 1100 the clouds had broken and the sun began to break through. The air effort was ordered and began at 1145 hours in conjunction with a massive artillery preparation. The forest literally reverberated with the noise of the explosions. This air attack was the largest ever made in support of a ground operation, including the "break-out" at St. Lo. Over 5000 bombers of all types from the United States and British Air Forces dropped roughly 10,000 tons of bombs on the enemy positions in and around Duren and the surrounding towns. All of these targets were almost completely destroyed but the enemy positions close in front of the 4th Infantry Division were untouched by the bombs. This was due to the fact that no clearly defined bomb line close in to the front could be defined. However, the enemy's rear areas and lines of communication within the 4th Infantry Division's zone of action were badly disorganized. (52)

The results of the artillery preparation were much more evident to the Battalion. The shells could be heard whining  
(52) A-3, p.73-74

overhead and crashing into the trees showering the area with fragments. While the heavy guns continued to work over the rear areas, the light battalion in support of the 8th Infantry shifted to the area close in to the line of departure at H minus fifteen minutes. The forest was literally being chewed to pieces by the exploding shells. Trees were shot off and fell across each other making large areas absolutely impenetrable. However, as it was soon to be evident, the Germans were so well dug in that they suffered only slight casualties.

The distance from the Battalion's assembly area to the line of departure was about 1000 yards. The route forward was along the road running northeast from Bend in order to avoid the rough terrain and conserve the strength of the troops. (See Map D) Even this road was so poor and muddy that the movement was difficult. The Battalion moved out at 1100 in a column of companies with E Company leading, followed by F Company and then G Company. As the head of the column approached the bottom of the ravine, enemy artillery fire began to fall on the bridge across the stream. It was suspected that this fire was being directed by observers from Hill 280. (See Map D) By increasing the interval between men and double timing, the Battalion succeeded in crossing the bridge, suffering only four casualties. As the Battalion proceeded up the steep slope, the enemy artillery fire continued to fall on the bridge and began to search the east slope of the ravine. (35)

By 1230 hours E and F Companies were deployed and G Company was in covered positions just east of the road running along the bottom of the ravine. From the Battalion Observation Post, the Battalion Commander could not see his companies but was in

(35) A-8

contact with them by radio and wire. At 1245 hours E and F Companies crossed the line of departure with two platoons abreast under cover of our artillery fire which was blasting the area just over the top of the slope. Enemy artillery fire continued to fall throughout the area but as yet was not too intense. No small arms fire was being encountered since the area was defiladed.

As the attack reached the top of the slope, the friendly artillery and mortar fire was shifted and immediately the assaulting companies came under heavy machine gun and artillery and mortar fire. The enemy machine guns were so well camouflaged and visibility so limited that they could not be located.

As the advance continued, the enemy artillery and mortar fire began to increase in volume and become very accurate. Three bursts from the 150 mm artillery pieces and 180 mm mortars began to take a heavy toll of the assault companies.

The attack was pressed and the advance continued against increasing resistance for about 200 yards. Suddenly, the leading elements broke through the underbrush into a small clearing along the fire break. About 25 or 30 yards from the edge of the underbrush and along the fire break a barbed wire entanglement of triple concertina higher than a man's head extended across the entire front. (See Map D) The fact that an anti-personnel mine field extended along the near edge of the wire was determined by several men having their feet blown off by the wooden Sahu mines. The enemy small arms fire which had been searching for the attacker heretofore now became deadly accurate. The Germans, perfectly concealed themselves, could see every man of E and F Companies who moved into the fire break.

It was at this time that it became evident that the enemy had learned how to mass his artillery. It was later learned that the German commander of the corps holding this area was an artilleryman and there was no doubt but what he knew how to employ his artillery. It also became evident that E and F Companies were caught in an area on which the Germans had previously registered their artillery and mortars. In spite of all efforts the advance was halted and E and F Companies were pinned to the ground by the deadly machine gun fire from the front and flanks. Friendly artillery and mortar fire was brought in as close as possible but still the enemy fire continued. By this time the enemy artillery fire had reached a crescendo. Experienced officers of the Battalion, who had fought all through Normandy and across France, later stated that they had never before seen the Germans mass so much artillery fire on one area. Men trying to dig in were blown to pieces where they lay. If a man rose from the ground he was almost certain to be hit by the machine gun fire even if he escaped the artillery and mortars. The support platoons of both E and F Companies were committed but were stopped as soon as they hit the mine field and barbed wire. Officers and non-commissioned officers, exhibiting the highest order of bravery and leadership, moved along the line encouraging the men and trying to find some way forward until there were but few left who had not been killed or wounded. Still neither company could advance. No bangalore torpedoes or other means of blowing gaps through the mines and wire had been provided since the information available prior to the attack had not revealed the presence of these obstacles. (34)

Back at the Battalion Observation Post, which was only about  
(34) A-8

400 yards in rear of the front lines, the situation was little better. Enemy artillery fire was pounding the entire east slope of the ravine and movement of any kind was very difficult. At 1400 the Battalion Commander talked to the Regimental Commander by telephone and explained that his Battalion was unable to advance and was suffering very heavy losses. He was informed by the Regimental Commander to continue the attack in an effort to break through the enemy resistance. (35)

Immediately after talking to the Regimental Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Jackson decided to commit G Company in an envelopment to the left. The Company Commander of G Company, Captain Earl L. Stackhouse, was called to the Battalion Observation Post to receive the order. While Captain Stackhouse was working his way up the slope of the ravine, Captain Hillebrandt of F Company was also working his way back from the front lines to personally report the situation to the Battalion Commander. These two Company Commanders, both seasoned combat leaders, arrived at the Battalion Observation Post simultaneously and before either had talked to the Battalion Commander, both were seriously wounded by an enemy artillery concentration that blasted the area. First Lieutenant George <sup>K</sup> Devine, Executive Officer of G Company, was then called to the Battalion Observation Post to receive the order for the commitment of G Company and First Lieutenant Robert R. Husted, Executive Officer of F Company took over that company. Command of E Company was assumed by First Lieutenant John B. Middleton, Executive Officer of E Company at about this same time since the Company Commander, First Lieutenant Dooley, had been mortally wounded a few minutes previously. (36)

(35, 36) A-8

At 1530 hours G Company moved from its reserve position, deployed with two platoons abreast, and started advancing up the hill with its left flank on the road running east from Schevenhutte. When the top of the hill was reached the company came under machine gun and rifle fire and was pounded by the enemy artillery and mortars. The advance continued until the clearing along the fire break was reached and here G Company, as E and F Companies had been, was stopped. Now all three companies were along the same general line and all were being severely mauled. The entire area was literally covered with the dead and wounded of the Battalion as only limited evacuation had been possible due to the heavy enemy fire. (37)

About 1700, the Battalion Commander, having exhausted all means to break the enemy line without success, ordered the companies to withdraw to the line of departure and to tie in for the night. By this time the enemy fire had slackened somewhat but many additional casualties were suffered in the withdrawal. The movement was completed by dark and the front had settled down to a relatively quiet situation.

About 1800 the Battalion Commander called the Regimental Commander by telephone from the Observation Post and requested that the Battalion be withdrawn. He explained that the Battalion had suffered heavily, having lost all rifle company commanders and a large proportion of platoon leaders and non-commissioned officers. However, this request was refused and he was ordered to continue the attack at 0900 on the following morning, 17 November. (38)

As darkness descended on the forest a tremendous task faced the 2nd Battalion. Plans for the next morning's attack had to be (37, 38) A-8

made; orders had to be issued; food, water and ammunition had to be brought forward; and the largest job of all, the wounded had to be evacuated. Furthermore, the depleted rifle companies had to undertake some kind of reorganization. The night became miserably cold and wet but blanket rolls for the men were out of the question. Everything had to be hand carried up the steep slope of the ravine and too many things took priority over the rolls. The Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon worked unceasingly throughout the night carrying supplies up the hill and bringing casualties down. The night was pitch black and the casualties could only be found by their cries of pain. A round trip for a litter team required from one and one-half to two hours and many of the wounded died from exposure before they could be evacuated. The number of wounded officers and enlisted men who passed through the aid station during the night plus those who had been killed totalled approximately 135 men. The Battalion Commander was up the entire night making plans, issuing orders and visiting the aid station to do what he could to comfort the wounded. One wonders how the Battalion was able to make even a semblance of an attack on the following morning. (59)

It is deemed desirable to bring out at this time that neither of the other two battalions of the regiment were committed on 16 November. Nor were either of these two battalions to be committed on the following day.

#### THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK - 17 NOVEMBER

The battalion plan of attack for 17 November was essentially the same as that for the previous day and for that reason the attack was doomed to failure before it began. B and F Companies

(59) A-8

were again to attack abreast in the area in which they had been slaughtered the day before. The only two changes were that the companies were supplied with Bangalore torpedoes during the night and an effort was to be made to get the tanks up the slope of the ravine to support the attack, which was to jump off at 0900. The primary mission assigned to the tank platoon was to break paths through the anti-personnel mine field and the barbed wire through which the foot troops could move. The tanks were to move up a narrow trail which wound its way up to the rock quarry about half way up the slope on the right flank of the battalion zone. (See Map D) From the rock quarry to the top of the hill they were to try to move cross country. The platoon was to move from its assembly area in the vicinity of Bend in order to cross the line of departure at 0900 along with the assault companies. The 29th Field Artillery Battalion and the 81 mm Mortar Platoon were to cover the enemy position with fire beginning at 0845 and continuing until lifted by call from the Commanders of E and F Companies. (40)

#### THE BATTALION ATTACK - 17 NOVEMBER

The morning of 17 November dawned cold and wet. A heavy mist hung over the front and the trees were dripping wet. By 0800 the tanks were working their way up the small trail leading to the rock quarry and the noise of their engines echoed through the woods, alerting the Germans. Immediately, the enemy artillery and mortar fire began to search the area surrounding the quarry. The men of E and F Companies crawled deep into their holes and waited for H-hour to arrive. By 0845 the tanks had reached the quarry and began looking for routes up the remainder of the hill.

(40) A-8

At 0900, when E and F Companies climbed out of their wet and muddy holes, only one tank of the five in the platoon had reached the line of departure. All the others were mired or could not climb the steep slope.

As the attack jumped off, the enemy was pounding the area as on the day before. At 0930, the leading platoons had reached the farthest point of the previous day's advance after suffering heavy casualties and were again stopped. The one tank advancing with the attack moved through the anti-personnel mine field but could not break through the triple concertina wire. Several times it backed off and made paths through the mines but it was never successful in breaking down the wire. The enemy continued to pour artillery and mortar fire into the assaulting troops and raked them with machine gun fire. To rise from the ground was almost sure death. In an effort to get a bangalore torpedo under the barbed wire, almost all of First Lieutenant Bernard F. Ray's platoon of F Company had become casualties. Realizing that something must be done at once, First Lieutenant Ray seized the bangalore and rushed forward. By some miracle he reached the wire and succeeded in placing the bangalore. In order to insure that the damp fuse would burn and that the gap would be blown, he decided to remain at the torpedo until it exploded, thereby sacrificing his life. For this display of heroism, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously.

Seeing First Lieutenant Ray's display of courage, several other men, mostly non-commissioned officers, began to work their way forward to the wire. Only three or four escaped the enemy fire and were able to reach the barrier and place the bangalores. However, when the fuse igniters were pulled, the torpedoes failed to detonate. Later it was discovered that the fuses had been

damaged by the exposure to the mud and water as they lay on the ground the previous night. (41)

Even though a gap had now been blown in the wire as a result of First Lieutenant Ray's heroism, the Battalion was unable to advance. At about 1000, the Battalion Commander ordered E and F Companies to withdraw to the positions from which they had jumped off and again the Battalion had suffered very severely without being able to reach the enemy position. The morale of the troops was shattered and it was very evident that the Battalion would have to be withdrawn from the line, reorganized and re-equipped before it would again be capable of effective action.

As E and F Companies were falling back, the Battalion Commander called the Regimental Commander by telephone and informed him of the situation. He was told by the Regimental Commander to remain in the present position and make plans to continue the attack on 18 November. However, Lieutenant Colonel Jackson knew that the Battalion could not possibly accomplish this mission and so stated. It was then decided that the 3rd Battalion would attack on 18 November and the 2nd Battalion would withdraw to an assembly area in the vicinity of Bend to reorganize. This move was to be executed immediately after the 3rd Battalion jump-off. By daylight on 18 November, all casualties had been evacuated and all elements of the Battalion were prepared to withdraw to the same area from which they had departed on 16 November to cross the line of departure in the initial attack. (42)

#### THE BATTALION REORGANIZATION - 18 NOVEMBER

On the morning of 18 November the Regimental Commander arrived at the 2nd Battalion Command Post in the village of  
(41, 42) A-8

Bend for a conference. As a result of this meeting the Battalion Commander was relieved from command and returned to the Regimental Command Post with the Regimental Commander. Command of the Battalion was taken over at this time by Major George L. Mabry, Jr., the Executive Officer, and Captain James W. Haley was transferred from the 1st Battalion to the 2nd Battalion and assigned as Executive Officer. Captain Haley reported to the Battalion on the afternoon of 18 November and was immediately acquainted with the situation by the Battalion Commander. (43)

When Major Mabry was given the command of the Battalion on the morning of 18 November, he was told to be prepared to attack the following day. For a new commander of a badly depleted and beaten battalion this was a large order.

Time was at a premium so the work began immediately. About 200 replacements had reported to the Battalion early in the morning and had been assigned to the companies. Unfortunately there were few officers among these new men. Clean clothes were issued to the troops and hot meals were served. Lost and damaged weapons and equipment were replaced, and new platoon and squad leaders were appointed.

At the end of the day the Battalion had been reorganized but only to the extent of appointing new leaders and increasing the numerical strength. The Battalion was now about forty percent under strength in enlisted men and there was an average of two officers per company, except for Battalion Headquarters Company. (44)

#### BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK - 19 NOVEMBER

The Battalion plan of attack for 19 November was based on the hope of gaining surprise. No artillery or mortar prepara- (43, 44) A-7

tions were to be made and it was hoped that the attention of the enemy would be drawn to the attack of the 3rd Battalion which was continuing its attack started on 18 November. The attack was to be made on the right flank of the regimental zone (See map D) and the formation was to be a column of companies in the order of G, F and E Companies. The heavy machine gun platoons from H Company were to be attached to G and F Companies and these platoons were to follow the advance of the companies since no positions for supporting fire were available. The 81 mm platoon was to be prepared to support the attack on call from the same positions used for the 16 November attack which were still occupied. A wire team from the Battalion Wire Section was to accompany the advance of G Company laying a wire line as the advance proceeded. This wire line, on which the Battalion Commander and his Command Group could tap in, was to supplement the radios. The Battalion Commander and his Command Group, made up of himself, the S-3, the Artillery Liaison Officer and necessary runners and communications personnel, were to follow the advance of G Company. The attack was to cross the line of departure at 0800 which meant that the Battalion would have to move from the assembly area at 0630. The line of departure was to be the road running along the bottom of the ravine. Again it would be necessary to supply the companies from this road forward by hand carry and the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon was alerted for this mission. Weapons carriers would be able to move along the road in the ravine but only under the cover of darkness. And again a forward collecting point was to be established by the Battalion Medical Section since the Battalion Aid Station was to remain in its present location in Bend as was the Battalion Command Post.

The attached tank platoon was to remain in battalion reserve in its present location and the engineer platoon was to clear the trail running east from the line of departure along the stream as the attack progressed. (See Map D) (45)

#### THE BATTALION ATTACK - 19 NOVEMBER.

As the Battalion Executive Officer watched the Battalion move through the village of Bend on the morning of 19 November enroute to the line of departure, he knew that only superhuman effort on the part of the leaders, especially the Battalion Commander, would be necessary if the Battalion was to be successful. The old men appeared to be still suffering from the effects of the attacks of 16-17 November and the new men appeared to be dejected and low in spirits due to the weather, the mud and the thought of their first taste of action. Only grim fortitude and determination seemed to be pushing the wet, muddy feet of the Battalion. The Executive Officer wondered if this would be sufficient to carry the Battalion through the hard, bloody fighting that lay ahead.

As the leading element of the Battalion crossed the line of departure at 0800 and started to move up the deep draw running east from the north-south road they came under machine gun fire from Hill 280. This fire was covering a mine field which extended across the draw. (See Map D) Immediately, the leading men took cover and refused to move. The Battalion Commander realized at once that if the attack was to advance every officer would have to lead the way and he began moving toward the head of G Company. Arriving at the mine field, he made a hasty reconnaissance and decided to try to by-pass the barrier by moving the Battalion across the draw and then around the base

(45) A-7

of Hill 280. About this time moderate enemy artillery and mortar fire began falling in the area including some rounds from heavy railroad guns. However, since this fire was not too heavy it was evident that the Germans were throwing most of their artillery against the 3rd Battalion attack. Within thirty minutes G Company was moving again due primarily to the efforts of the Battalion Commander and the Company Commander of G Company and was crossing the draw toward Hill 280. Immediately across the draw and at the base of Hill 280, the company encountered another mine field and several men became casualties. A Company aid man began working his way toward the wounded men but he too stepped on a mine and was seriously injured. Other men voluntarily tried to rescue these casualties from the mine field but not one got further than a few yards before they too were killed or wounded by the Sahu mines. About this time, the Battalion Commander reached the area and issued orders that no man was to try to evacuate the casualties from the mine field. To do so was plain suicide.

The Battalion Commander then made a personal reconnaissance of the entire area and by some incredible means escaped the mines. He succeeded in finding a path through the mined area on the south slope of Hill 399 and soon had G Company moving along this path. Enemy machine gun fire continued to sweep the area but was not too effective due to the roughness of the terrain. (46)

The Battalion Commander now remained at the head of G Company and the advance was continued for about 400 yards, only slight resistance being encountered. As the leading elements of G Company approached the small creek (See Map D) it came under heavy machine gun and rifle fire from four log bunkers located on the high ground just across the stream. F Company was

(46) A-7, A-8

committed in an envelopment to the left and in very close fighting, personally led by the Battalion Commander, the enemy position was overrun. The advance was continued with F and E Companies abreast and by 1500 had reached the second small stream. Here G Company came under extremely heavy machine gun fire from log bunkers across the stream and the advance was stopped. A small counterattack developed against the left of G Company but was easily repulsed. Again the Battalion Commander took charge of the fighting and the attack was pressed. F Company succeeded in fighting its way forward to the stream against very heavy resistance and the right platoon of G Company succeeded in reaching the stream in the bottom of the draw. This stream, only a few feet wide, was easily fordable but the German positions on the high ground across the stream only a few yards away looked right down on the platoon. Some shelter was afforded by the steep bank of the stream but again the advance was stopped. The few men who succeeded in scrambling up the bank were easy targets for the German gunners since the range was no more than 25 or 30 yards. Contact was so close that the Germans began to roll grenades down the bank on to the platoon which was trying to take cover behind the bank and in the stream itself. Fortunately, darkness was soon to fall. (47)

About 1730 the Battalion Commander decided to halt the attack and tie in for the night. He informed the Executive Officer of these intentions and told him to have the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon start the hand carrying of supplies forward and the evacuation of the wounded. He then ordered the Company Commander of G Company to pull the platoon back out of the stream on line with the remainder of G Company and to refuse the right flank of the

(47) A-8

company by placing the 3rd platoon in position on the right facing south. F Company was ordered to refuse its left flank in the same manner and E Company was to take up positions to protect both flanks and the rear. The Battalion Commander then informed the Executive Officer that he was leaving for the Battalion Command Post to make plans for the following day. (48)

Late on the afternoon of 19 November the Battalion received approximately fifty replacements. These men were immediately assigned to the companies and after a brief orientation by the Battalion Executive Officer were sent forward to assist the carrying parties in carrying supplies to the front lines. After the completion of this task they were to remain with their assigned companies since the day's casualties had brought the Battalion down to less than fifty percent of authorized strength. (49)

The carrying parties worked steadily until well after midnight before resupply was effected and the casualties had been evacuated. Several casualties of G Company, who had to be abandoned in the stream, could not be reached and many others in the mine fields died before the engineers could clear paths to rescue them. The mine fields and the single, narrow path through them along the side of Hill 399, made the job of the carrying parties doubly difficult and only the essentials of food, water and ammunition could be carried forward. Again it was necessary for the troops to sleep in a hole half filled with mud and water, in freezing weather, without the little comfort of a blanket roll. It was humanly impossible to carry the rolls forward by carrying parties along with the other supplies.

The Battalion Commander arrived at the Battalion Command Post about 2000. Of the many days of hard fighting he had seen  
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in Normandy, France and now Germany, this had undoubtedly been the hardest. Not only had he had a great new responsibility, that of leading a tired, worn battalion for the first time, but also in order for the Battalion to advance it had been necessary for him to personally engage in the fighting. For his actions during the day and on the three days which were to follow he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. (50)

#### THE BATTALION PLAN - 20 NOVEMBER

As a result of oral orders delivered to the Battalion Commander early on the night of 19 November, the 2nd Battalion was to make a demonstration on the morning of 20 November. This feint was to be in support of the attack of the 1st Battalion which was to be committed on the left flank of the zone to clear the road running east from Schevenhutte. The demonstration was to begin at 0830 in order to cover the movement of the 1st Battalion which was to cross the line of departure at 0900. The plan called for the 81 mm Mortar Platoon to fire a fifteen minute concentration followed by a concentration of smoke. As the smoke concentration began the heavy machine gun platoons of H Company, which were in position on the line with F and G Companies, were to fire rapid fire for five minutes then change to slow fire for the next ten minutes. No movement of troops was to take place and all men were cautioned to take cover from the enemy artillery and mortar fire which was expected as a result of the feint. (51)

#### THE BATTALION DEMONSTRATION - 20 NOVEMBER

The 81 mm Mortar platoon opened fire at 0830. For the first  
(50,51) A-7

five minutes the rate of fire was the maximum that the crews could attain. The woods in front of the Battalion position echoed with the burst of the shells. And as was expected the German reaction was immediate. Machine guns from the log bunkers facing the Battalion opened fire and artillery and mortar shells began falling in the area. Fortunately, our troops had learned to provide their holes with overhead cover and casualties from the enemy fire were to be very light. By the time H Company's machine guns had opened fire, the enemy's fire was extremely heavy. There could be no doubt but what he expected the 2nd Battalion to attack. (52)

The effectiveness of the feint was immediately obvious. The 1st Battalion crossed the line of departure and advanced 1000 yards against only slight resistance with hardly any artillery or mortar fire being encountered. It is undoubtedly true that the enemy's attention had been focused on the 2nd Battalion and that the attack of the 1st Battalion took him by surprise. For the remainder of the day and night the front along the 2nd Battalion sector was quiet, marked only by an occasional burst of machine gun fire or a few rounds of artillery. The cold, rainy weather continued and light snow fell during the day. After the demonstration, the Battalion occupied itself with trying to keep warm, reorganizing to the extent possible while in contact, and making plans for resumption of the attack on the following day.

#### THE BATTALION PLAN - 21 NOVEMBER

By 20 November all three battalions of the Regiment had been committed and the enemy first line of resistance had been penetrated in three places. Since the battalions had attacked on very

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narrow fronts and at widely separated points, there was no physical contact between battalions. Although the first enemy line had been broken, there were many enemy strong points behind the front line of the Regiment. Visibility was so reduced by the dense forest and the weather conditions that the attacking troops would often by-pass these enemy positions without being observed.

In order to close the gap between the 3rd Battalion and the 2nd Battalion, the 2nd Battalion was to attack to the northeast on 21 November. The plan of attack was to again advance in a column of companies in the order of E, F and G Companies. The attack was to move along the fire break which ran to the northeast (See Map D). One platoon of heavy machine guns from H Company was again attached to E and F Companies to follow the advance of those companies. The 81 mm Platoon was to be prepared to support the attack on call from its position in vicinity of Bend. The platoon was alerted to be prepared to displace forward during the day to a position selected by the Commanding Officer of H Company. The attached platoon of tanks was again to remain in reserve since no roads by which they could move to support the attack were available. In an effort to gain surprise, the artillery was not to fire a preparation but was to be prepared to support the attack on call. The Battalion Command Group was to follow the advance of E Company. The attack was to jump off from present positions at 0900.

The administrative plan was to be the same as for preceding attacks except that the ammunition supply point had been pushed forward during the night of 20 November. The road running east from Schevenhutte had now been opened almost to the triangle on the top of the ridge (See Map D) and this road was to be used as the route of advance of supplies and ammunition.

From the furthest point of vehicle movement it would again be necessary to hand carry the ammunition and supplies and to evacuate the wounded by litter teams. (53)

#### THE BATTALION ATTACK - 21 NOVEMBER

At 0900, the advance began with only light artillery fire being encountered. The enemy positions at the head of the draw were found to have been recently evacuated with much equipment, including two heavy mortars, having been abandoned by the enemy. The advance continued against only slight resistance until the triangle was reached at which point E Company came under very heavy machine gun and rifle fire from prepared enemy positions in and around the triangle. E Company was unable to advance and F Company was committed to the left. Just as F Company had deployed and moved upon line with E Company, an enemy counter-attack in company strength struck the front lines from the direction of the Ren Weg road. This counterattack was so determined that the Germans succeeded in overrunning the Battalion line between E and F Companies and penetrated all the way back to the reserve company. It had been impossible to bring artillery fire down on the counterattack because the low visibility prevented the attack from being observed until it had actually hit the line of E and F Companies. Only after close hand to hand fighting by individuals and small groups was the attack finally stopped. Even the Command Group became engaged. (54)

As soon as the enemy attack had been stopped, G Company was committed and soon the line had been restored. All the Germans who had penetrated the Battalion's line were killed or captured.

(55) A-7; (54) A-8

Approximately thirty-five to forty prisoners were captured, and later two truck loads of dead Germans were picked up in the area. As an example of how close the fighting became, a rifleman of E Company killed all four members of a German machine gun crew with his rifle at a range of 15 yards. These Germans were in the act of crawling forward to the edge of a thicket to place their gun in action. (55)

After the counterattack had been <sup>repulsed</sup> defeated, G Company was echeloned to the right rear of the Battalion and sent a platoon to each of Hills 401 and 402. These platoons found that the enemy positions on these two hills had been recently evacuated and it was suspected that the counterattacking force had moved against the Battalion from these positions. (56)

The attack was continued with E and F Companies abreast, E Company on the right, with G Company echeloned to the right rear protecting the right flank. Heavy resistance continued throughout the day with direct fire from self-propelled guns firing down the Ren Weg causing numerous casualties. By 1700, the Battalion's advance had reached a point on the Ren Weg about 500 yards southeast of the triangle and here the Battalion tied in for the night. A perimeter defense was taken up with G Company protecting the flanks and rear. (57)

Again the carrying parties and litter bearers worked until well after midnight. The road running east from Schevenhutte had been cleared to a point about 2000 yards east of the village but was under heavy fire from the enemy artillery almost continuously. Under cover of darkness, vehicles brought supplies for the Battalion as far forward as possible and the carrying parties moved them the remaining distance by hand. The Battalion Medical (55, 56, 57) A-8

Section established a collecting point at the furthest point of vehicle advance and shuttled the casualties back to the aid station by jeep as they were brought in by the litter bearers. Again the Battalion was destined to spend a cold, wet, miserable night since it was impossible to bring the men's rolls forward. (58)

#### THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK - 22 NOVEMBER

The Battalion plan for 22 November was for a continuation of the attack of the previous day. E and F Companies were to continue the attack abreast, with E Company on the right, and G Company was to be in reserve, protecting the right flank. The 81 mm Mortar Platoon was to be prepared to support the attack from its new position east of Schevenhutte.

The administrative plan and other details of the attack were to be the same as on preceding days. The attack was to jump off from the front line positions at 0630 hours without an artillery preparation, again seeking to gain surprise. (59)

The Battalion Executive Officer began making plans on the night of 21 November for the movement of the Command Post to a forward location early on the morning of 22 November. The Company Commander of Headquarters Company was directed to select a new Command Post along the road east of Schevenhutte early the next morning and to begin immediately to install communications and organize the movement of the headquarters. (60)

#### THE BATTALION ATTACK - 22 NOVEMBER

At 0630, just as the cold, bleak day was dawning, the Battalion crawled from its muddy holes and moved forward. The (58, 59, 60) A-7

early hour of the attack and the absence of an artillery preparation took the Germans by surprise and initially the advance of the Battalion was rapid. Numerous prisoners were taken and heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy. One concrete pill box and four or five log bunkers, together with an extensive trench system astride the Ren Weg, were overrun by the Battalion by 0800. (See Map D) The attack was continued but by now the Germans had recovered from the surprise and resistance became very stubborn. The enemy artillery and self-propelled gun fire became extremely heavy and the advance of the Battalion was slowed. G Company was committed on the right of E Company early in the morning and the advance moved slowly forward. After hard, close fighting throughout the day, by 1700, the Battalion had reached a point astride the Ren Weg about 200 yards short of the right-south boundary of the Regiment. At this time, G Company was pulled back to battalion reserve and the Battalion took up a perimeter defense for the night. (61)

The activities during the night were the same as on previous nights. The main supply route had been opened to the triangle during the day but still supplies had to be hand carried from that point to the Battalion position, a distance of some 1500 yards. (62)

By 1200 hours on 22 November, the Battalion Command Post had completed its movement to the new location. The new Command Post was an underground log shelter, a former German Command Post, from which three dead Germans were removed. It was located just off the road about 1100 yards east of Schevenhutte. (63)

When the Battalion Commander arrived back at the new Command Post after dark on the evening of 22 November, he was informed

(61) A-8; (62, 63) A-7

by the Battalion Executive Officer that the Battalion was to be relieved the following morning and pulled back to an assembly area in the vicinity of Schivenhutte to receive a much needed rest and to reorganize. He was further informed that he was to immediately report to the Regimental Command Post from whence he would depart for a brief visit with his brother who was in a nearby field hospital as a result of having lost a foot to a German mine. The Executive Officer was to take command of the Battalion in the absence of the Battalion Commander and to effect the relief of the Battalion on the following morning. (64)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing and criticizing the operations of the 2nd Battalion, it is necessary to keep in mind the terrain over which the battalion operated and the bad weather conditions that existed during the period. Further, it must be remembered that information on which the initial attack was based was extremely limited through no fault nor neglect of the 2nd Battalion.

It is difficult to place the responsibility or to determine who was at fault for the lack of information available to the 2nd Battalion on which to plan the attack of 16 November. The no-patrolling order was apparently well conceived but it is evident that the enemy was well aware of the coming attack. I believe that had the Battalion been given the opportunity to probe the enemy position with patrols that a weakness in his defenses could have been located and the attack launched in an area where it would have been successful. This belief is substantiated by the successful attack of the 3rd Battalion on 18 November which was launched only a short distance to the right of the area in which

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the 2nd Battalion attacked on 16 November. It is further believed that regardless of the lack of information, the Battalion plan should have anticipated that the enemy position would be mined and wired and that provisions for breaking these obstacles should have been included in the plan.

The difficulties of the terrain over which the Battalion was to attack were fully realized by the Battalion Commander. His administrative plans were complete and were designed to overcome these difficulties. The efficiency of the Battalion Surgeon and his Medical Section and sense of responsibility and attention to duty were of the highest order. The determination and courage displayed by the litter teams in spite of the tremendous difficulties encountered in the evacuation of the numerous casualties doubtlessly saved an untold number of lives. Nothing but praise can be given to the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon for its work throughout the night in hand carrying supplies forward and bringing the wounded to the rear.

In my opinion, the Regimental Commander erred in ordering the 2nd Battalion to continue the attack on 17 November. To me it is evident that due to the severe losses suffered on 16 November, the Battalion was in no condition to continue offensive operations against a prepared position, manned by a capable and determined enemy. It probably would have been more advantageous to commit the 3rd Battalion on the 17th since this Battalion had not yet been engaged. The 2nd Battalion had lost so severely in key personnel and the spirit and determination of the troops had been so lowered by the severe mauling of the previous day that only a token attack could be mounted on the 17th.

Considering that the Battalion was ordered to attack on 17 November, the Battalion Commander could probably have devised

a better and more thorough plan of attack. The attack of the Battalion over the same ground and with the same scheme of maneuver used on 16 November was doomed to failure before it started. Had the plan called for a shift to the right, the attack to be made in a column of companies with G Company leading and launched with the possibility of gaining surprise, it is possible that the enemy line could have been broken.

The one day allotted to the 2nd Battalion for reorganization after the disastrous attacks of 16-17 November was insufficient. The attack which the 2nd Battalion made on 19 November could well have been made by the 1st Battalion which had not been committed prior to this time. The 2nd Battalion at less than two-thirds strength, including the replacements received on 18 November, and with an average of two officers per company, excluding Battalion Headquarters Company, could well have used another day for reorganizing.

Although I agree that the relieving of the 2nd Battalion Commander on 18 November was probably desirable, I feel that he should not be too severely criticized for the failure of the attacks on 16-17 November. It is likely that his will to fight had been destroyed but in my opinion, his request that the 2nd Battalion be withdrawn on the night of 16 November and his statement to the Regimental Commander on the afternoon of 17 November to the effect that the Battalion was not in condition to continue the attack on 18 November, were sound and justified.

The attack of the 2nd Battalion on 19 November which was successful in gaining some 900 yards was made with great difficulty. The morale of the troops was decidedly low and they possessed very little fighting spirit. Great credit must be given to the new Battalion Commander for the success of this attack. It

was primarily due to his courage, determination and personal example that the Battalion even succeeded in getting beyond the line of departure. His plan of attack was simple but yet complete and this is the only kind of a plan that the Battalion was capable of executing at this time. His presence at the head of the Battalion throughout the day carried the Battalion forward.

The demonstration made by the 2nd Battalion on 20 November played a major role in the successful attack delivered by the 1st Battalion on the left flank of the regimental zone. The plan for this feint was well-conceived, well-drawn and well executed. Undoubtedly the enemy's attention was focused on the 2nd Battalion on the right flank of the regimental zone. This fact is substantiated by the large volume of fire placed on the 2nd Battalion's position and by the light resistance initially encountered by the 1st Battalion in its attack. As a result of this feint and the successful attack of the 1st Battalion, the enemy's first line of resistance had now been broken in three different areas.

The attack of the 2nd Battalion on 21 November succeeded in obtaining a measure of surprise. Instead of a frontal attack against the enemy position, which had stopped the advance of the Battalion late in the afternoon of 19 November, the Battalion Commander decided to make an envelopment to the left. The companies were well disposed for this movement and as a result of the low visibility, due to the dense woods and foggy weather, the Battalion was able to outflank the enemy strong point without being detected. A gain of 1000 yards was registered against relatively light resistance until the enemy's next prepared position was encountered. This flanking movement forced the enemy to withdraw from the strong point which had stopped the Battalion on 19 November.

Much credit is due the Battalion for stopping the counter-attack on the afternoon of 21 November. Contact was so close that the use of artillery and mortar fire was impossible with the result that the fighting became hand to hand. The counter-attack was so determined that the Battalion line was penetrated and because of the heavy woods, the fighting became a series of individual and small group engagements. Contact between units was lost and control became exceedingly difficult but by night-fall the line had been restored and the Germans who had made the penetration had all been killed or captured. Only determined troops could have repulsed such a counterattack.

The Battalion's attack on 22 November was a continuation of that of the previous day. The fact that any advance at all was made, is a tribute to the courage and determination of the men and the initiative and leadership of the officers. Very heavy casualties had been suffered in the stubborn fighting of the previous day and the tactical unity of the companies was completely disorganized. The Battalion now had not had a hot meal for four days, had spent four wet and miserably cold nights without rolls and had been subjected to tremendously heavy fire for seven days and nights, with the exception of 18 November. In spite of these problems, the Battalion gained 1500 yards in the attack this day.

In my opinion, troops who are to fight in heavily wooded areas must receive prior training in this type of fighting. A captured document of the 183rd Volks Grenadier Division, which was encountered in the Hurtgen Forest, read in part as follows:

"In combat in wooded areas the American showed himself completely unfit". (65) I believe that special formations must be adopted for fighting in woods and special means employed for maintaining control and direction. The 2nd Battalion could well have made use of the week spent in the forest prior to the

(65) A-3, p.166.

attack of 16 November in training for combat in dense woods.

It is very important that replacements receive a period of indoctrination by the receiving unit before being committed to action. All too often in the Hurtgen Forest replacements were killed or wounded without ever reaching the front line. Hardly ever did they even have the chance to learn the name of their company commander.

In summarizing the results of the operations of the 2nd Battalion during the period 16-22 November, it is necessary to again recall the difficulties encountered with the weather and the heavily wooded, rough terrain. The lack of roads in the area also played a major role in the problems of the Battalion. In spite of these difficulties, and the severe reverses in the attacks on 16-17 November, the Battalion continued to press the attack and add greatly to the ultimate accomplishment of the regimental objective. Operating almost constantly at less than fifty percent strength and suffering from the loss of all rifle company commanders, the Battalion continued to advance, repelling daily counterattacks and inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. Three prepared enemy positions were encountered and each was broken. Numerous prisoners were captured. Much of the credit must go to the skill, initiative and leadership of the officers but in the final analysis, it was the courage and determination of the man with the rifle who met and overcame the miserably cold and wet weather, the fanatical German defenders and the mine fields and prepared <sup>defensives</sup> ~~defensives~~ of the Hurtgen Forest. To give the reader some idea of the stubborn resistance encountered, the 4th Infantry Division suffered 5,260 battle casualties between 6 November and 8 December. (66) And several other divisions suffered as heavily. Of the above casualties, roughly one-

(66) A-3, p.167

third were suffered by the 8th Infantry and the 2nd Battalion was the heaviest loser in the 8th Infantry with a large proportion of its losses being sustained between 16-22 November. During the battle, five enemy regiments were met and defeated by the 8th Infantry.

The Battle of the Hurtgen Forest, as bloody and bitter a fight as any of the war, brought no glorious victory. No major breakthrough was made nor large area overrun by our troops. But the enemy paid a costly price in heavy casualties for his stubborn defense and undoubtedly the paying of this price hastened the end of the war in Europe.

#### LESSONS

Many lessons were brought out by the actions of the 2nd Battalion in the Hurtgen Forest. Some of the more important of these are as follows:

1. Troops who are to fight in heavily wooded areas must receive training for this type of operation.
2. Maintenance of control and direction in dense woods is very difficult. Plans must include provisions for overcoming these problems and suitable formations must be adopted.
3. In rough, heavily wooded terrain, plans must include provisions for hand carry of supplies and ammunition for extended distances. The evacuation of the wounded by hand must also be planned for.
4. In the attack, the effectiveness of close support by artillery and mortars is greatly reduced in dense woods.
5. In heavily wooded areas, troops must provide their foxholes with overhead cover for protection against tree bursts of artillery and mortar shells.

6. The gloom and low visibility which exists in dense forests during periods of bad weather destroy morale.

7. Adequate information of the terrain and enemy defenses must be available before a successful attack can be planned.

8. To attack a position a second time from the same direction with the same scheme of maneuver after the first attack has failed, unless unavoidable, is unsound.

9. Adequate troops must be available to insure that units who have been encountering heavy resistance in difficult terrain and bad weather conditions can be frequently relieved from combat for rest and rehabilitation.

10. Plans for the attack of prepared defensive positions must include provisions for breaching mine fields and barbed wire entanglements.

11. Troops who are suffering from excessive fatigue become careless and the casualty rate rapidly rises.

12. Troops who are required to remain in the line for long periods without relief reach a state of low morale and combat efficiency which causes an increase in the casualty rate.

13. A unit which has suffered heavily in an unsuccessful attack must be allowed sufficient time for reorganization before continuing the attack.

14. Surprise increases the chance for a successful attack.

15. Higher commanders must recognize when a unit has reached the point when it is no longer capable of making a successful attack.

16. Tanks are relatively ineffective in heavily wooded areas which are heavily mined.

17. Whenever possible, new replacements must receive a period of indoctrination by their new unit.