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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 109TH INFANTRY
(28TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE,
VICINITY OF DIEKIRCH, LUXEMBOURG,
16-23 DECEMBER 1944
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: RESERVE INFANTRY BATTALION
IN A COUNTERATTACK AND RETROGRADE MOVEMENT

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, 28th US Infantry Division in the Battle of the Bulge, in the vicinity of DIEKIRCH, LUXEMBOURG, 16-23 December 1944.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the principal events which led up to this action.

From mid-August until mid-September Allied Divisions raced toward the German border, the British following the coastline toward HOLLAND; First Army heading for BELGIUM and LUXEMBOURG; Third Army advancing to the south and west with almost miraculous rapidity, beating the Germans to many of the SEINE RIVER crossings. (1) By the middle of September the Allied Armies had reached the German Western Defenses and were extended generally from the mouth of the RHINE RIVER south to SWITZERLAND. Here they were forced to pause pending adequate logistical support. (2)

After the reduction of BREST the new American Ninth Army was brought into the line, to the quiet Ardennes sector, between the First and Third Armies. They were later shifted north of First Army on October 23, two days after the capture of the first major German city, AACHEN. (3) (See Map A)

(1) A-1, p. 54
(2) A-1, pp. 56-60
(3) A-1, p. 66

Again in November the Allied Forces began the advance along the front. Third Army, after capturing METZ, drove east, generally closed along the SAAR RIVER, and established three bridgeheads on the other side. On the north the British cleared the area west of the MEUSE RIVER. The main effort of the First and Ninth Armies was halted as it attempted to break into the open to the RHINE RIVER. (4) (See Map A)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The First Army fought east of AACHEN through the HURTTGEN FOREST to take or destroy the ROER RIVER DAMS. The fighting in this area was particularly bloody and costly to the Allied Forces. (5)

The First Army sector stretched from the area north of AACHEN south through LUXEMBOURG, a distance of nearly one hundred and fifty miles. (6) While the larger part of Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges' First Army was attracted toward the heavy fighting in the AACHEN area, the ARDENNES sector of eighty-eight miles was loosely held by three divisions of Major General Troy H. Middleton's VIII Corps. Shifts were frequent in this sector. (7)

In the middle of November the 28th Division took over the center sector of the VIII Corps area. This division was "worn out" after completing terrific fighting in the HURTTGEN FOREST. It was expected it could get the necessary rehabilitation in this zone. (8) On 6 December, the 4th Division moved into the area for the second time, replacing the 83rd Division at the southern end of the zone. (9)

(4) A-1, p. 68
(5) A-1, pp. 68-69
(6) A-1, pp. 74-75

(7) A-4, p. 1
(8) A-4, p. 2
(9) A-1, pp. 75-76

On December 10, the 106th Division occupied the north sector. This division had just arrived on the continent of Europe and had not yet received its battle indoctrination. 7

(10) To complete the corps picture Combat Command A of the 9th Armored Division occupied a small area between the south flank of the 28th and the north boundary of the 4th Division.

(11) (See Map A) The corps mission was to defend in place.

(12)

The enemy had been quiet all along the corps front for a two month period. Frequent reports of panzer units in rear of the German positions were never confirmed by prisoners.

(13)

THE 28TH DIVISION SITUATION

The 28th Division, the Pennsylvania Division, landed on the continent of Europe on 22 July 1944. After participating in the fierce hedgerow fighting in Normandy during July and August, they marched through Paris on August 29 to complete the liberation of the French capitol. As part of the First Army they continued the race across FRANCE and LUXEMBOURG to the German border that terminated when they endeavored to penetrate the pillbox defenses of the SIEGFRIED LINE.

In early November, the division, by this time referred to as the "Bloody Bucket" by the Germans, as an acknowledgment of the fury with which they fought, was committed in the HURTTGEN FOREST. (14) The battle casualties of the 28th, while in this area, numbered 248 officers and 5,452 enlisted men, and indicates to some extent the fierce fighting in which the

(10) A-1, p. 77
(11) A-1, p. 108
(12) A-1, p. 75

(13) A-4, p. 5
(14) A-6, pp. 1-24

units took part. (15) The division slogan "Roll On" was jokingly referred to as "Roll Over and Make Room for Replacements". (16)

Contrasted to the "Hell of Hurtgen" the Ardennes Sector was almost a rest area. During the latter part of November and early part of December replacements were received, assigned to units and indoctrinated. They soon acquired the esprit de corps of the battle veterans and moral was excellent. The division rest center at CLERVAUX offered many opportunities for relaxation, and leaves of absence were granted authorized personnel to visit PARIS, MEDITERRANEAN Coastal Resorts and, in a few instances, ENGLAND. (17)

At the same time the supply status of the division was returned to normal as personnel were reequipped and given every opportunity for refresher training. (18)

Because the division zone was twenty seven miles in width it was organized with three regiments on line. The majority of the positions along the main line of resistance overlooked the CUR RIVER, with the 112th Infantry in the north, the 110th Infantry in the center and the 109th infantry in the south. (See Map B) (19) The zone was so wide that the defensive positions consisted of nothing more than a series of widely separated strong points, each with barbed wire, minefields, an automatic weapon or two and covered shelters. Contact between the strongpoints was maintained by patrol action. (20)

DISPOSITIONS OF THE 109TH INFANTRY

In the middle of December the 109th Infantry, with the

(15)	A-5, Chap. III	(18)	A-7, p. 1
(16)	A-9, p. 6; personal knowledge	(19)	A-1, p. 108
(17)	A-6, pp. 22-23; personal knowledge	(20)	A-4, p. 3; personal knowledge

mission of occupying and defending positions on the west bank of the CUR RIVER in its zone, was disposed generally as follows: 2nd Battalion occupied positions in the vicinity of BASTENDORF, 3rd Battalion in the vicinity of BETTENDORF and 1st Battalion was located in DIEKIRCH in mobile reserve.

(21) (See Map C)

The positions of the front line battalions were relatively quiet. An occasional artillery shell hardly disturbed the prevailing peace. The line of pillboxes across the CUR RIVER seemed almost lifeless. Patrols of both forces probed irregularly across the river. (22)

The 107th and 108th FA Battalions from positions in the regimental zone were in direct support. (23)

Company C, 707th Medium Tank Battalion and Company A, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion were attached to the regiment and occupied positions in the regimental area. Company A, 103rd Combat Engineer Battalion was also attached to the regiment and one platoon of this company was attached to 1st Battalion. (24)

The kitchens were released to battalion control.

The Regimental Command Post was located in ETTELBRUCK together with the regimental service elements. (25)

The weather during the forepart of December was particularly cold and raw as well as penetrating. Occasionally snow flurries would cover the ground in scattered spots, generally melting before darkness. The ground was partially frozen, making digging difficult. (26)

(21) A-7, pp. 2-3
(22) A-5, p. 22;
personal knowledge
(23) A-7, p. 3;
personal knowledge

(24) A-7, pp. 1-3;
personal knowledge
(25) Personal knowledge
(26) Personal knowledge

The area organized by the 109th Infantry was between nine and ten miles wide extending along the high ground overlooking the OUR RIVER, the boundary between LUXEMBOURG and GERMANY. The boundaries generally extended from the junction of the LANDSCHEID-WALSDORF Roads in the north, exclusive, and the SURE RIVER, flowing from west to east, in the south, inclusive. (See Map C) The zone was cut up considerably by numerous rivers and streams. The OUR RIVER was paralleled by the SURB and BLEES RIVERS flowing exceptionally winding courses from northwest to southeast. Deep gorges and high ridges were interspersed throughout the countryside which was crisscrossed by a complex network of secondary roads that generally followed the valleys. Observation was excellent and the terrain, if organized by an adequate number of troops, favored defense.

(27)

THE RESERVE BATTALION

After occupying the positions of the right front line battalion for a short period, the 1st Battalion was moved to DIEKIRCH to perform the missions of a regimental reserve held mobile. The companies were spread throughout the town, the personnel were billeted quite comfortably in the larger buildings and, as the kitchens were released to company control, three hot meals a day were served regularly. (28)

The battalion strength at this time numbered approximately seventy per cent of the table of organization strength, and about thirty-five per cent of this group were replacements assigned since the HURTTGEN FOREST action. Training was intensified with particular emphasis on the teamwork and control of small units. (29)

(27) Personal knowledge
(28) Personal knowledge

(29) Personal knowledge

Because of the training policy and the common attitude that the battalion was occupying a rest area, particular emphasis was placed on rehabilitation, reorganization and plans were not prepared for probable employment in the event of a penetration or breakthrough. (30)

The trend of conversation and thought turned toward passes, leaves of absence, occasional parties, mail and a white Christmas. (31)

THE INITIAL SITUATION

At 0545 on the morning of December 16th, heavy concentrations of enemy artillery fire awakened the personnel of 1st Battalion in and around DIEKIRCH. Drivers scrambled out of bed and moved vehicles to concealed positions. Phones started to ring in the battalion command post as subordinate unit commanders requested information regarding the situation. It was learned from the regimental S-3 that other elements of the regiment reported concentrations of enemy artillery fire falling in their areas. Amidst the confusion a hot breakfast was served, the last hot meal the battalion had for several days. (32)

About 0700 the battalion was informed that regiment had issued orders to the 2nd and 3rd Battalions to be on the alert and to take every precaution to prevent the enemy from crossing the OUR RIVER. At the same time the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Harmon R. Williams, received orders to have the battalion ready to move in any direction on order. These instructions were relayed to all subordinate units. (33)

(30) Personal knowledge

(31) Personal knowledge

(32) Personal knowledge

(33) A-7, p. 2;
personal knowledge

At 0820 information was received from regiment that forward battalions reported strong enemy patrols had crossed the CUR RIVER and were operating north of FOUHREN and east of BETTENDORF. Artillery and small arms fire was brought to bear on the enemy resulting in heavy casualties. (34)

Later in the morning Company E, occupying the high ground south of FOUHREN, reported strong enemy infiltrations around their right flank in the vicinity of LONGSDORF. At the same time Company F reported enemy units attempting to penetrate their position. Company G, the reserve company of 2nd Battalion, was ordered to move from its present position in BRANDENBURG to the right flank of Company F to reinforce that sector. This was accomplished without delay. All front line units reported that enemy shelling was received in their areas and that large concentrations of enemy troops were attempting to infiltrate through or take their positions. The ground they occupied was held by well directed small arms and automatic weapons fire, coupled with heavy concentrations fired by the artillery battalions in direct support. (35)

At 1445 the commanding officer of 2nd Battalion reported he had lost contact with Company E. The last report from that company indicated they were receiving heavy mortar concentrations on their positions and a strong enemy force estimated as one battalion was attacking in that direction. (36) He ordered his S-3 to visit that unit, take an SCR Radio with him, find out what the exact situation was and what could be done about it. The battalion S-3 disappeared and was later reported missing in action. (37)

(34) Personal knowledge

(35) A-7, pp. 3-4

(36) A-7, p. 3

(37) Personal knowledge

At this time confused reports began to come into the 1st Battalion Command Post from all directions. Some of these were (1) the positions of the 110th Infantry, the regiment on our left, had been overrun; (2) Parts of that unit were annihilated or cut off; (3) The division command post at WILTZ was surrounded; (4) Enemy parachutists had landed at various sites in the division zone; and other rumors too numerous to mention. (38)

NARRATION

THE BATTALION INITIAL ACTION (39)

During the afternoon the battalion commander received orders to send one company, reinforced, north to LONGSDORF to regain and maintain contact with Company E.

Company A was selected for this mission and the company commander was ordered to report to the battalion command post without delay to receive instructions. The battalion order was simple and included only the current situation, the mission and the attachments. One platoon, Company C, 707th Medium Tank Battalion, one platoon, 30 caliber Machine Guns, and one section, 81 mm Mortars, Company D, were attached to Company A at this time. A battalion wire team was also designated to accompany the unit and maintain wire communication.

Company A moved east from DIEKIRCH without delay in an extended formation, necessitated because of the volume of artillery fire, and turned north on the road leading to LONGSDORF. Just south of that town they made contact with a strong enemy force estimated as an infantry battalion with at least three tiger tanks. (See Map D) The company immediately deployed two platoons and moved supporting weapons into position. In so

(38) Personal knowledge

(39) Personal knowledge

doing they suffered heavy casualties. Supporting fires were requested but the company was not able to advance. Fierce fighting occupied both forces for the remainder of the afternoon and A Company claimed more than its share of killed and wounded.

Having visited A Company sector shortly after darkness, the heavy weapons company commander reported that the position of that company was hopeless. He also related that the terrain in that area was not favorable for the proper employment of the platoon of heavy machine guns attached to that company and the positions they occupied were unsatisfactory. He desired to withdraw his guns under cover of darkness while it was possible to do so. He was promptly informed of the necessity of holding that position at all costs and that those machine guns were attached to Company A.

Shortly thereafter the A Company Commander returned to the battalion command post quite disturbed over the seriousness of the situation that faced his unit at that time. His casualty rate had been mounting continually since early in the afternoon and several of his key personnel, including two officers and the leader of the attached 30 caliber machine gun platoon, were either killed, wounded or missing. Their position had been consolidated but they could not advance against this superior German force. He recommended his unit break contact under cover of darkness but this recommendation was not accepted. Before he returned to his company he gave his personal effects, together with a note addressed to his mother to one of the battalion staff officers, and made a comment that he would never see us again. As it happened, he was killed by enemy mortar fire the following morning.

About 1630 the regimental commander directed the 1st Battalion Commander to send one company, reinforced, to sieze and hold BRANDENBURG at all costs. C Company, reinforced, was selected for this mission. The following units were attached: (1) Platoon caliber 30 Machine Guns, Company D, (2) Section 81 mm Mortars, Company D, (3) Platoon, Company A, 103rd Engineer Battalion, (4) Battalion Antitank Platoon, (5) Platoon, Company C, 707th Medium Tank Battalion consisting of two tanks, (6) Wire team and SCR 300 Radio and operator, Battalion communications Platoon, and (7) Two men, Battalion Intelligence Section. One Field Artillery forward observer also accompanied the group. The Battalion Executive Officer was placed in command of this reinforced company.

This unit moved out without hesitation, proceeded north via BASTENDORF, then northwest to BRANDENBURG without making contact with enemy forces. After a hasty map reconnaissance the troops were disposed generally as follows: The Engineer Platoon, with one antitank gun attached, was ordered to pass through the town, proceed approximately two miles to the south, establish a road block and delay enemy forces approaching from that direction. C Company with a platoon of machine guns attached, was directed to occupy the high ground west of the town and establish road blocks on roads leading to the southwest, northwest and north. (See Map D) The mortars occupied positions south of the town and the command post was located in BRANDENBURG itself. Wire communication was established to the 2nd Battalion Command Post. The troops were in position before 2230 and battalion informed that the town was secured without difficulty.

This group was no more than in position when the quiet was interrupted by small arms and automatic weapons fire from the left or southwestern approach to the town. Immediate investigation disclosed that a German patrol mounted on bicycles had approached the road block. C Company had opened fire prematurely and the patrol was able to withdraw easily under cover of darkness.

An almost identical situation had occurred at the road block covering the northern approach to the town. However the squad covering this approach withheld fire and remained quiet until the leading elements of the patrol had halted at the road block. Two members of the patrol were killed with bayonets and two others were captured. The prisoners were searched and identified as members of 352nd VG Division. Interrogation was hampered because a competent interpreter was not available.

Aside from numerous alerts and intermittent artillery fire which caused several casualties, Company B enjoyed a comparatively quiet day in DIEKIRCH.

THE SECOND DAY

Concentrations of enemy artillery, lasting for one hour, landed on positions in the regimental zone commencing at 0530 on the morning of 17 December. (40)

Third Battalion reported enemy attacks threatening their positions. About 1000, one Platoon, Company K, was attached to Company I and given the mission of restoring the right portion of their sector. At the same time, Company K, minus one platoon, was committed on the left of Company I with the mission of extending the battalion line to the left and rear and gaining contact with A Company, southwest of LONGSDORF.

Fierce fighting ensued and the enemy was contained. (41)

Second Battalion was attacked in the vicinity of FOUHREN by German Infantry supported by tanks. In the left sector Companies F and G coordinated their defense and were responsible for a large number of enemy killed and wounded. In this action twenty prisoners were captured. (42)

Antitank Company organized positions east of DIEKIRCH along the road running south from TANDEL near R.J. 206. They became engaged in a fire fight with an enemy force estimated as two companies of infantry reinforced with three Tiger Tanks. The 1st Battalion Commander participated in this fire fight in which the superior enemy force was repulsed.

Company A failed to advance toward LONGSDORF but they were able to continue to organize their position and hold the ground they occupied against repeated enemy attacks. (43)

During early afternoon the enemy overran the F and H Company kitchens located in BASTENDORF. About the same time enemy artillery destroyed the D Company kitchen located in DIEKIRCH. An order was then issued by regiment that the kitchens would revert to regimental control and were moved to the vicinity of ETTELBRUCK. The majority of the units of the regiment had been existing on K rations since breakfast on the 16th. (44)

Company C, in the vicinity of BRANDENBURG, reorganized, dug in and camouflaged positions that had been occupied rather hastily during the hours of darkness.

A five man patrol was formed to maintain contact between the road block organized by the Engineer Platoon on the DIEKIRCH-FRIEDHOF Road, and the company command post.

(41) Statement of Major H. M. Kemp, then Executive Officer 3rd Battalion, 109th Infantry, 15 January 1950.

(42) A-7, p. 3

(43) Personal knowledge

(44) A-7, p. 4; personal knowledge

The patrol made several trips throughout the day and each time reported the platoon engaged in a fire fight with a superior enemy force that they were able to contain. (45)

Early in the afternoon an enemy force, estimated as a full strength company, moved into the town of LANDSCHEID from the north. They grounded equipment and began to organize what appeared to be a defensive position. Several of the group started to dig shelters when they were surprised by closely coordinated mortar and artillery fire. The initial concentrations landed in the center of the largest group. The screams and cries voiced at that time could be plainly heard in the company position and the enemy scattered in all directions. (46)

Enemy patrols operated aggressively along the BRANDENBURG-BASTENDORF Road, cutting the wire lines and harassing wire crews as they moved along the road endeavoring to repair them. As a result of this patrol action another road block was established on the BRANDENBURG-BASTENDORF Road, southeast of BRANDENBURG. (47) (See Map D)

The enemy succeeded in infiltrating large groups into the regimental sector, particularly the rear areas. These groups constantly harassed the positions of the Regimental Cannon Company and the supporting field artillery. (48)

Because of the numerous enemy patrol actions reported throughout the area, the battalion commander organized one platoon from Company B with two tanks attached. He instructed them to maintain contact between DIEKIRCH and the road block on the DIEKIRCH-FRIEDHOF Road, manned by the platoon of engi-

(45) Personal knowledge

(46) Personal knowledge

(47) Personal knowledge

(48) A-7, p. 4

neers, and close with, capture or destroy any enemy that infiltrated along this road. Shortly thereafter it was reported the gun positions of Battery A, 107th Field Artillery and Battery C, 108th Field Artillery, located astride the DIEKIRCH-FRIEDHOF Road in the vicinity of the latter town, were threatened. (See Map D) The battalion commander of the 107th Field Artillery Battalion assumed command of this group and proceeded to aid the personnel at the gun positions. After severe fighting in and about the battery positions the guns and equipment of those units were successfully evacuated. The coordinated fires of the howitzers accounted for a large number of enemy killed or wounded. Forty-five prisoners of war were taken in this action. (49)

Between 1000 and 1600 radio contact with Company E was gained and they constantly requested ammunition, rations and more concentrated artillery fire. Company B, less one platoon, with four tanks attached, was given the mission of supplying ammunition and rations to the isolated Company E. Late in the afternoon they moved east from DIEKIRCH and then north toward TANDEL. They gained contact with a superior enemy force just short of the town and failed to advance in the accomplishment of their mission. (50) (See Map D)

THE THIRD DAY

The enemy continued heavy interdictionary artillery fires on all positions during the night and patrolled extensively through our lines into rear areas. However, our positions remained substantially the same at daybreak. (51)

Neither Companies A nor B were able to advance as they

(49) A-7, p. 4; A-4, p. 108; personal knowledge
(50) A-7, p. 4; A-4, p. 108; personal knowledge
(51) A-7, p. 4; A-4, p. 108; personal knowledge

met increased enemy resistance. The positions of Company A were threatened by a renewed attack against their right flank but somehow they managed to repel this effort. (52) Three enemy tanks broke through the defenses of these two units, moved south to Road Junction 206 where they were finally stopped by bazooka fire from personnel of Antitank Company.

(53) The enemy infiltration in the areas of these units made movement almost impossible. Tanks were used by Company A, in several instances, to evacuate wounded and were able to refuel and return to their positions. (54)

C Company continued to hold their positions in BRANDENBURG in the face of repeated strong enemy attacks. The positions of one platoon of Company G were overrun by a strong German force early in the afternoon. The members of the platoon not killed or wounded were captured and disarmed. As they were marched to the rear they managed to escape and wandered unarmed into C Company area in BRANDENBURG. Enough weapons were left behind by wounded and taken from German Prisoners to rearm the platoon. After a hasty reorganization they returned to their former position. (55)

Elements of 3rd Battalion continued in close combat with the enemy. Second Battalion Units, with the exception of Company E, were able to hold their positions successfully. A patrol that advanced to FOUHREN reported Company E Command Post was destroyed by fire, their positions overrun and no friendly troops in the immediate area. (56)

Combat Command A, 9th Armored Division, the unit on the right of the 109th Infantry, fell back to new positions.

(52) Personal knowledge

(53) A-7, p. 5

(54) A-8, 18 Dec 44

(55) Personal knowledge

(56) A-7, p. 5; A-4, p. 108

Serious gaps existed in the regimental front because Company E and one platoon of Company K were captured or missing. For these reasons an organized withdrawal was planned to the high ground north and northeast of DIEKIRCH. (57) (See Map D)

Company A, 103rd Engineer Battalion, prepared all bridges in the area for demolition as soon as all troops had cleared. Advance parties were ordered to the rear to reconnoiter new positions during daylight hours. Three routes were selected: C Company and the remainder of 2nd Battalion through BRANDENBURG, 3rd Battalion south of the DIEKIRCH-BETTENDORF Road and Companies A and B north of the same road. (58)

C Company was charged with the responsibility of holding the approaches to BRANDENBURG until such time as 2nd Battalion Units had broken contact and passed through that town. The tanks were held in position until the foot elements of C Company had cleared by twenty minutes so that the noise of the tanks would not disclose their routes or activities. Although the distance to the newly selected defensive area was only five miles from BRANDENBURG over hilly terrain approximately twenty stragglers fell out of the column because of utter exhaustion from the stress and strain of the past three days. A straggler detachment was not provided by the battalion order but the artillery forward observer and the tank platoon leader assisted the stragglers to climb onto the tanks and moved them in that manner to the new positions. Fortunately, enemy infantry and armor failed to maintain contact during the withdrawal; however, enemy artillery fired heavy concentrations on BETTENDORF.

(57) A-7, p. 5; A-5, p. 109

(58) Personal knowledge

First Battalion units did not suffer any casualties during the night and the withdrawal was successfully executed before 0200 in the morning. (59)

THE SECOND DEFENSIVE POSITION

The battalion sector of the new defensive position extended generally east-west through the little town of FRIEDHOF and was organized with Companies A, C and B on line from left to right, respectively. (See Map D) All attachments reverted to regimental control upon arrival in this area. (60)

Although the position offered high ground to the elements of the battalion, the sector was wooded and observation was somewhat limited. Foxholes and slit trenches were dug and occupied during the night, and the battalion ammunition and pioneer platoon constructed a mine field across the road extending north-south through the area. (61)

Promptly at daybreak, the battalion commander accompanied by the S-3 made a hasty visit to all front line positions, encouraging the men and at the same time suggesting ways and means the positions could be better organized. The locations of the automatic weapons were changed and their sectors of fire further coordinated. The men were particularly cold, tired and hungry and very anxious to build fires. Preventing this was an added problem. Although contact with the enemy had been broken everyone realized it was just a matter of hours before the "Jerry" would be in front of our position. (62)

Early in the afternoon attacks against the 2nd and 3rd Battalion positions were repelled and the front line elements of 1st Battalion became engaged in several small arms fire

(59) Personal knowledge

(60) Personal knowledge

(61) Personal knowledge

(62) Personal knowledge

fight with aggressive enemy patrols. The greater part of the day, however, was spent improving the positions and endeavoring to keep warm. (63)

Later in the afternoon the battalion commander received orders that another withdrawal was planned to begin at 2000 that evening, 19 December 1944. This order was a result of the new mission, "to protect the left flank of CCA, 9th Armored Division", assigned to the regiment. At the same time he received the information that contact with division headquarters had been lost and Regimental Combat Team 109 was attached to CCA, 9th Armored Division. (64)

An advance party was immediately organized to reconnoiter the new position, southwest of ETTTELBRUCK. They moved out quickly so that the reconnaissance could be completed before darkness. (65)

Lt. Col. Williams contacted the company commanders and plans were completed for the movement and organization of the new position. First Battalion was designated to follow 2nd Battalion in the following order: Company A, Company B, Headquarters, Company D and Company C. One platoon, Company C, was charged with protecting the withdrawal of the battalion and that platoon followed the battalion thirty minutes later. The engineers mined and booby trapped all bridges in the area and supporting artillery displaced and covered the withdrawal by interdiction fires. (66)

The battalion moved as far as ETTTELBRUCK without incident, except a few casualties resulting from active enemy artillery fire. The speed of the column slowed down considerably and

(63) Personal knowledge
(64) A-1, p. 104;
personal knowledge

(65) Personal knowledge
(66) Personal knowledge

investigation disclosed the entire population of ETTTELBRUCK had decided to evacuate at the same time the battalion had planned their movement through the town and along the same route. (67)

The resulting confusion was almost unbelievable. The civilians used every means of transportation possible to carry their personal effects, including beasts of burden, bicycles, baby carriages, wheelbarrows, wagons, carts, household pets and automobiles. The civilians fortunate enough to be driving automobiles insisted on keeping the headlights burning. The leaders of the battalion units endeavored to express themselves as best they could without success, that it was necessary to keep the lights turned off. Finally, one of the officers decided the only solution to the problem was to start breaking the illuminated headlamps with a bayonet or other weapon. After treating a half dozen automobiles in this manner the drivers of the other vehicles were able to determine what was intended and the column was once again in darkness. The problem of straggler control became increased at this point. Luckily, the battalion position was approximately two thousand yards southeast of the town so that civilians intermingled in the column for that distance only. (68)

Enemy artillery, although active in the other battalion sectors during the course of the evening, did not score a direct hit on the 1st Battalion column or the civilian population after they passed through ETTTELBRUCK. As soon as the column cleared ETTTELBRUCK enemy concentrations were frequent in the town itself. Had these concentrations been fired fifteen minutes earlier the 1st Battalion and civilian casualties would have been severe. (69)

(67) Personal knowledge
(68) Personal knowledge

(69) Personal knowledge

THE DEFENSE OF THE FINAL POSITION

As the battalion proceeded along the road the units were met by company and platoon guides and moved to their respective defense areas. The positions were organized as best they possibly could be during the remaining hours of darkness. Companies C and B were disposed on the MLR; Company A occupied a reserve location approximately five hundred yards in rear of the boundary between front line units. (70) (See Map E)

At daylight Lt. Col. Williams visited the companies, requiring the unit commanders to continue to dispose their troops and to resume the organization of the position. The fires of automatic weapons were coordinated. Contact with 2nd Battalion on the right was established and the defense of the battalion consolidated. (71)

The troops had existed for the past four days on the K type ration and, in most instances, had not been able to heat water to prepare hot coffee. Those blanket rolls that were moved from DIEKIRCH to ETTELBRUCK with the kitchens had not been brought up to the position during the previous nights because of the fluid tactical situation in the battalion area and the numerous enemy patrols threatening supply routes and rear installations. The frequent moves, the changing situation, and the number of miles covered by marching at night over particularly rough terrain caused many of the men to abandon or lose their overcoats, gloves and overshoes. All the men had wet feet and some were developing the early stages of "trench foot". (72)

Lt. Col. Williams encouraged the men at every available

(70) Personal knowledge
(71) Personal knowledge

(72) Personal knowledge

opportunity and insisted that the other officers do likewise. Because of the tactical situation the building of fires could not be permitted. The battalion supply officer was able to obtain one extra pair of socks for each man. The personnel were then able to dry and massage their feet and put on dry socks; however this failed to aid the situation to any great extent as their shoes remained wet. At this point the men were cold, wet, physically and mentally exhausted, and somewhat discouraged. (73)

Early the morning of the 20th of December enemy troop movements were observed in and about the town of ETTTELBRUCK. The artillery forward observer with B Company was contacted and concentrations were fired. Prisoner of war interrogation later in the day disclosed the artillery fire at this time to be exceptionally accurate, inflicting numerous casualties and delaying the enemy advance through ETTTELBRUCK considerably. (74)

Enemy patrols were quite active and troop movements to the south along the ALZETTE RIVER were reported. Our positions remained substantially the same throughout the night. (75)

On the morning of the 21st a German Officer was captured by one of the front line squads of Company C. A map carried by this officer showed the 352 Volksgrenadier Division had been attacking against our regimental front. (76) Third Army G-2 reports had given this unit a combat evaluation of "Good fighting unit" composed of German Air Force and Naval personnel who, after three and a half months of extensive training and re-organization, had become "Good assault Infantry troops". (77)

(73) Personal knowledge
(74) Personal knowledge
(75) Personal knowledge

(76) Personal knowledge
(77) A-3, G-2 Annex 28,
p. CXXV

To accomplish the mission of protecting the left flank of CCA, 9th Armored Division, 3rd Battalion units, since yesterday, had been disposed in and about the towns of GROS-BOUS, MERZIG and FEULEN. (78)

Late in the afternoon pressure against I Company, located in MERZIG, increased to such a degree that they could not hold their position so they were pulled back to the high ground west of 1st Battalion. The left flank of C Company was adjusted to tie in with this unit. (79)

Throughout the remainder of the day enemy patrol action continued and repeated motor movements were reported in front of C Company's position. The enemy was harassed with artillery fire in ETTELBRUCK and along the road leading south. (80)

At 0200, the 22nd of December, C Company reported heavy enemy activity in front of their position and flares were fired frequently by the enemy over our main line of resistance. At 0300 strong enemy infiltrations were reported in C Company sector. At daylight it was discovered a penetration was successful in turning the right flank of that unit. (See Map E) (81)

Lt. Col. Williams personally led A Company, the battalion reserve company, against the head of the penetration and was successful in restoring the main line of resistance. This unit organized the gap and stopped further infiltration at this point. It was discovered that seven front line riflemen of Company C were killed by bayonets in their foxholes. (82)

Motor columns and foot troops moved across the front of our position throughout the remainder of the morning and artillery and mortar concentrations continued to be fired with

(78) A-7, p. 7 (80) Personal knowledge
(79) A-7, p. 7; (81) Personal knowledge
personal knowledge (82) Personal knowledge

ever-increasing destructiveness. (83)

About 1000, the morning of the 22nd, the spirits of the men of 1st Battalion picked up considerably as elements of the 318th Infantry, 80th Division, plodded through the snow as they passed through the positions and relieved the troops. Little time was lost in assembling units and moving about three thousand yards in a southeasterly direction to a group of buildings in BERG, LUXEMBOURG, including the summer home of the Duchess of Luxembourg. The personnel immediately took steps to dry their clothing and equipment, heat coffee and another K ration. The corridors and rooms of the building were without heat but, after spending the past six nights under combat conditions, that was one night's rest that will long be remembered. (84)

To sum up the results of this operation: Companies A and B, 109th Infantry, while they failed to gain contact with Company E or carry badly needed supplies to that unit, were able to contain and delay superior enemy forces for three days. Company C, 109th Infantry, was successful in siezing and holding BRANDENBURG, thus assisting the 2nd Battalion to withdraw to the second defensive position. The one platoon from Company B relieved the pressure around the gun positions of Battery A, 107th Field Artillery and Battery C, 108th Field Artillery, enabling them to avoid capture or annihilation. (85)

The 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, by thorough and stubborn resistance, assisted the 109th Infantry Regiment to occupy successive delaying positions, maintain contact with elements of

(83) Personal knowledge
(84) Personal knowledge

(85) Personal knowledge

the 9th Armored Division on their right and prevented the 352 Volksgrenadier Division from gaining the objective assigned to them. (86)

The regiment was able to slip to the south across the SURE RIVER, where they, together with elements of the 9th Armored Division and the 4th Division, successfully formed a southern hinge, on which a new line, facing north, was eventually formed. (87)

As an indication of the fighting in this sector the ammunition expended by the elements of the regiment during the first three days of this operation included the following: (1) 280,000 rounds of small arms, (2) 5,000 rounds of mortar, (3) 3,000 hand grenades and (4) 300 rounds of bazooka. (88)

The total casualties in the 109th Infantry for the month of December were 1172, including 43 officers. Of this total, 98 were killed, 213 wounded, 159 missing, 254 non-battle and 350 captured; 285 prisoners of war were captured during the same period. Very little fighting occurred during the periods not covered by this monograph. (89)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. ACTIONS WHILE IN RESERVE

The 1st Battalion had been the reserve battalion of the 109th Regiment for several days prior to 16 December. During that period replacements were indoctrinated and the personnel were reequipped and given every opportunity for recreation and refresher training.

Responsibilities of the reserve battalion include making reconnaissance and preparing plans for probable missions.

(86) A-1, p. 114

(87) A-1, p. 114

(88) A-7, p. 9

(89) A-7, p. 9;
personal knowledge

Reconnaissance was not made and plans were not in existence. As a result, decisions concerning the method of employment, routes, missions and objectives were hurried and not as sound as they might have been. Four different missions were given to elements of the battalion. The Battalion Executive Officer and the Officers of C Company were not familiar with the routes to BRANDENBURG or the terrain prior to employment of the unit in that area. This can be attributed in a great extent to the attitude adopted by everyone that we were occupying a rest area and more emphasis was placed on rehabilitation and reorganization than making plans for future employment in the event of a penetration or breakthrough.

2. COMMITMENT OF RESERVES

It is the writer's opinion that the reserves of the Regiment were committed piecemeal and without the coordination necessary for them to accomplish the mission assigned to them.

The initial report from Company E on the 16th of December indicated infiltrations around their right flank in the vicinity of LONGSDORF. At the same time Company F reported enemy units attempting to penetrate their position. As a result Company G, the reserve company of 2nd Battalion, was ordered to the right flank of Company F to reinforce that sector in the gap between Companies F and E.

At 1445 on the same day, contact with Company E was lost and an enemy force estimated as one battalion was attacking in their direction. Later in the afternoon, Company A, from the Reserve Battalion, was ordered north to LONGSDORF to regain and maintain contact with Company E.

About 1000 on the morning of the 17th, Company K, minus one platoon, reserve company of 3rd Battalion, was committed on

the left of Company I. Their mission was to extend the battalion line to the left and rear and gain contact with Company A.

Late in the afternoon Company B, minus one platoon, another company of the Reserve Battalion, was ordered north towards TANDEL to resupply Company E.

During this two day period four companies of the Regiment were committed piecemeal without coordination at four different times in four different directions toward the position of E Company. Had the attacks of these units been coordinated a greater degree of success would have been achieved.

3. THE COUNTERATTACK

It is my opinion that the reconnaissance of the zone of action of Company A was not adequate and that available information of the enemy was not taken into consideration before that unit was committed.

The report from Company E on the 16th of December indicated an enemy force estimated as one battalion attacking in that direction. Later reports from both A and D Company Commanders indicated a superior force in front of the A Company position. The mission assigned to Company A was too difficult for a unit of this size to accomplish. Granted, it was necessary to delay and contain the enemy force. This might better have been accomplished with less casualties by the reserve elements making maximum use of the key terrain north and northeast of DIEKIRCH and coordinating their defenses on a narrow front.

4. CONTROL OF UNIT TRAINS

During the organization and occupation of the position in the early part of December, the unit trains were released to battalion control and as a result were moved forward to battalion and, in some instances, company areas. On the 16th of December

the tactical situation changed abruptly and a penetration was made in the regimental sector. On the afternoon of the 17th the F and H Company kitchens, located in BASTENDORF, were overrun by enemy and the D Company kitchen, located in DIEKIRCH, was destroyed by artillery fire. It was not until after these three incidents had happened that the trains were ordered to revert to regimental control. It is the opinion of the writer that if the supply officer had kept abreast of the tactical situation and recommended the kitchens revert to regimental control on the 16th these three kitchens might not have been destroyed.

5. TRAFFIC CONTROL

On 19 December the civilian population evacuated ETTELBRUCK at the same time the battalion column moved through the town. The confusion could have been reduced, perhaps eliminated, if prior consideration and planning had been given this problem by staff officers at either the battalion or regimental level.

A military government officer was responsible for military government in the regimental zone and a military police platoon was organized in the Regimental Headquarters Company. If the Military Government Officer had been familiar with the tactical situation and a military police squad had been designated to work in conjunction with that officer, traffic could have been effectively controlled.

6. SUPPLY DISCIPLINE

On the 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd of December the number of personnel in the battalion without overcoats, gloves and overshoes indicated a failure in training to impress upon the minds of the enlisted men the importance of not losing or abandoning items of

clothing and equipment. During these four days the members of the battalion were particularly cold, wet and miserable and the men doing the majority of the complaining were without one of these three items.

The frequent moves, the miles covered by marching at night over particularly rough terrain, and the fluid tactical situation had a bearing on the number of shortages; however the majority of these shortages were the result of carelessness.

7. LOCAL SECURITY

The penetration in the C Company sector on the morning of the 22nd of December, coupled with the fact that members of their unit were killed by bayonets while still in their foxholes, indicated a lack of security on the part of front line elements of this unit. Had adequate steps been taken to provide security it is doubtful the enemy could have completely surprised these men in their foxholes. It is granted the personnel of the unit were almost completely exhausted; however, security measures must be taken under any and all circumstances.

8. SUPERVISION OF ORDERS

The superior manner in which the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. H. R. Williams supervised the reorganization of the battalion on successive defensive positions is worthy of favorable comment.

On the mornings of December 19th and 20th Lt. Col. Williams realized the battalion personnel were almost physically exhausted after the withdrawals of the previous nights. He managed to conserve sufficient energy himself to be able to visit front line units promptly at daylight, assisting in the organization of the defensive positions and encouraging the men at every available

opportunity. Consequently he insured the battalion was adequately organized and alert in the event of enemy attack.

9. CONTACT WITH OPPOSING FORCES

The night of December 19th the elements of 1st Battalion were able to organize their initial withdrawal under cover of darkness and move to new positions without excessive casualties during the conduct of the operation. The new positions were located by enemy patrols the following day. On the 19th, during the hours of darkness, 1st Battalion was again able to break contact and move to new positions.

Had the German force been more aggressive and alert, contact could have been maintained during the organization of the withdrawals and movements to these new positions. Subsequently accurate artillery fire could have been placed on our columns and the results would have been devastating.

LESSONS

1. Commanders of reserve units should continually make reconnaissance, keep abreast of the situation and prepare plans for probable missions.
2. Piecemeal commitment of reserves without coordination is not practicable and should be avoided.
3. Decision as to when to launch previously planned local counterattacks essential to regain critical terrain within the battle position involves consideration as to whether the momentum of the enemy attack has been spent to a degree that the counter-attack has a reasonable chance of success.
4. Supply officers of infantry units must constantly keep abreast of the tactical situation and make timely recommendations concerning the control and location of unit trains.
5. Staff officers at all levels must consider measures

necessary to regulate and control traffic and include such measures as part of plans and operations.

6. Supply discipline is a continuous problem and steps must be taken by leaders of all echelons to insure proper enforcement.

7. Commanders of all units are responsible for adequate security of their respective units and this cannot be neglected at any time under any circumstances.

8. Complete and thorough supervision of orders is one of the most important steps of troop leadership.

9. The opposing force must not be allowed to organize a withdrawal under cover of darkness and under no circumstances permitted to break contact.