

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
GENERAL SECTION
MILITARY HISTORY COMMITTEE
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED OFFICERS COURSE
1946-1947

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 23D INFANTRY
(2D INFANTRY DIVISION)
EAST OF ST. LO, 26-29 JULY 1944
(NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Battalion Commander)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

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OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 23D INFANTRY
2D INFANTRY DIVISION
EAST OF ST. LO, FRANCE
NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the 2d Battalion, 23d Infantry, 2d Infantry Division, in the Normandy Campaign, during the period 26-29 July 1944 in the initial stages of the breakout of the Normandy Beachhead by the 1st and 3d U. S. Armies.

In order to properly orient the reader, it will be necessary to describe the events leading up to the operation known as "COBRA", the name given to the breakout of the beachhead. This operation marked the end of the buildup in Normandy, and marked the beginning of the rout of the German Armies from France. (1)

The Order of Battle of the 2d Infantry Division was the 9th, 23d and 38th Infantry Regiments; the 15th, 37th, 38th and 12th Field Artillery Battalions; the 2d Engineer Battalion; the 2d Medical Battalion; and the Division Special Troops. The 12th Field Artillery was the medium artillery battalion. (2)

The 2d Infantry Division, as a part of V Corps, started landing in France on 8 June 1944, and was committed in the line between the 1st and 29th Divisions by V Corps Field Order No. 2. The attack to be launched at noon the next day by the three divisions abreast, with the 2d Division taking over the 5,000 yard front north of Trevieres, was to capture the key high ground in the Cerisy Forest. (3) (See Chart A)

Due to make the main effort against the Germans, with the Cerisy Forest as its objective, the 2d Division was hampered by lack of weapons and equipment as the hour of the jump off neared.

(1) A-2, p. 36; (2) A-2, p. 13; (3) A-1, p. 136.

The 9th and 38th Infantry Regiments, scheduled to attack abreast in the Trevieres area, had no transportation, and most of the battalions lacked heavier equipment and weapons. The 23d Infantry had begun to assemble in the vicinity of St. Laurent, and was designated as Division reserve. The attack was delayed in getting started, and progress was slow initially. At first the enemy offered very stiff resistance from a number of organized positions, but these positions were widely separated, and were not held in strength, and were given weak artillery support. (4)

On the morning of the 10th of June the 9th Infantry had reduced fortified positions south and east of Trevieres, and then advanced swiftly, led by the 2d and 3d Battalions abreast, through the Cerisy Forest, against light opposition. The 2d Battalion, 38th Infantry, completed the capture of Trevieres. The 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry passed through the 2d Battalion, and continued the advance abreast the 3d Battalion. The 23d Infantry was still in reserve in the vicinity of St. Laurent. The 38th Infantry reached the village of Cerisy La Foret, and at 2100 hours the 1st Battalion was pushing on with orders to seize Haute-Littee at the southeast corner of the woods. (5)

On the 11th of June, the 1st and 2d Divisions organized the ground won in the rapid advance. There was no contact with the enemy on most of the front, and patrols pushed several miles to the south found no opposition in any force. By this time V Corps had won the ground essential for the security of the beachhead. The advance had carried over 12 miles inland and had conquered the dominating terrain at Cerisy Forest, while the right wing rested on the Vire-Elle River line. (5)

The attack was to continue without delay, and on 11 June

(4) A-1, p. 138; (5) A-1, p. 141; (6) A-2, p. 26.

preparations for a new effort were under way, directed by Field Order No. 3, issued at 1700 hours in the V Corps Headquarters. (7)

The 2d Division was ordered to take objectives south of Cerisy Forest and the Elle River. The Elle River was nothing more than a narrow creek, that wound through the country side. From a map study it did not appear to be much of an obstacle. As it turned out the Germans took full advantage of this river, and built their defenses to the rear of it. The ground on both sides of this little river was soft, and the banks were very steep. This proved to be a very definite tank obstacle. (8)

Upon entry into Normandy, something new had been injected into the picture as far as the American soldier was concerned, the hedgerows. Not only were they new to the foot soldier, but proved to be a big obstacle in confining the tanks to the roads. The Germans dug in behind the hedgerow from their side, and then without disturbing the natural camouflage on our side, would cut a firing port. (9) (See Charts B and C)

The 23d Infantry was committed on 12 June as a result of V Corps orders, and was ordered to seize la Cix Rouge, and St. Georges d'Elle on the south side of the Elle River. The attack was launched at 0600 hours, and had proceeded about 1000 yards, hindered occasionally by snipers. At 1305 hours the two leading battalions of the 23d Infantry encountered very stiff resistance from organized positions, as they approached the Elle River. Units of the two battalions were able to gain a small foothold on the far side of the river, but were immediately counterattacked. The 1st Battalion was encountering trouble north of St. Georges d'Elle. At the end of the day all units were pulled back and established positions on the north side of the river. (10)

(7) A-1, p. 150; (8) A-4, Eye witness, self; (9) A-4, Eye witness, self; (10) A-4, Eye witness, self.

On 16 June the 2d Battalion continued the attack at 0800 hours initially meeting little resistance. However after advancing about three hedgerows strong resistance was encountered on the south and west banks of the river to its front. Companies F and G in the attack and Company E upon being committed on the right succeeded in crossing the river. Company G had crossed the river in the same spot they had crossed four days previously. A counterattack by the Germans forced the two companies to relinquish their small bridgehead and return to their positions from which they had launched the attack. (11)

The two attacks as described in the preceding paragraphs were launched to seize the dominating terrain feature in the Omaha Beachhead area. The objective, Hill 192, was a serious handicap to the V Corps in the hands of the Germans, as they were benefiting greatly from the observation this Hill afforded them. Hill 192 was the highest terrain feature in the area and dominated all approaches into St. Lo, key communication center in the V Corps sector. (12)

The V Corps had been opposed mainly by the 352d German Infantry Division, up to the time that they had started their advance inland from the beaches. The troops of this division were not up to the standard of the other German divisions, and were not entirely composed of Germans. Many were non-German soldiers from countries occupied by Germany, who were not eager to fight. The attacks in the vicinity of Hill 192 however, brought new identifications of prisoners. The 8th Parachute Regiment, 3d Parachute Division, the elite of the German Army, ^{was} were identified as being in the Hill 192 area. This regiment was composed of well qualified soldiers, and

(11) A-4, Eye witness, self; (12) A-2, p. 35.

was composed entirely of Germans, and they fought with the zeal of all followers of Hitler. (13)

The 23d Infantry Regiment was to remain quiet for a few days. One more attack was ordered for 19 June, when the 1st Battalion attack south from St. Georges d'Elle, but they encountered stiff resistance, and were forced to hold positions just south of St. Georges d'Elle. After this attack the regiment continued to locate enemy installations. This marked the first determined line of resistance by the Germans since the initial landing in Normandy. The enemy had taken full advantage of all the natural obstacles and the terrain features in the area, which afforded him the best fields of fire and observation. (14)

The 23d Infantry Regiment had lost a large number of men, killed in action and wounded, in its attempt to seize these key objectives south of the Elle River. The 2d Battalion had lost two of its rifle company commanders plus the executive officer in both companies, and the commander of the heavy weapons company. (15) The position taken by the enemy defended the key terrain feature in the area, and from this terrain feature the observation was excellent deep into the beachhead. On clear days the beach itself could be seen. This terrain feature also provided the enemy with excellent observation of all the approaches to the objective of the 29th Division, St. Lo. Until this Hill fell on 11 July, the 29th Division was unable to take the city of St. Lo. (16)

The 23d Infantry was to remain quiet for the time being. The Omaha Beachhead was at an end, and the regiment was to spend the next two weeks preparing their positions, patrolling and training. (17)

(13, 14) A-4, Eye witness, self; (15) Eye witness, self;
(16) A-4, Eye witness, self.

On 10 July there had been very little change on the front. The regiment had maintained contact with the enemy in the same positions. The division was preparing to push off on its attack the following morning, in compliance with the instructions contained in V Corps Field Order No. 10. (18)

The 11th of July provided no essential changes in the enemy defensive positions, which at this time ran roughly from the base of Hill 192, key point of all the territory to the east of St. Lo, east through the village of Berigny and roughly parallel to the Elle River to St. Germain d'Elle. The German units occupying this area were identified as the 9th Parachute Regiment and the 5th Parachute Regiment of the elite 3d Parachute Division. (19)

The Division objective during the attack of 11 July was Hill 192, and that portion of the Berigny-St. Lo road directly south of Hill 192. The 23d Infantry with the 1st and 3d Battalions, less Company K, attacking in column, was assigned the task of taking the southeastern portion of Hill 192 and securing the Berigny-St. Lo Highway. The 2d Battalion was to cover the attack by fire only in the initial stages of the attack, and to be prepared to move in on la Cix Rouge and the Berigny-St. Lo Road after the 1st Battalion reached its objective. (20)

The attack was preceded by an intense concentration from twelve Field Artillery Battalions. A barrage was laid down in preparation of the attack and was to be lifted every ten minutes to the next hedgerow. A total of forty-five tons of artillery ammunition was fired during this attack. (21)

The 3d Battalion encountered stiff opposition, and the 1st Battalion was able to make a little progress against a determined defender, finally reaching a draw about 800 yards from the line

(18) A-2, A-4, A-3; (19) A-4; (20) A-4, Eye witness, self; (21) A-3

of departure. The attack was a concerted, well planned, hedgerow to hedgerow drive following on the heels of a rolling artillery barrage. The stubborn resistance of the enemy from their well concealed machine gun positions in the corners of the hedgerows slowed the attack to a progress slower than had been anticipated. The leading companies, A and C, were held up at this draw and at this point Company B was committed on the right and secured the southeastern slopes of Hill 192. All companies made satisfactory progress during the day and by midnight the 1st Battalion was located generally along the Berigny-St. Lo Road. The 38th Infantry on the right of the division had progressed over the crest of Hill 192 and was on the western slopes of the Hill. Hill 192 had fallen in one day and was now in the hands of the division. (22)

THE PROBLEMS OF THE HEDGEROWS

During the period of 8 June to 19 June, the regiment had learned many lessons. This had been their first combat after one of the most intensive training periods that any division sent overseas had ever undergone. The regiment as a part of the 2d Infantry Division had undergone many varied types of training during the interim from September 1940 to 8 June 1944, including airborne, winter, and an intensive small unit training program. The mental attitude of the men in this division was excellent, although they had been disappointed several times, when they thought they were going to the combat zone. Now they were faced with the real test of an outfit and had succeeded in proving themselves only partially. Many problems that could not be foreseen in the training period had cropped up in the short space of two weeks. Could they meet the test, only future actions could

(22) A-2, A-4, Eye witness, self.

divulge the answer.

The officers and men of the regiment set out to see what they could do to meet the test, and try to devise some means of overcoming the many obstacles that had presented themselves. * Squads were taken out of the line and given training in the rear areas in new methods that were devised. (23)

The hedgerows had provided quite a problem up to this time. New methods of attack were necessary. According to one observer, "the hedgerows subdivided the terrain into small rectangular compartments which favored the defense. Each compartment could be developed into a formidable obstacle to the advance of the infantry. By tying in adjacent compartments to provide mutual support, the Germans succeeded in obtaining a more or less continuous band of strong points across the front. Handicapped by lack of observation, difficulty in maintaining direction, and inability to use all supporting weapons to their maximum, the attacker is forced to adopt a form of jungle or Indian fighting in which the individual soldier and the small unit play a dominant part." (24)

The Germans, past masters at the art of defending, did not leave any tricks known to them go unheeded in defending these hedgerows. Each field was a strong point in itself. Near the middle of the field they would implace a machine gun surrounded by a few riflemen to cover the whole field. In the corner of the field the inevitable "burp" gun or machine pistol would be found. These sometimes were connected with tunnels from one field to another, which enabled them to shift their defenses to meet an attack in another threatened area. As was the case in any instance when one would run up against the German defenses, he had

(23) A-4, Eye witness, self; (24) A-6, Eye witness, self.

the necessary observation for his high angle fire weapons. They would sometimes place machine guns in positions where they could deliver long range fire upon the approaching troops. The Germans were exploiting these hedgerows to the utmost and, as could be expected, not only defended them frontally but swept them by enfilade fire. The first determined line met under these conditions found the elite paratroopers, defiant and of high morale, and the possessors of the best equipment of the Wehrmacht defending them. The positions in this area were not hastily thrown up in the face of an advancing attack, but had been well-dug-in far ahead, with carefully constructed underground shelters, gun emplacements, and communication trenches. Problems confronted the men of the 23d Infantry, and they had to be solved before any future attacks could be successful. (25)

The hedgerows were of such a nature that they presented a definite obstacle to the tanks, and prevented them from accompanying the infantry. The tanks traveling on the roads were limited to very small fields of fire, and in most cases no field of fire at all. (26)

The machine guns of the infantry were not capable of delivering the amount of fire expected of them. The brush on the top of the hedgerows and the narrow width at the top did not make it feasible to employ the standard mount of the two machine guns in the infantry. Thus, the rifleman was not afforded the necessary fire superiority that he needed to cover his movement. Observation was limited to the next hedgerow in most instances making overhead fire in support of the rifle troops impossible. (27)

Fire power, the shock action of the tank, and the volume of fire delivered by the machine guns to gain fire superiority for

(25) A-1, A-2, A-4, Eye witness, self; (26) Eye witness, self;
(27) A-4, Eye witness, self.

Their movements were the major problems confronting the units in Normandy at this time. Solving these problems was a tribute to the ingenuity of the American soldier. How well this ingenuity paid off is one of the major lessons set forth in this monograph.

The big problem of solving these major deficiencies was tackled by the officers and men of the regiment in the time between 19 June and 11 July. Devising some mount for the machine guns to fire from the top of the hedgerows was solved with the designing of a spike mount. The machine guns could not be laid on the top of the hedgerow and fired because the action of the bolt moving back and forth would soon pick up enough grass and sticks to cause malfunction. The spike mount proved its worth in the campaigns to come. This mount consisted of a large washer taken from the wagon wheels that could be found in the area. Some of the washers ironically enough were taken from abandoned German wagons. The washer was fastened to the spike by three prongs, affording a housing for the pintel of the machine gun, and solving the problem of firing the guns from the top of the hedgerow. The gun was fastened to the spike, making it a one man load, and the spike was rammed in to the top of the hedgerow, thereby enabling the gunner to deliver the necessary volume of fire on the hedgerows occupied by the Germans. We had taken a very definite step in the right direction to gain the necessary fire superiority needed.

(28)

The next big obstacle to overcome was the problem of finding a way for the tanks to operate through the fields. This appeared to be the biggest obstacle of all. Here again the ability of the American soldier came into play, and when the chips were down he came through. There were a number of methods that were offered

(28) A-4, Eye witness, self.

and all of them are noteworthy, but would be too numerous to mention.

The most noteworthy of those suggested by the men of the division were taken and the tactics that were to be employed were worked out by the officers and men of the regiment. This scheme called for a team of four engineers to accompany the tanks, and when the tank approached a hedgerow the engineers were to take TNT and blow a passage through the hedgerow. Extra TNT was to be carried on the tank in order to facilitate the supply of it, and to keep the tanks rolling with the infantry. This tank-engineer-infantry team solved the problem in the next attack of the regiment, but later had to be modified because the tanks were very vulnerable to enemy artillery fire with the TNT on the back. Several tanks hit by artillery in the next operation were blown up. In the meantime, however, some GI had devised a means of overcoming the hedgerow that was not quite so dangerous for the tanks. The idea of this soldier was to mount improvised blades, known as a rhinoceros, on the front of the tank that would enable the tank to cut its own way through. This proved to be the solution, and this rhinoceros was used throughout Normandy, thus eliminating the engineers from the team. (29)

The tank-infantry team was to operate in the following manner: A squad of infantry was to be employed with each tank, plus a squad of either light machine guns or a squad of heavy machine guns. The team was to move from its assembly area to the line of departure. Upon reaching a hedgerow the tank was to fire its cannon into each corner of the next hedgerow, and then spray the trees with its machine guns. The machine guns were then to spray the hedgerow while the Browning Automatic Riflemen and the scouts

(29) A-3, Eye witness, self.

moved to the next hedgerow. These tactics were to be used throughout the entire Normandy campaign by the men of the 23d Infantry and they paid good dividends. Training in this coordinated team began in the rear areas of the regiment on 28 June 1944, and it was hoped that all units would be able to go through it. (30)

The period in Normandy covered in the introduction brought forth many deficiencies, which were promptly corrected. The most noteworthy feature developed by the regiment during this period was the development of the tank-infantry team to blast through the hedgerows, rout the enemy entrenched behind them, and to secure the objective. The problems encountered during the period 8 June to 10 July and the manner in which they were solved are brought forth to show the amount of coordination necessary to carry out a successful attack and to properly orient the reader with the type of enemy and the conditions, both in regards to the terrain and the enemy, that must be overcome.

After the two day offensive on Hill 192 the division held its lines once more along the Berigny-St. Lo Road from 11 July to 25 July. The 2d Battalion was withdrawn from the line about the 15th of July and entered an assembly area in rear of St. Georges d'Elle in preparation for the attack to be launched in the near future by the regiment. (31)

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The terrain over which the 23d Infantry was to pass during the course of this attack was dominated by two hills, Hill 192 which had come into our hands on 12 July, and the Hill upon which the village of St. Jean des Baisants was located. This hill rose to a height of over 200 meters, which made it higher than Hill 192. (See Chart D)

(30) A-4, A-11, Eye witness, self; (31) A-4, Eye witness, self.

The terrain in Normandy, better known as the Bocage country, was subdivided into small rectangular fields by hedgerows; forming compartments which favored the defender. The terrain was generally level or gentle slope. The hedgerows consisted of an earthen mound or wall, that was eight to ten feet in width and from four to six feet in height, covered with scrub or undergrowth on the top. Along either side of the hedgerow was a ditch. These fields were not of any uniform size, and an aerial photograph reminded one of the patch quilts women used to make. (32) (See Charts B and C^{and F})

The roads in the area were narrow and winding and ran between the hedgerows. In most instances the roads were sunk so deep between the hedgerows that a quarter ton vehicle could be driven along the front line. This condition offered the enemy many advantageous positions for ambush or surprise attack. In many instances the enemy would choose to place his main line along these roads as it afforded him covered avenues of approach to his position and also enabled him to shift his strength to meet a threat in another area. High angle fire, accurately placed, was about the only type fire that would reach the enemy when he was dug in along one of these roads. In any terrain analysis the number of sunken roads had to be taken into consideration. (33)

Due to the height of the hedgerow and the scrub on top, observation was limited to the next hedgerow, making the adjustment of artillery fire very difficult. (34) (See Charts B and C)

The compartmented terrain made the tanks quite immobile, and caused the fighting to break up into small infantry engagements. Consequently, the burden of the attack and its ultimate success rested with the small unit leaders. (35)

(32) A-6, A-7, Eye witness, self; (33) A-6, A-7, Eye witness, self;
(34) Eye witness, self; (35) A-6, Eye witness, self.

The development of a base of fire, as taught by our present doctrines was not possible in the manner to which we were accustomed. The hedgerows did not give the machine guns the necessary field of fire for overhead fire, and the lack of observation prevented the mortars from firing in too close. (36)

The high ground in the vicinity of Hill 192, which is the height in meters of the Hill, afforded good observation for a limited time only. This observation was not too close in initially and therefore not a great deal of influence could be imparted by the Battalion Commander to the operation. The terrain sloped gently down from Hill 192 for about 1500 yards and then began a rapid incline to the village of Notre Dame d'Elle, from there it rose gently to the high ground in the vicinity of St. Jean des Baisants. (37) (See Chart D)

Churches, with towering steeples, situated on the high ground in the vicinity of Notre Dame d'Elle and St. Jean des Baisants afforded the Germans very good observation of the area, and they were not hesitant in making use of them. (38)

The sector was traversed with a number of sunken roads which led to the small villages and farms in the vicinity. The main road in the area was the Berigny-St. Lo Highway.

THE 2D BATTALION, 23D INFANTRY IN ASSEMBLY AREA

The 2d Battalion had been withdrawn from the line on the 15th of July, and was ordered to an assembly area in the vicinity of St. Georges d'Elle. The day after closing into this assembly area, the Battalion Commander received orders to prepare his plans for an attack to the south from Hill 192. The target date for this attack was to be announced at a later date. (39)

At this time, the battalion was commanded by Lt. Colonel (36, 37, 38) Eye witness, self; (39) A-4, Eye witness, self.

Raymond B. Marlin. Immediately upon receipt of the order to prepare his plans for the attack, he called his staff together and informed them of his tentative plans. He told his staff that this attack was to be made in conjunction with the rest of the Division to secure the high ground in the vicinity of St. Jean des Balsants. The tentative zone of the battalion had been assigned by the Regimental Commander to enable the Battalion Commander to make his plans. (40)

The companies at this time were engaged in refitting their men, gaining some much needed rest, and reorganizing. The 2d Battalion had been in the front line continuously from the 12th of June until they were relieved on the 15th of July, and this was the first time since their initial baptism of fire that they had been out of range of German small arms. At the same time, training in the tactics of the tank-infantry team was going on in the vicinity of the Service Company area. This period of training gave the men an excellent opportunity to gain the necessary coordination that was needed by the team. Many of the men had never had the opportunity to work with tanks before this time. (41)

The nature of the terrain in Normandy did not afford leaders an opportunity for issuing orders from a vantage point thereby enabling them to point out salient terrain features to their subordinates. A practice of sending the various commanders up in the artillery liaison planes before an engagement to observe the terrain over which they were to operate had been instituted in the regiment before the attack on Hill 192. The Battalion Commander was quick to take advantage of this opportunity, and began at once to send all the commanders of the various units

(40) Eye witness, self; (41) A-4, Eye witness, self; (42) Eye witness, self.

that time would permit. (42)

The Battalion Commander had announced his tentative plan for the attack was to employ a column of companies. Company E was to lead the attack, followed by Company F, with Company G to be held in reserve initially. Preparations for the attack were then made with the priority on all facilities for training going to Company E. Company E had been chosen for the attack because of the high morale of the Company and because it was the only company in the battalion not having lost its Company Commander. (43)

The Battalion Commander, the S-2 and S-3 moved out the same afternoon upon a reconnaissance of the area over which the attack was to be made. For the first time they had a piece of terrain that afforded them some observation of the zone of advance. The zone of the advance assigned by the Regimental Commander was very narrow and dictated that the attack be made in a column of companies. The sector from which the attack was to be launched was held at the present time by the 3d Battalion of the 38th Infantry. This sector was to be turned over to the 2d Battalion of the 23d Infantry the night before the attack. While on the reconnaissance the Battalion Commander decided that he would put his Observation Post on the front edge of the little diamond-shaped patch of woods on the top of Hill 192. This area was constantly being shelled by the Germans, and as they had excellent observation of the area, it was decided that the Observation Post would have to be dug in ahead of time under cover of darkness. Fortunately, on the forward edge of the little patch of woods, a large tree of about three feet in diameter had been knocked over by German shell fire. The Observation Post was dug in under this log and disclosed nothing to the Germans. The Battalion Command Post was to be located in the rear of this patch

(42) Eye witness, self; (43) Eye witness, self.

of woods and was subsequently dug in ahead of time by the A and P Platoon. The latter paid dividends because both the Observation Post and the Command Post were hit during the initial stages of the attack by German shell fire, without any casualties being suffered.

(44)

Maps of the area were plentiful, but were of such a scale that it was very difficult to definitely locate the leading elements. The Division Engineers however met the contingency by enlarging the maps to a scale of 1/10,000. These maps provided a much clearer picture of the area and greatly increased the ability to locate each position.

Control of units and location of front lines were major problems in attacking in the hedgerows. Some means had to be devised to overcome these deficiencies. The Battalion Commander decided if each field were numbered before the attack, it would enable the various commanders to locate themselves more readily, and by so numbering the fields the locations could be given readily over any means of communication without disclosing one's position to the enemy. The men of the Battalion Intelligence Section set out immediately to number the fields on the maps that were to be used by all the leaders of the various units of the battalion, and attached elements, including the direct support artillery battalion. This provided a very excellent means for maintaining control, and at the same time provided the Battalion Commander with an easy means of designated company zones of action. (45) (See Chart F)

Training was going on all this time in the rear area, and tanks were assigned to work with the units that they would be working with on the day of the attack. Prior to this time there was no means for the infantry to communicate with the men in the

(44) Eye witness, self; (45) Eye witness, self.

tank. Double EE 8 telephones were secured and attached to the rear of the tank and connected by wire to a phone in the tank to facilitate this communication. All infantrymen were acquainted with the location of this telephone. (46)

Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, was attached to the regiment for the attack. The Company, less one platoon, was then attached to the 2d Battalion. This unit had come ashore on D-Day and had seen considerable action up to this time. (47)

The attack of the 2d Battalion had to pass between the Bois de Rillerie, known to be strongly held by the Germans, and the sunken road about 200 yards to the east. This provided a very narrow zone of advance for the battalion initially. The 3d Battalion of the 23d Infantry was to make a limited objective attack in conjunction with the 2d Battalion to secure the Bois de Rillerie. This objective was situated only two hedgerows in front of the positions occupied by Company K at the time. (See Chart F)

Target day for the attack had been tentatively set for the 23d of July, so preparations were pushed forward with new vigor. The time between 15 July and 21 July was profitably used in preparation for the attack. The Battalion Commander would send one of the staff or one of the Company Commanders up on Hill 192 or up in a plane to study the terrain at every opportunity. When the attack jumped off, the Battalion Commander wanted to be assured that every leader knew as much as possible about the zone of advance. (48)

On the afternoon of 21 July, the Battalion Commander assembled his staff, the Company Commanders of the Battalion, the Company Commander of Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, a Liaison Officer (46) A-4, Eye witness, self; (47) A-1, Statement of C. O., Co. C, 741st Tank Bn; (48) A-4, Eye witness, self.

from the 37th Field Artillery, and a Liaison Officer from Company C, 81st Chemical Battalion, at the Battalion Command Post in the vicinity of St. Georges d'Elle. Each commander was issued enough maps for all the officers in his unit who would be concerned with the attack. The fields on the maps were previously numbered by the Battalion Intelligence Section. (49) (See Chart F)

The 2d Division was to attack with three regiments abreast, to secure the high ground in the vicinity of St. Jean Des Baisants. The 38th Infantry was to be on the right, the 9th Infantry on the left, and the 23d Infantry in the center. The Division Artillery was to support the attack from their present positions, with the normal combat team missions for the light battalions, and the 12th Field Artillery to be in general support. (See Chart E)

The 23d Infantry was to attack in its zone of action, which extended east to Berigny from the road junction of the Berigny-St. Lo Road with the road leading south to St. Jean des Baisants. The 23d Infantry was to seize the village of St. Jean des Baisants, and then pass to Division reserve in the vicinity of Rouxville. The 37th Field Artillery, the normal combat team artillery, was to be in support of the regiment. Company C, 741st Tank Battalion and Company C, 81st Chemical Battalion, were attached to the regiment. Company C, 81st Chemical Battalion was equipped with 4.2 Chemical Mortars. (50)

The plan of the 23d Infantry was to attack with two battalions abreast. The 2d Battalion on the right was to attack with its right on the road leading from Hill 192 to St. Jean des Baisants, seize the village of Notre Dame d'Elle and be prepared to continue the attack to seize the regimental objective. The third battalion was to make a limited objective attack to seize the Bois de la Rillerie.

(49) Eye witness, self; (50) A-4;

It was decided to give this mission to the 3d Battalion because it was anticipated that it would take quite some time to clean the woods of the enemy, and later events proved this assumption to be correct. The 2d Battalion with Company C, 741st Tank Battalion attached, was to take over the remainder of the regimental zone after they passed the Bois de la Rillerie and continue the attack on the regimental objective. (51)

The 2d Battalion was to attack in a column of companies with E Company leading. When the rear of E Company cleared the Bois de la Rillerie on its right, Company F was to advance in rear of Company E. Company G was to remain in Battalion Reserve. Company E and Company F were to have a section of heavy machine guns from the 1st Platoon of Company H attached to them. This would enable them to have enough machine guns to make up the teams that had been formed in the training period. The 81mm Mortar Platoon of Company H and Company C, 81st Chemical Battalion were to support the attack of the battalion from positions in rear of Hill 192. (52) (See Chart F)

The 37th Field Artillery Battalion was to prepare to fire a preparation of twenty minutes duration with time fire on an area about 150 yards wide and 300 yards or four hedgerows deep. During this preparation the tanks of Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, less one platoon, were to make a sortie under the preparation into the enemy lines to a depth of four fields, and then return to the line of departure and join Company E. The 37th Field Artillery was then to be ready to fire on targets of opportunity as they appeared. (53)

Company E was to relieve Company L, 38th Infantry, the unit which occupied the area from which the attack of the 23d Infantry was to be launched. This relief was to take place the night before

(51) A-4, Eye witness, self; (52) Eye witness, self; (53) A-4, Eye witness, self.

known as the Normandy breakthrough. (55)

THE MOVE FORWARD TO THE LINE OF DEPARTURE

On the night of 25 July Company E completed the relief of Company L of the 38th Infantry on the south slopes of Hill 192. The relief was concluded without incident, and Company E was now in position for the attack.

Just prior to daylight, on the morning of 26 July, the Battalion Commander, the Battalion S-2 and S-3, the Artillery Liaison Officer, the Company Commander of Company C, 741st Tank Battalion and a Liaison Officer from the Chemical Mortar Company, with their accompanying radio operators, moved forward to the Observation Post which they had previously prepared on Hill 192. (56)

The tanks had been eased up into positions in rear of Hill 192, into a position about 300 yards from their line of departure the afternoon of 25 July. Their movement into position was accompanied by various demonstrations to cover the noise of their movement. In addition to the noise made by the various demonstrations, the tanks moved at a very slow rate of speed and did not attempt to use too much power to give away their movement. (57) (See Chart G)

The Battalion Command Post was moved up to its new location about 100 yards in rear of the diamond-shaped patch of woods on the top of Hill 192, the Battalion Executive Officer, S-1, the A & P Platoon Leader and the enlisted men of the Battalion Headquarters Section moved up to the new Command Post location under cover of darkness on the morning of 26 July. The Company Commanders of F and G moved their companies to predesignated assembly areas and then reported to the Battalion Command Post to await orders when to move. (58) (See Chart G)

The diamond-shaped patch of woods on the top of Hill 192 had

(55) A-2; A-3, Eye witness, self; (56) Eye witness, self;
(57) Eye witness, self; (58) Eye witness, self.

been a target of the American artillery during the long period the Germans had held the Hill. When it fell to the Americans, the Germans continued firing on it. During all of this bombardment it had become a tangled mass of brush and tree stumps. It remained a target for the Germans during the process of the attack, as it was a logical route for the advance of ammunition, troops, and other supplies. The Germans were successful to some extent in denying this route to us for the greater part of the day. (59)

By 0500 hours, on the morning of 26 July the march to the line of departure, the Berigny-St. Lo Road, by the various units of the 2d Battalion, of the 23d Infantry had been completed. The routes to the line of departure had been thoroughly reconnoitered during the period 15 July to 25 July. (60)

There had been an ample amount of time allotted to the battalion in preparing for the attack and this factor paid dividends when the zero hour approached. All the companies of the 2d Battalion were able to arrive at their appointed places in sufficient time, without incident. The attached units in support of the 2d Battalion were all in position the evening before the attack. At 0600 hours on 26 July, everything was in readiness for the attack to be launched. (61)

THE ENEMY AND HIS DEFENSES ON 26 JULY 1944

The enemy defensive positions in front of the 23d Infantry were much the same as those encountered all through Normandy. Every field, every hedgerow, was heavily defended, and the enemy made the most of their prepared positions. Time and again the Germans were forced back into their foxholes and held there by artillery fire which was suddenly lifted in high bursts to allow the tanks to break through the hedgerows under it, but the preparedness of the ^Germans was (59) Eye witness, self; (60) A-4, Eye witness, self; (61) Eye witness, self.

complete, and at the end of the sortie they would come out of their dugouts to delay the advance of our infantry.

The enemy had taken advantage of all the time they had in preparing their positions. These positions were dug in behind the thick hedgerows, and were then covered with heavy logs and earth. The positions were organized in depth, so that each field became another prepared line for the infantry to attack. The Germans were also using mine fields that had been cleverly placed to slow up the attack of the Americans.

Their main line of resistance ran along a line about 250 to 400 yards south of the Berigny-St. Lo Road in an East-West direction. Full advantage of the two wooded areas along this line, the Bois de la Rillerie and the Bois de la Roche, was taken by the Germans. (63) (See Chart F)

The reserve position of the enemy ran along the line of the road running from Planquis, West to the North-South Road, which formed the right boundary of the regiment. This position was also highly organized, and here the enemy laid more extensive mine fields to hold up our advance. (64) (See Chart F)

The German 3d Parachute Division held the front of the 2d Division. This unit had been in contact with elements of the 2d Division from the time of their initial entry into combat. They were the elite of the German Army, and were given many special privileges, the best equipment that the German war machine had, and were indoctrinated with the creeds of Nazism to the point of fanaticism. (65)

THE ATTACK OF THE 2D BATTALION ON 26 JULY

At 0610 the artillery began to fire its preparation for the attack. This preparation lasted for twenty minutes, and was to

(63) A-4, A-2, A-3, Eye witness, self; (64) A-4, Eye witness, self; (65) A-4.

be a time fire preparation to be accompanied by a sortie by the tanks attached to the battalion. The tanks moved out under the preparation to a depth of about four hedgerows, while the artillery kept the Germans in their holes. The tanks then returned to the line of departure to accompany the infantry. (66) (See Chart G)

Company E, from its position in the front of the woods on Hill 192, moved to the line of departure, the Berigny-St. Lo Road. The E Company position south of the Berigny-St. Lo Road had been evacuated to allow the artillery to fire on the German front lines during the preparation. The Germans continually crowded our front lines to avoid our artillery fire. When they reached the road they were met by an avalanche of devastating fire from the hedgerows just to the south of the road. By this time the Germans realized that there was a determined attack in progress, and they began to open up with artillery, like none the 2d Battalion had ever seen. The German mortars began to fall all over the area occupied by Company E. The leading platoon of Company E had been stopped just south of the road, and was taking a heavy beating from the German fire. This fire began to take its toll of the men of Company E. The Company Commander of Company E pushed his next platoon in column forward in an effort to break through the line. This platoon began to take its casualties from the heavy German fire, but Company E continually pressed the attack forward. (66)

The progress of Company E was slowed considerably not only by the intense fire from their front but from their left flank. The enemy, from his position in the Bois de la Roche and Bois de la Rillerie, was delivering a heavy volume of fire on Company E from the woods on their flank.

(66) A-2, Eye witness, self.

Company K, 23d Infantry, was pushing its attack forward into the Bois de la Rillerie, but was meeting a determined enemy. Many acts of heroism, courage and fortitude were displayed during the early stages of the attack and continued through the whole operation. The Bois de la Rillerie must be seized before the attack of Company E could continue. Company K pushed ahead and kept carrying the attack to the Germans. (67)

All this time the enemy was shelling the Battalion Observation Post and Battalion Command Post, and the little wooded area on the top of Hill 192, in an effort to deny its use to our forces in supplying Company E, and in sending our reinforcements forward. Around 1000 hours the resistance in the Bois de la Rillerie and Bois de la Roche had been sufficiently reduced to enable Company E to continue its advance. Company E had a strength of 9 officers and 165 enlisted men as an effective fighting force when it had launched its attack that morning. Six of these officers were lost before they had progressed beyond the line of departure. A Platoon Sergeant of the 1st Platoon of Company E, Sergeant Burrier, gathered the remnants of the two leading platoons that had been committed by Company E, organized them into a fighting unit and pressed the attack of the battalion. By 1800 hours that evening Company E had pushed its attack forward to secure its initial objective, the high ground south of Bois de la Roche. The company had taken about forty prisoners during the period, accounted for an untold number of German dead, and consisted of only 3 officers and 69 men when the day's action was over. (68)

Great difficulty was experienced throughout the day in coordinating the movements of the tanks and infantry. Communications were difficult and the limited training in operations with tanks

(67) A-4, A-2, Eye witness, self; (68) A-4, A-2 Eye witness, self.

experienced by the men added to the confusion.

When Company E had progressed beyond the southern edge of the Bois de la Rillerie, Company F had been committed on the left flank of Company E, in accordance with the original plans of the battalion. Immediately, upon being committed, Company F began to come under heavy fire. They had taken a long route around the east edge of Hill 192 to escape the intense artillery that was falling on the Hill. Company F began to push the attack vigorously to move the Germans back. The attack of Company E and Company F moved ahead slowly during the rest of the morning. (69)

About 1030 hours that morning the Battalion Commander, Colonel Marlin, was experiencing difficulty in controlling the attack of the two leading companies. Communications were difficult to keep in. Wire was being carried forward by the attacking companies, but as soon as the linemen would get it in, the intense German artillery would knock it out. Colonel Marlin decided that it was time to move his Observation Post to the south of the Berigny-St. Lo Road to facilitate control. The Battalion Commander, the Battalion S-2 and S-3, the Artillery Liaison Officer, the 81st Chemical Battalion Liaison Officer, and the Company Commander of Company C, 741st Tank Battalion started their move from the Observation Post on Hill 192. They decided to move to the left side or west edge of the Hill, and had just reached a point near the junction of the sunken road running along the western slope of Hill 192 and the Berigny-St. Lo Road when the Germans laid in another intense artillery barrage. This barrage caught the entire party in the open and pinned them to the ground. Communications with the Battalion Commander's party were out for quite some time. As communications to units on the south side of the Berigny-St. Lo Road were difficult, it was some

time before anyone knew what had happened to the Battalion Commander and his party. About 1200 hours a message came in over the battalion radio net for the Battalion Executive Officer to report to the Battalion Observation Post. Realizing that something had happened, the Battalion Executive Officer, in company with another officer from the Battalion Command Post, moved forward to the Observation Post. Upon arriving there they found the Battalion Commander had been wounded. He had crawled back to the Observation Post and had contacted the Command Post by radio. In the same barrage which had wounded the Battalion Commander, the Artillery Liaison Officer, the Chemical Mortar Liaison Officer and the Battalion S-3 became casualties and had to be evacuated. The S-2 of the battalion had been wounded also, but not enough to cause him to be evacuated. There was little time to lose. The Battalion Commander refused to be evacuated until he had fully acquainted the Executive Officer with the situation. (70)

A reorganization of the battalion staff was hastily made by the Executive Officer, who had now assumed command. The S-2 was appointed Battalion S-3, and the officer from the Battalion Command Post, who had accompanied the Executive Officer forward, was appointed as S-2. The Artillery Battalion and the Chemical Battalion were notified and soon replaced the wounded officers. The Tank Company Commander had been successful in reaching the south side of the Berigny-St. Lo Road. The situation was getting too far out in front, so the new Battalion Commander and the Staff started to move from the site of the Battalion Observation Post, to try once again to reorganize the battalion into a unit. A new route was followed this time but before the new command group

(70) Eye witness, self.

had gone very far they were again pinned down, and only after being pinned down twice were they successful in reaching the south side of the road. There they were united with the Company Commander of the Tank Company, and were hastily oriented as to the situation of the Tank Company. Two of the tanks had been hit, and it was necessary to replace the remainder of the platoon, as their ammunition was running low. The attack was slowed while this change was taking place. (71)

The Battalion Commander regained contact with the two leading companies of the battalion and found that they were having a difficult time. Company E had run into a mine field in the fields just south of the sunken road running east and west to Planquis. Their effective fighting strength had been greatly sapped during their drive to their present position. Company F had not suffered too much during their drive but were greatly slowed down due to the determined defense the Germans were throwing up against them. The Battalion Commander ordered Company G to move to a new position in the vicinity of the Bois de la Roche, which was accomplished without too much difficulty. (72)

About this time the Battalion Commander was informed that Company E would be replaced by the 1st Battalion and that we were to divert our attack to the direction of Planquis. This was accomplished with little difficulty as Company G from its position in the vicinity of Bois de la Roche was in an excellent location to be committed in that direction. It was necessary to change the direction of attack of Company F however. Before this could be accomplished the Regimental Commander had informed the Battalion Commander to hold up his attack for the day. (73)

Company B of the 1st Battalion replaced Company E on the

(71) Eye witness, self; (72) Eye witness, self; (73) A-4, Eye witness, self.

right of the battalion and Company E was reverted to battalion reserve with a fighting strength of 3 officers and 69 enlisted men, having suffered heavy casualties that day, not only from the German fire, but from a 500-pound bomb dropped from our planes on the Company lines by mistake, wounding quite a number of men. (74)

The 38th Infantry advanced during the day coinciding generally with that of the 2d Battalion. The 38th Infantry was encountering the same determined enemy in its sector. By 2200 hours, on 26 July, the lines of the 38th Infantry were generally abreast of the 23d Infantry lines.

The line held that evening by the 2d Battalion ran generally along the sunken road leading to Planquis. The Battalion Commander was ordered to take up a position here pending resumption of the attack on Notre Dame d'Elle, on 27 July at 0800 hours.

A total of 61 prisoners of war were taken by the 23d Infantry during the days operation. Prisoners taken were from the 2d Battalion, 3d Parachute Regiment, and all prisoners stated that their units had suffered heavy losses during the day.

THE CAPTURE OF NOTRE DAME d'ELLE

On 26 July, about 2330 hours, the Regimental Commander ordered the Battalion Commander of the 2d Battalion to resume the attack in the morning at 0800 hours, in conjunction with the 1st Battalion with the objective Notre Dame d'Elle. The 2d Battalion was to change their direction of attack and swing to the southwest toward Planquis. The redistribution of the troops for this change of direction had already been instituted when the attack for the day was stopped, so it did not cause too much trouble. Company G was to attack along the north side of the sunken road leading to Planquis, and Company F was to attack on the south side of the road. (75)

(74) A-4, Eye witness, self; (75) A-4, Eye Witness, self.

The attack jumped off at 0800 hours, on 27 July, and progressed very satisfactorily toward the little village of Planquis. At this time the tanks of Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, began to run out of ammunition and it was necessary to hold up the attack while ammunition was replenished but after talking it over with the Regimental Commander, the attack was pushed on against heavy resistance to secure the village of Planquis. (76)

The tanks of Company C had to withdraw to replenish their ammunition. They had suffered casualties in both men and tanks the day before and were replaced later in the day by a platoon from Company D, the light tank company of the Tank Battalion. The Battalion was ordered to change their direction again. The attack was to be continued in a southerly direction astride the road leading into Notre Dame d'Elle. (77)

Company G from a position near the southern edge of the village of Planquis, turned their direction of attack to the south on the east side of the road running to Notre Dame d'Elle and Company F swung their attack to the south on the west side of this road. By this time the light tanks had joined the battalion, and the attack was resumed after replenishing the ammunition of both companies. The attack had not progressed far when Company G began to run into difficulty. The fields on their side of the road ran parallel to the road and were long and narrow, affording no protection against the defender. Every advantage was with the defender, for from his position on the far end of these long narrow fields he swept them with automatic fire. (78)

After experiencing some difficulty in overcoming this resistance, Company G was able to resume the attack, but only after Company F had pushed ahead against stubborn resistance on the right (76) A-4, Eye witness, self; (77, 78) Eye witness, self.

side of the road. Company G moved ahead about two hedgerows when they ran into another group of enemy dug in along the sunken road. The company poured a heavy column of fire on the enemy. While held up here, a gunner of the light machine gun section of the company, by edging his way up the main road, was able to outflank the Germans in the sunken road, and by pouring out the fire from his light machine gun at its maximum rate was able to push the Germans out of this position. The Company was then able to push ahead and come abreast Company F, who was pushing steadily ahead on the right side of the road. (79)

The Battalion Observation Post had now been moved into the village of Planquis, and from the buildings could gain a little observation of the area. However, heavy German fire from direct fire weapons, soon drove the command group from these houses and deprived them of this observation. (80)

The battalion was held up late in the afternoon, after making steady progress up the hill toward Notre Dame d'Elle. The battalion front line now ran along the hedgerows just north of the village of Notre Dame d'Elle. The leading companies were held up by fire from the houses in the village, and by heavy mortar and artillery fire, which was being observed from the church steeple in the village. (81)

It was decided to make a coordinated assault on the town by Companies F and G, preceded by an artillery concentration. About 2000 hours a preparation was laid down on the town by the 37th Field Artillery Battalion for ten minutes, and the leading companies proceeded into the town unopposed, hampered only occasionally by snipers that remained in the buildings. (82)

The attack progressed to about three hedgerows south of the road running east and west through the village of Notre Dame d'Elle, (79) Eye witness, self; (80, 81, 82) Eye witness, self.

where it was halted for the night. (83)

The 1st Battalion attack, led by Company B, was held up originally by a mine field, made satisfactory progress during the day. Company B was generally abreast of Company F. The 38th Infantry on the right of the regiment was making good progress with their attack.

Should the reader be confused as to how artillery fire could be observed at 2000 hours and a coordinated attack be made at this hour of the evening, it must be explained that the units fighting in Europe at this time were operating on British Double Summer Time, which was two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, and therefore it was daylight until about 2200 hours every evening.

The regiment took 45 prisoners during the days fighting. Most of them were from the 5th and 8th Parachute Regiments. All prisoners stated that losses in their units were extremely heavy during the two days of fighting with some companies suffering 50 to 60 percent casualties. Losses to our own units were not as heavy as the previous day, as the regiment lost 2 officers and 102 enlisted men, either killed or wounded. (84)

THE ATTACK ON ST. JEAN des BAISANTS, 28 JULY 1944

The battalion was ordered to resume its attack the next morning with St. Jean des Baisants as its objective. The attack was launched at 1000 hours and the enemy resistance decreased notably from that of the previous day. Mine fields, literally thrown throughout the zone of advance, slowed the attack somewhat. The artillery and mortar fire of the enemy had decreased in intensity from previous days and was more of the harassing type, but was placed on the forward elements with some degree of accuracy. (85)

(83) A-4, Eye witness, self; (84) A-4; (85) Eye witness, self.

Companies F and G moved out about 1000 hours and were stopped occasionally by slight resistance in scattered areas. The large number of mines in the area and the number of sunken roads, from which scattered remnants of the once proud 3d Parachute Division of the German Wehrmacht offered resistance, slowed up the advance of both companies.

An air strike had been requested on the high ground around St. Jean des Baisants, but before our forces could be halted or the air strike called off, the planes were overhead and the battalion was bombed and strafed by our own planes. Fortunately, there were no casualties suffered by our forces. (86)

After this air strike, which slowed down the battalion, the attack was resumed and despite the small arms fire and the harassing mortar and artillery fire the leading elements of the battalion pushed on into the village of St. Jean des Baisants. The Regimental Commander ordered the battalion to dig in south of the town and to prepare for an enemy bombing. The bombing never occurred, but shortly after the battalion entered the village and progressed to the south edge of the village where it halted, it was greeted with an avalanche of heavy German artillery and mortar fire. Accompanying this heavy artillery and mortar fire was the fire of German anti-aircraft weapons, which had been lowered to an elevation where they could be fired on ground troops. Despite this heavy fire, the battalion hung on to its lines and the village of St. Jean des Baisants was officially in our hands by 2000 hours and the Division Commander had been so notified. (87)

The 1st Battalion had not progressed as swiftly as the 2d Battalion due to the many mine fields. By 2000 hours they were (86) Eye witness, self; (87) A-4, Eye witness, self.

halted just short of the east-west road, west of St. Jean des Baisants. (88)

The 9th Infantry, which had been attacking on the Division left came abreast of the 2d Battalion on the left, and passed in front of the 23d Infantry. The 9th Infantry had been attacking about 2 kilometers to the east of the 23d Infantry in a south easterly direction.

Only eight prisoners of war were captured by the regiment during the course of the days attack. They all stated that their units had suffered heavily during the three days of the operation. Our losses during the days fighting were one officer and thirty-seven enlisted men. (90)

The 9th and 38th Infantry Regiments took over the Division zone of advance from this point and the 23d Infantry reverted to Division reserve. The rout of the Germans from their prepared positions in Normandy had been started, and all that was to remain in store for the division for the next three weeks was to continue pressure on the Germans, not allowing them to again get set in a prepared position. The pursuit was on. (91)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In a resume of this operation it will be seen that the 2d Battalion of the 23d Infantry was assigned a most difficult task. The Battalion was given the mission of attacking a prepared position frontally on a narrow front, against an area which the Germans thought was the most vulnerable spot in their line. The fanaticism of the German paratroopers made the accomplishment of the task more difficult, as they defended their positions to the last, and in many instances would even be found attempting to escape back

(88) A-4; (89) A-2, A-4; (90) A-4; (91) A-2, A-3, A-4.

to their own lines after they had been by-passed.

The preparation and planning for this attack left little to be desired, and was very thorough and complete.

In the preparation for this attack, ample opportunity was given to subordinate commanders to make the necessary reconnaissance that is essential to the success of any attack.

The combined efforts of all the arms of service organic to an Infantry Division led to the successful conclusion of the attack. The engineers contributed greatly by their ability to enlarge the maps on hand to a scale that would solve the problem of control. The artillery with its well planned concentration and preparations greatly aided the movements of the Infantry. The fighting spirit, aggressiveness, courage and fortitude of the infantry men, and the initiative of the individual soldier played a dominating role in the success of this attack.

The armor of the tanks and their overwhelming fire power and shock action are greatly needed by the Infantry, and have a decided effect upon the progress made by the Infantry. Without the tanks the attack appeared to bog down. The presence of tanks provided confidence and assurance to the infantry men, which combined with his aggressive spirit lends great influence to the eventual outcome of a battle. The lack of coordination between tanks and infantry in the initial stages of this battle can be traced directly to the unfamiliarity of both tanks and infantry with the limitations and capabilities of each other. A tank battalion should be made an organic part of the infantry division so that infantry and tanks can become familiar with each other.

The orders issued for this attack were disseminated down to the lower units, and in such detail that the small unit leader knew what his part would play in the success of the operation. The part played

by the small unit leader in this attack contributed greatly to its success. The necessity of familiarizing subordinate leaders with the details of the plan proved to be of greatest importance, especially when the commander became a casualty. This fact should not be overlooked in any attack.

The locations of Observation Posts and Command Posts should be selected with utmost care. They should not be placed in the most obvious places. The enemy must be given credit for being as intelligent as we are, and he will pick out the probable Observation Post and then proceed to neutralize it. A Command Post placed too far forward is in danger of being involved in the same fires that the forward elements encounter, and the possibility of its being neutralized is highly probable. German artillery and mortar concentration during the attack tended to neutralize both the Command Post and the Observation Post at the same time as they were located within 200 yards of each other.

The loss of leaders in the early stages of an attack or during the attack can be disastrous, and all precautions should be taken to be assured that subordinates are capable and thoroughly familiar with the situation at all times.

The line of departure should never be designated in such a position that there would be a possibility of the troops needing to fight to arrive there. The location of the line of departure in this attack was designated as the Berigny-St. Lo Road. This road was under observation, and subsequently under German mortar and artillery fire from the start.

Reserve elements should not be placed initially so that they will be endangered by the same artillery and mortar fire that is falling on the forward elements. Human nature is first concerned with self-preservation, and when reserve elements are under artillery fire it is difficult to make the men get up and move. This may

happen at a decisive moment. Reserve elements in this operation were moved too close in rear of Hill 192, and as a result were subjected to the same fire that was falling on the Battalion Observation Post and Command Post.

The loss of six officers on the line of departure, and subsequent loss of others during this operation speaks well for the aggressive leadership of our officer corps. The officers of this battalion were continually moving among their men urging them forward, and in so doing, exposed themselves to the heavy German fire.

Forward observation by artillery is vital, as can be seen from this operation. With the limited observation in the hedgerow country it was essential that forward observers of the artillery be well forward. The forward observers in this operation pushed ahead with the infantry and continually adjusted fire on the next hedgerow in front of the infantry. Without this forward observation this attack might not have progressed as rapidly. This operation proved the soundness of the doctrine of forward observation.

In summary, the 2d Battalion, 23d Infantry, advanced over four and one half kilometers, against a determined and fanatical enemy, deeply instilled with the creeds of Nazism. It succeeded in accomplishing the very difficult mission assigned to it, in inflicting heavy casualties on one of the best divisions the German High Command had at its disposal in Normandy, and in making this unit non-effective as a combat unit. In the face of heavy resistance, and losing much of its own effective fighting strength, including the Battalion Commander and Staff, the Battalion decisively defeated the Germans.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. Thorough planning and co-ordination are essential to the success of any attack.

2. Familiarization of all commanders and their subordinates with the plan is necessary if the attack is to be pushed with full vigor at all times.

3. Fire power and fire superiority are necessary to give freedom of movement to the infantry.

4. Aggressive non-commissioned officers are a determining factor in any engagement. This aggressiveness pays dividends in all operations, especially when the officers become casualties.

5. Reconnaissance is a vital factor in combat. Every opportunity should be taken to give subordinates the necessary time for reconnaissance, even to the point of supplying the means for it. The liaison plane was an excellent means of providing the necessary reconnaissance by the subordinate leaders.

6. Artillery plays a dominant part in an attack, and all infantry men should be familiar with the methods of adjustment necessary to bring artillery fire down on the desired locality. The infantry men of this battalion were capable of adjusting artillery fire and this was a deciding factor, due to the limited observation afforded the forward observers of the artillery battalions.

7. Disciplined and well trained troops are essential, and will pay the highest returns. Well disciplined troops will go ahead and push the attack to the enemy in the face of overwhelming odds. The men of this battalion pushed the attack to the enemy constantly, despite the loss of their leaders.

8. The tank-infantry team is a fighting element capable of combining the necessary fire power, shock action and maneuver against a determined enemy that will make his position untenable.

9. A sense of responsibility on the part of all officers toward their men is essential. All officers should develop this

before entry into combat. Sense of responsibility alone will prove its worth, if it is practiced beforehand in training. An aggressive leader who has instilled in his men that he is behind them and will take care of their every need, does not have to worry about his men following him in combat.

10. Training must be continuous, even during combat, as conditions will arise in combat that one cannot foresee in training, and every opportunity must be grasped to improve the fighting ability of your team. New methods may have to be devised to meet new situations. The applying of the sound tactical principles laid down in the field manuals to any given situation, with slight variations to meet existing conditions, will always be near the solution desired.

11. Individual initiative can play a dominating role in combat. The individual initiative of the infantry soldier in training, should always be encouraged. Individual initiative is valuable at the critical moments when commanders cannot do a great deal to influence any action.

12. No position will fall because of its danger of being cut off. A determined enemy, indoctrinated with the fanatical creeds of Nazism, will continue to fight when their position is untenable, even though the situation may be hopeless for them, as long as they can effect casualties on the attacker.

13. Reserves are necessary to enable the commander to influence the operation at a decisive moment. Do not jeopardize their mobility by placing them too far forward where they might become immobilized by the same fires holding up the forward elements. Locate the reserve so it can be readily used to influence the action.

14. Reorganization should take place whenever the opportunity presents itself, even under fire, in order to maintain a cohesive

fighting team at all times.

15. The shock action of artillery and tanks delivered on a determined, well disciplined enemy are not sufficient to make him surrender his position. They must be followed closely by aggressive infantry, who will rout the enemy from his foxholes and dugouts and occupy the ground. Infantry should follow as close as possible to catch the enemy while he is still dazed in his holes and before he has a chance to recover and fire.

16. The ingenuity of the American soldier is paramount when problems arise. The American soldier is able to devise means to overcome certain deficiencies in many ways. This factor is important and the most should be made of this ingenuity at all times, in training and in combat. Problems referred to a group of American soldiers will always be solved in some manner, and commanders should always keep this fact in mind.