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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 343d INFANTRY (86th DIVISION)  
IN THE REDUCTION OF THE RUHR POCKET AND THE REDOUBT AREA,  
25 March - 8 May 1945  
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Regimental Supply Officer)

Type of operation described: PURSUIT OPERATIONS

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 2

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INTRODUCTION

Those who fought in the Pacific Theater and during the early part of the war in the European Theater may find it difficult to follow a story of a war fought in cool, invigorating weather, over beautifully scenic terrain often using super highways as Main Supply Routes and fighting an enemy who had neither the will nor the logistical support to make a determined stand except on a very small scale -- a war in which an Infantry Division conquered 220 miles of enemy territory, captured 53,354 prisoners and forced seven rivers in a period of forty two days -- a war that permitted the division commander at one time to issue legitimately with the rations one bottle of champagne per three men in the division. (1)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

On 7 March 1945, the last determined German defensive line along the Rhine River was penetrated when the bridge at Remagen was taken intact. By 22 March, the bridgehead was secure. On 25 March the breakout began moving eastward and then on 28 March the direction of the major attack turned northward to effect a junction with the Ninth Army at the Ruhr River. It was during this major phase of allied operations that the operations to be described in this narrative began. (2)

The operations of the 343d Infantry Regiment, 86th Division during the period of 25 March to 8 May 1945 may be divided logically into three phases as follows: (3)

1. "The Watch on the Rhine" - <sup>25 March -</sup> 4 April 1945 (See Maps 1-2).
2. "The Ruhr Pocket" 5 April - 18 April 1945 (See Maps 1-3).
3. "The Redoubt Campaign" 20 April - 13 May 1945 (See Maps 1-4).

(1) A-2; (2) A-4, Pp 19-25; (3) A-2.

Note particularly the mileages moved while fighting and in the movement between battle areas. The total distance moved during the entire period of forty two days is approximately six hundred miles.

The description which follows will cover the operations from the viewpoint of the Regimental Supply Officer and only so much of the tactical situation as is necessary from time to time to establish the combat situation and the location of the action.

#### PHASE I OF REGIMENTAL OPERATIONS

The "Watch on the Rhine" adequately describes the first phase of the operations. The regiment occupied the sector as shown in the city of Cologne, Germany (see Map 2) on the Rhine River with the mission of patrolling the western banks of the river and preventing crossings by the German Army. The enemy opposing us consisted primarily of Home Guard Troops with a few SS Troop leaders. During the ten day period, patrols were sent across the river, the largest consisting of thirty-seven men and two officers, which captured five prisoners for interrogation; the mortars, 57-mm guns, cannon and field artillery fired on targets of opportunity; and all personnel were generally familiarized with actual combat conditions. No attempts were made by the Germans to cross the river in force. (4)

During this period the regiment gathered up packboards, dummy ammunition, extra clothing and other items of property which it was felt would not be needed in future operations. However, no authority could be obtained to turn these items in to supply agencies and therefore it was necessary to store them in a suitable building and leave a detachment of guards who were to be taken over administratively by the 82nd Airborne Division which relieved us. The equipment had all been neatly segregated and piled in company lots in anticipation of a hurried pick-up if necessary at some future time. However, the 82nd Airborne Division, in addition to taking care of our guards, took over our storage building

(4) A-1.

after we left and, using Russian laborers, moved our equipment. Naturally, our equipment was never again anything but a regimental pile and a subsequent segregation proved unsatisfactory to several company commanders.

(5)

It was at Cologne that we were also first acquainted with unnecessary waste of supplies. The organization which we relieved left behind great piles of dirty used clothing, broken rations and assorted ammunition. We learned later that the accumulation of dirty clothing was the result of their method of solving the laundry problem -- they merely drew new clothing and took in the dirty clothing but failed to dispose of it properly. The rations were an accumulated surplus of emergency rations which had been broken into by individuals to get such things as fruit bars, peanuts, bacon, etc., and then left since they were unfit for issue and also because, upon moving, the regiment did not have sufficient transportation to carry them along. Ammunition, including some types in limited stock, was also left behind. (6)

We learned that an Infantry Regiment under the existing T/O & E could not handle track vehicles. Our six M7 105-MM Howitzer track vehicles had made a three hundred and fifty mile march from Camp Old Gold to Cologne without floats. We had requested floats, but none were available for our use. We had no skilled tank mechanics and from the time we started our first move until our combat period was over, our M7's were never all on the road at one time. (7)

Having had a brief and uneventful initiation at Cologne, we were relieved by the 325th Glider Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division on the night of 3 - 4 April. The regiment moved by motor on 5 April to an assembly area in the vicinity of Dillenberg, Germany, from which position the second phase of its operations began. (See map 3). (8)

Before going into the narrative of the second phase it would be well to point out here a lesson learned on the move concerning captured transportation.

(5, 6, 7) Personnel experience; (8) A-1.

→ The organization which we had relieved at Cologne had left with us several captured vehicles which we should have left with the outfit who relieved us. However, being the neophytes that we were, our company commanders thought that the battle-wise people whom they relieved had become battle fatigued and they greedily accepted anything with wheels and an engine and put their 1st echelon mechanics to work making them run -- feeling that regiment would certainly confiscate their prizes if they allowed them to enter the motor pool. As a result, when the regimental column moved out from Cologne, our time length was greatly increased and our road space was resplendent with rifle and heavy weapons company commanders riding in puffing Kraut half tracks, their duffle neatly stored in cumbersome four wheel trailers and their troops riding in a style to which they were totally unaccustomed. Naturally, the Regimental Supply Section had its share -- against the better judgement of a capable Regimental Motor Officer. Needless to say, during the ninety mile trip much reloading took place and many company commanders wound up in tight seats in greatly overcrowded jeeps with duffle dragging in the road. If their friends and patrons had been able to see the column after it was about fifty miles out, they no doubt would have lost their battle fatigue symptoms amidst a roar of belly laughs. The coveted captured transportation, for which we had no replacement parts, lacked wheels, tires, tracks and innumerable engine parts. Ninety per cent of it was abandoned before the march was completed.

(9)

Before we go into the narrative of the second phase of the operations it would be well to describe more in detail the functions of the Regimental Supply Officer and the Supply Group during the first phase so that the comparison between the first, and second phases may better be brought out. First of all, the first ten days had been a type of defense but the probability of attack was remote. Being in a large town and having a large river barrier, we were free to move almost without restriction in rear of

(9) Personal experience.

the river bank and, on the whole, the supply functioning resembled a garrison set-up with the added feature of having a well-equipped civilian garage for a motor pool and a warehouse for our Regimental Supply set-up. The only inconvenience was working in blackout at night. The Regimental Supply Officer was billeted and spent the bulk of his time with the Regimental Command Group since the RSO was only three city blocks away and wire communication was possible. Supplies came in normally and were distributed in the normal garrison manner. Three hot meals a day was the general rule for the bulk of the troops. (10)

#### PHASE II OF REGIMENTAL OPERATIONS

Shortly after the second phase began it was found that certain different supply routines were necessary to support the regiment during a pursuit. These few, small, comparatively insignificant changes made at this time proved to be the basic plan which enabled us to supply the regiment properly through the two pursuit phases which followed and during which other organizations failed to accomplish the mission. These changes made in the T/O & E Organization to meet a particular tactical situation constitute the lessons to be learned from the narrative of the action that follows. In general, they embody sound and accepted principles. For purposes of brevity they may be listed as follows:

1. The battalion trains consisting of five (5) kitchen trucks and two (2) ammunition trucks were released to the battalions, and the kitchen truck of Regimental Headquarters Company was released to the Company at the beginning. These trucks were not returned to regimental control until after the combat period.

2. The Regimental Supply Section retained eleven (11) 2½-ton trucks. (Cn Co and AT Co were not extensively employed and hence were able to function without their 2½-ton ammunition trucks and AT Co assisted the Regimental CP in making its moves.)

(10) Personal experience.



3. The Regimental Supply Officer spent the bulk of his time with the supply train, leaving an NCO as liaison at the Regimental CP and checking in only once or twice a day to coordinate moves and stay abreast of the regimental situation and regimental plans. He spent the remainder of his time actually supervising services and supplies in the RSO and coordinating movement of the supply echelon.

4. Battalion ammunition supply was dealt with by requiring battalion S-4's to turn in expenditure reports daily. Their expenditure reports were, in effect, that portion of their prescribed loads which they had used. Since the prescribed load was more than adequate to support a day's combat, the routine amounted to replenishing the prescribed loads. The battalion commander could prescribe his own loads. By carrying small amounts of ammunition on the eleven (11) trucks retained by The Regimental Supply Section, we were able to re-supply the battalions on many occasions without sending their trucks to the ASP. After we gained a little experience, battalion trucks were seldom required to go back farther than the train bivouac.

5. All supply installations were habitually in one place called the RSO or train bivouac. It included the motor pool, the ammunition section, the ration section, a general supply section, and the RSO section. We all moved together, ate together, and were in the same billets.

6. Rations were issued at the RSO daily, being available at 1630. They were drawn by the using units with their own transportation and taken forward to the kitchen locations designated by battalion and separate company commanders. One emergency ration was held on hand by Regiment. The normal ration issue consisted of two hot meals and one emergency meal.

7. Gasoline supply was maintained in the motor pool by the use of some 250 "Jerry" gas cans and all the U.S. cans which were available. With the additional transportation the Regimental Class III supply point was able to supply the regiment except on the long moves.

Along with these regimental routines the division branch supply sections adopted certain routines which included the habitual establishment of a Class I DP, and a Class III DP when possible as far forward as possible. All branches attempted to have on hand small supplies of essential equipment.

To go on then, into the second phase of the operation, namely the participation in the reduction of the Ruhr Pocket, we can establish the tactical situation sufficiently for our background purposes by saying that the regiment operated in the division zone with the 8th Division on the left and the 99th Division on the right, as part of the 1st Army (Map 3) with the mission of advancing and destroying all enemy in our zone. During this period the regiment advanced eighty miles and captured 8039 prisoners. Stiff resistance and a counterattack took place at Herscheid and considerable difficulty was experienced in taking the town of Huinghausen, Germany. With the exception of the above, resistance was light. The final objective, the high ground in the vicinity of Hagen, Germany, was taken by 1830, 15 April 1945 with an additional two days spent mopping up by-passed areas of resistance. (11)

During this pursuit, the regiment was motorized with borrowed trucks and by riding on tanks and tank destroyer vehicles whenever the situation permitted. Individuals began to discard gas masks and the battalions frequently found it impossible to move up the individual rolls at night. In many instances, two or three guards were left miles behind watching rolls and other extraneous equipment. In spite of the fact that the battalions had their transportation plus their sections of the transportation platoon, the action and movement was too fast to permit them to keep closed up. Of course, civilian billets with beds and blankets were available to the troops, and all units were able to carry the essential equipment for pursuing the fight. The transportation retained by the Regimental Supply Section was used to the utmost in drawing gasoline, (11) A-1, A-7.

rations, replacement equipment and in moving. On several occasions we found it necessary to leap frog by half sections. Every available officer, including the Regimental Motor Officer, the Transportation Platoon Leader, the Service Company Commander, the Munitions Officer and the Graves Registration Officer, was used on missions of maintaining normal functioning, reconnoitering for forward locations, securing billets and controlling moves as well as obtaining and returning the borrowed trucks which the regiment was using in its fast pursuit. (We soon found that a few pieces of reliable captured transportation were essential in order to carry with us a very small amount of essential supply, move for long distances and draw rations, gasoline and supplies simultaneously. The Regimental Motor Officer, however, was very careful to retain only good -used or new captured equipment and it was kept to a minimum.) (12)

Upon completion of this two weeks phase, the regiment was ready to clean up and this included having dry cleaned some four thousand (4,000) woolen shirts and woolen trousers. We had been able to keep in fair condition by washing, or having washed by local civilians, such items as underwear, socks, etc., but no dry cleaning facilities were available. During the two day mop-up period, however, when the regiment was settled in one place, the Division Quartermaster made arrangements with First Army installations to do the job. Unfortunately, before the clothes could be turned in and hauled back, we changed Armies and the Regimental Supply Section carried two truck loads of dirty clothes for the ensuing two weeks. This necessitated the drawing of many new uniforms since it encouraged the practice of washing O.D. uniforms which quickly rendered them too small and consequently unserviceable. (13)

During the short break at the end of the second phase extensive motor maintenance took place, replacement equipment was issued and nine (9) more truck loads of non-essential equipment were sent back to be stored in the vicinity of Cologne. We were alerted to move on 19 April; we closed in

(12) Personal experience; (13) Personal experience.

vicinity of Wurzburg, Germany. The move was approximately three hundred miles but all vehicles were closed in promptly. Before leaving we had been required to turn in our captured transportation by Corps Order.

### PHASE III OF REGIMENTAL OPERATIONS

This third phase of the operations was again a fast-moving pursuit known as the Redoubt Operation (see Map 1 & 4). During this period the mission was again to advance and destroy all enemy within our zone. It was during this period that, as part of the Seventh Army and for a short period the spearhead of the now famous Third Army, the division forced the crossings of six major rivers, namely; the Altmuhl, Isar, Danube, Inn, Mittel-Isar, and the Salzach. The enemy consisting now of miscellaneous units from newly and hastily formed repulsion battalions, successfully destroyed bridges across the Danube, the Amper Canal, the Isar, and the Mittel-Isar but he was neither strong enough nor did he possess the logistical support necessary to offer determined resistance to our assaults. It is interesting to note that an enemy GHQ Bakery Unit was pressed into combat service at Ingolstadt. The Regiment and the division maintained a relentless pursuit throughout the period, pushing the enemy back into the Redoubt Area where resistance was finally and completely overcome on 8 May, 1945. A total of 3838 prisoners were taken. (14)

During this period, while the troops were on a twenty-four hour basis fighting the enemy, the supply echelon encountered its major difficulties in movement and in maintenance of proper support. Gasoline was a major problem and at one time required a haul of one hundred and thirty five miles. Traffic at temporary bridges over the many rivers in the area slowed up all motor movement for supplies. However with enemy resistance weakening, the troops kept on pursuing. Bad weather for a period of three days, enemy road blocks, and road and bridge demolitions were prevalent. (15)

It was during this period, in an effort to locate a road and a crossing of the Mittel-Isar Canal to avoid traffic, that the Regimental (14, 15) A-1.

Supply Officer and the Munitions Officer unwittingly took Erding, Germany from the southeast while the 2d Battalion was fighting to take it from the north. (16)

Our system of establishing the regimental supply points as far forward as possible and of the division moving its Class I and Class III supply points as far forward as possible were dependent now on the length of hauls to the rear and the time consumed in the traffic on poor roads. Regiment continued to maintain in the train bivouac supplies of all types including "panzerfaust", a captured German general purpose AT missile, which was bulky and with which our supply personnel were unfamiliar and hence reluctant to handle, but which had caught the fancy of the Battalion Commanders. On one occasion in an effort to get really forward and save a move, our regimental supply group came under fire of 88-mm guns but fortunately only a civilian passenger car belonging to the Regimental Supply Section of an adjacent regiment was hit. (17)

Throughout this phase, prisoners were taken by the hundreds but the regimental system called for their handling by S-1 in enclosures later either evacuated or taken over by Division. The only function the S-4 had was to furnish rations occasionally to Regimental Headquarters to feed the prisoners if they remained with us long enough. Again, the AT Company was of considerable assistance to the S-1 in the handling of prisoners.

During this phase of the operations the Graves Registration Officer with two enlisted helpers found it almost impossible to function. He was able to prepare for shipment the personal effects of many casualties but the evacuation of our own dead was given a very low priority and the evacuation of enemy dead lacked a priority due to the fact that all transportation was sorely needed for supply functions. Personal effects were evacuated through Quartermaster channels requiring inventories and receipts each time they were turned over. At the regimental level we were required to separate issue equipment from individual effects and to retain the (16, 17) Personal experience.

issue equipment. Needless to say with a shortage of transportation the segregation and delivery was not always prompt. (18)

On 8 May this phase ended with the enemy in the Redoubt area completely defeated and hostilities ended. For the supply group this gave us time during which paper work could be brought up to date and company commanders could straighten away their combat loss certificates as credit vouchers in their property records.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

An analysis of the operations brings out the fact that the first phase was a relatively unimportant defensive phase and that the second and third phases were essentially a motorized regiment engaged in a pursuit with no encircling force on our level. This must be kept in mind as it means that the movement was much more rapid than anything we had practiced or anticipated. The threat of enemy resistance existed and on occasion resistance grew stubborn. However, from the point of view of this description the problems involved were supply of the organization with extended supply lines, and the main obstacles were weather, mines, road blocks, rivers and traffic. The method of procedure in solving the problems indicates that where a special situation exists, a special organization and a departure from SOP is necessary and if properly planned and executed can be made to meet the special problems. In this operation the supply problem was realized as fundamental and in an effort to strengthen the system and because the situation permitted, the battalions were allowed all of their organic transportation and all of their regimental train vehicles at all times. Because Cannon Company and AT Company were not extensively employed, some of their vehicles were added to the Regimental Supply Section so that it would be strengthened in transportation and hence be better able to make long hauls for supplies, displace forward rapidly and bring well forward those supplies essential to the operation. Higher echelon planning also recognized the fundamental problem and anticipated the difficulty in rapid pursuit operations. Whenever possible,

(18) Personal experience.

Division established its supply points well forward and endeavored to maintain adequate quantities of essential supplies. The problem of maintaining adequate supplies without accumulating immobilizing surpluses was often delicately balanced.

It brings out also the fact that provisions were not made for proper cleaning of outer garments of clothing and consequently O.D. clothing was ruined.

One of the weaknesses of not having the S-4 with the Command Group at the Command Post is brought out by the fact that due to being unfamiliar with the tactical situation the S-4 entered a town on a reconnaissance which was ahead of our friendly lines.

During the pursuit operations the train bivouac was the only regimental supply point and all supply personnel worked from one location rendering them all available to perform jobs other than their own particular jobs when necessary, and also permitting units of the Regiments to come to only one place for everything.

Captured transportation was used by the Regiment, unsuccessfully at first, but to good advantage when supply became more difficult with long hauls and bad roads.

The Graves Registration function in the regiment was inadequate.

#### LESSONS

Naturally, in an operation of this type, hundreds of lessons were learned; the most important of which may be listed and discussed as follows:

1. In a fast moving offensive operation not only must all echelons of an Infantry Regiment have released to them their organic transportation and their normal support from Service Company of the Regiment but the Regiment's supply transportation must be augmented in order to keep supplies with the troops when the troops are motorized. Primarily it is a problem of longer hauls being more time consuming in the procurement of needed supplies. Obviously it involves also a constant movement of supply installations forward with organic loads which renders vehicles unavailable for

procurement of supplies. It also means the need for gasoline is increased in the infantry regiment which is at best poorly equipped to supply normal needs.

2. All echelons are interested in supplying adequately the lowest unit in the fight. In combat when there is a fire fight, branch antagonisms and petty schemes are not in vogue, and plans and supply operations are built around supplying fighting units. If I learned nothing else, personally, I learned that my regimental commander was interested in me and my work during combat for one purpose only, and that was the supply of his battalions. Looking to our next higher echelon it was often very comforting to find the G-4 and the Division Services anticipating our problems and they simplified many supply situations. In so doing, they of course, were cooperated with by their next higher echelon. Naturally, not all needs are anticipated and all situations exactly diagnosed but where the need is known maximum efforts are made to supply what is needed. The once common belief that those who had the supplies and the transportation were reluctant to release either is not true in combat.

3. Storage of equipment definitely established as not essential to an operation by a Regiment or lower unit is not a sound practice in a fast moving pursuit of more than five (5) days duration. Good guards are good combat soldiers and normally will not be detailed to the job. Bad guards are worse than none at all. Provisions should be made on some higher echelon for units to turn-in through normal supply channels items of equipment not needed so that they may be properly cared for and, if an unforeseen situation arises, made immediately available. One way might be perhaps the assignment of trucks or mobile supply units for that express purpose. The expenditure would be warranted by the saving in cost of the equipment lost and ill used.

4. In a fast moving pursuit operation when captured transportation becomes available it should be used by Infantry Regiments and lower units but with certain qualifications. First, certain types only which are in quantities so that cannabalization is possible should be retained so that



spare parts are available. Secondly, a vehicle which does not pass an inspection by a qualified motor officer of the Regiment, should not be retained by any unit in the Regiment. Thirdly, obviously no more vehicles should be retained than can be reasonably maintained for combat use and our own vehicles should have priority always.

5. Supply organization can be varied just like any organization for special tasks. Just as combinations of units are made for combat tasks, so supply groups within the Infantry Regiment can be organized and grouped and specially equipped. It must be realized that the T/O & E organization of the Regimental Supply Section is not the "end-all and be-all". In many situations personnel and transportation in the T/O & E become surplus and by the same token in some situations they are inadequate. That flexibility of organization and operation for an Infantry Regiment is essential for tactical reasons is certainly well understood. The same principles can be more universally applied to the Infantry Regiment's logistical needs. Terrain, type operation, weather, and support also affect supply. In the present T/O & E the need for more transportation is reflected; however, there is much to be learned in the flexibility of organization within the regiment.

6. Graves Registration is a misnomer for the officer who handles the dead and their personal effects in the Infantry Regiment. None of his time is spent in graves registration and only a very small amount of it is spent in collecting the dead. The major task of the Graves Registration group is the inventory and processing of personal effects; Though only briefly covered in the description of the operation, it can be brought out here, and I am sure born out by those who became familiar with the personal effects process as prescribed during the last war, that the set-up was not adequate. Commanders of company size units in combat cannot be held responsible for property inventory, packaging and dispatch of personal effects of deceased unless they are given much more help than they were given. The problem is one of safeguarding the individual's effects in the many channels they pass through before eventually arriving at their

destination. A solution is to eliminate as many inventories as possible. I believe this could be achieved by making available for issue (and establishing an allowance of perhaps five (5) per company to be kept on hand) a small, strong, light metal box, (72 cubic inches) with secure lock, into which a company commander or trusted representative could place items of the soldier's effects. The remainder could accompany in any suitable container. In the box could be placed one copy of the inventory and a second copy could become a part of the man's final records, sent to his family, and perhaps eventually become a claim for his family.

7. Maps are needed by the Supply Section in a fast moving offensive situation. In many instances these can be maps discarded by combat elements since they must cover rear areas. A single staff distribution at the most may give the Supply Officer three (3) sets of maps. In a normal situation time is available to bring NCO's and drivers in and show them routes on maps and their memories will suffice. In fast moving situations where the hauls are long and speed is essential as many as twenty or thirty road maps can be used in a supply section if all personnel are to be kept adequately abreast of the situation and in order to have smooth supply functioning.