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OPERATIONS OF THE 820TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION IN A
RETROGRADE MOVEMENT, DURING THE GERMAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE
IN THE ARDENNES - ALSACE CAMPAIGN
14 - 25 DECEMBER 1944
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Supply Officer)

Type of operation described: A RETROGRADE MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph is a description of the operations and supply functions of the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed), attached to the 106th Infantry Division, United States Army, during the first ten days of the German counteroffensive in the Ardennes - Alsace Campaign, 14 December, 1944 to 25 December, 1944.

To properly orient the reader as to the sector in which this operation occurred, it will be necessary to describe in brief the general situation, positions and frontages held by the major commands in the European Theater of Operations as of 14 December, 1944.

By 14 December, 1944 the Allied Armies in the European Theater had advanced to the general line: Nijmegen, Holland Aachen, Germany, along the Belgian - Luxembourg border to Saarbrücken, thence along the French - German border to the Rhine, then southeast to Strasbourg, Colmar, and the Swiss border. (See Map A) This front was held by the following Allied Armies from north to south: The Canadian First, British Second, Ninth U.S., Third U.S., Seventh U.S., and the French First. (See Map A)

GENERAL SITUATION

The First U.S. Army at this time held one hundred fifty miles of the four hundred fifty mile front. (1) (See Map A) The length of the First Army Front was the result of General Eisenhower's de-

(1) A-1, p. 75.

cision to concentrate his limited Allied Forces in those areas most vulnerable to the German forces. To accomplish this, General Eisenhower, in September 1944, extended the First Army boundary to the north. This decision forced General Hodges, Commanding the First Army, to extend still more his already extended divisions. This he did by extending the frontage of the divisions in the Ardennes Sector. (2) This action by General Hodges permitted the heaviest concentrations of units of his command to be located in the north, or, the sector in which the heaviest fighting was then occurring. (3)

The First Army was composed of three Corps, from north to south they were : The VII, V, and VIII. ^{Map B-} The Ardennes Sector, a sector about 80 miles long, was included in the VIII Corps, under command of Major General Troy H. Middleton. ^{Map e)} The VIII Corps was composed of the 106th Division with 14th Cavalry Group attached, the 28th Division, 4th Division, and the 9th Armored Division in reserve with Combat Command B in the line. (4) The sector held by General Middleton's VIII Corps was considered an unlikely sector in which the German Army could or would attack, if any attack at all could be expected. Therefore, divisions were brought into this sector for rest and recuperation since it was a relatively "quiet" sector. The VIII Corps mission at this time was to defend in place. (5) This mission permitted battle weary divisions in the First Army to rest and refit.

The northern sector of the VIII Corps line was assigned to the 14th Cavalry Group, then attached to the 106th Division, and to the 106th Division, with 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion attached. (See Map E) Since both the 106th Division and the 820th Tank Destroyer

(2) (3) A-1, p. 76; (4) A-2, p. 97; (5) A-1, p. 75.

Battalion were newly arrived in the theater, it was deemed advisable to place them in the "relatively quiet" sector to gain their first battle experience. (6)

In order to learn how the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion was placed in the line, it is necessary to go back about ten days to 4 December, 1944. On 4 December, 1944, the 820th Tank Destroyer was bivouaced in a small town near Maastricht, Holland and had been attached to the Ninth Army. On 7 December, orders were received transferring the 820th to the First Army, and further attaching the 820th to the 106th Division, then preparing to relieve the 2d Division in the vicinity of St. Vith, Belgium. (7)

On 8 December, the Battalion Commander, S-1, S-3, and Company Commanders plus other selected company personnel left Holland for St. Vith to contact the 106th Division and the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed). The 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion was the battalion which the 820th was to relieve. (8) Orders were for the remainder of the battalion to proceed to Crombach, Belgium, about 5 miles from St. Vith, on 9 December under command of the Battalion Executive officer. The 820th left Holland 9 December for Crombach, Belgium, arriving there 10 December. After arriving in Crombach, orders from the 106th Division, were for the 820th to have completed relieving the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion by 0600 hours 12 December, and to accomplish this relief during the hours of darkness only. These orders also prescribed the manner of relief such as: gun positions were not to be changed, platoon position for platoon position, strict radio silence, command posts were to occupy the same buildings as had been used by the 612th Units. No deviation from this order was to be permitted. (9) This restriction was later to prove costly for

(6) A-1, p. 77; (7) (8) Personal knowledge; (9) Statement of Lt. Col. J.F. de V. Patrick, CO 820th Tank Destroyer Bn. *W. de V.*

the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

THE BATTALION SITUATION

The relief of the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion by the 820th was accomplished successfully within the time limit 0600 hours 12 December (See Map E) although snow, ice and cold weather made it necessary to winch many of the towed guns into position. On 12 December Company A was attached to the 14th Cavalry Group as a part of a small task force. The 14th Cavalry Group was the most northern unit of the VIII Corps. Although attached to the 14th Cavalry Group, Company A continued to draw all supplies from the S-4 of the 820th.

Company B of the 820th was in position in the vicinity of Kobscheid, Germany. Company C, 820th, was in positions near Bleialf, Germany. The command post of the 820th was located in Eimerscheid, Belgium. (See Map E) The battalion was deployed over a frontage of about eight miles. From Lanzerath on the north flank to Bleialf, on the south flank. (10) In all four locations, the three companies, and the command post, and rear echelon, there was only one good route of entry and withdrawal from each position due to the snow and ice and generally impassable conditions of the smaller road net. (11) This one good route of withdrawal was parallel to the front and not directly to the rear.

During the following two days, 13 - 14 December, the battalion was brought up to its authorized allowance on all classes of supply with the exception of one 3" towed gun for B Company, and Class V Supply. It had not been possible for the S-4 to obtain the basic load of 37 mm ammunition. (12) Also during the period 13 - 14

(10) (11) (12) Personal knowledge.

*My I. success very
late in
February.*

December, the 820th S-4 contacted the G-4, 106th Division relative to obtaining supply and communications equipment from or through the 106th Division. The 820th S-4 was informed that no supply would be drawn through the 106th Division, and that all supply for the 820th would be drawn directly from Corps or Army by the 820th S-4. With the S-4 of the 820th at this time was the Communications Officer of the 820th who was attempting to secure an S.O.I. for use by the 820th, and to have radio frequencies assigned to the 820th. The Communication Officer was unable to get an S.O.I., nor were radio frequencies ever assigned prior to 17 December, 1944. (13)

From the date of the relief of the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion by the 820th, the Battalion Commander and Company Commanders of the 820th had been trying to have the Division order, restricting gun positions to the same positions as were previously held by the 612th Tank Destroyer, modified or rescinded. This was not permitted until the morning of 16 December, at which time Company Commanders could start moving gun positions. Had this permission been received sooner, it would have enabled guns of the 820th to be placed in better firing positions and obtain greater fields of fire. (14) The reason given for not allowing any movement of gun positions was to insure the secrecy of relief as long as possible. At the close of day on 14 December the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion was deployed on an eight mile front. At full strength in men, and up to authorized allowances in all classes of supply with the exception of one 3" gun and a shortage of 37 mm ammunition for the Reconnaissance Platoon attached to the 14th Cavalry Group. The battalion was not in possession of an S.O.I. or radio frequencies on which to operate. (15)

(13) Personal knowledge; (14) Statement of Lt. Col. J. F de V. Patrick, Bn. CO; (15) Personal knowledge.

This was later to have a disastrous effect on the control and supply of the combat elements and the rear echelon of the battalion.

On the 15th of December, the Battalion S-4 contacted VIII Corps ordnance at Bastogne, Belgium hoping to obtain the one 3" ^{which was} gun short, and to try to obtain the 37 mm ammunition short in the Reconnaissance Platoon. Neither of these were received. Upon return to the Battalion Command Post, the S-4 was informed that the ammunition allowance for the 3" guns was to be 6 rounds per gun per day and that the S-4 would keep an accurate record of each round fired. This order was the result of a shortage at the front of certain types of ammunition prior to 15 December. The 3" ammunition was in this category. During the day of the 15th, the 820th fired only the number of rounds per gun as had been ordered. Also this 6 rounds per day was the same amount as had been fired by the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion. This also was done to lead the enemy into believing there had been no change of troops in the line. In return the battalion had received the usual daily amount of German Artillery, 8 - 10 rounds per day. These rounds were never hits, but were always over or short and were generally fired three times daily, at 0600, 1200, and 1800 hours. (16)

At a battalion staff meeting, after the return of the S-4 from VIII Corps, it developed that all three company commanders were concerned over not being permitted to change the gun positions of any of the guns of their respective companies. During the past three days the enemy artillery had always fired shorts and overs on their positions. They thought it strange that no rounds had fallen on any gun position. It was decided by the Battalion that Commanders would again try to get permission from Division to change the location and fields of fire of most guns of the battalion. The S-4 was instructed to go to Spa,

(16) Statements of Capts J.J.Lane, J. Fowler & S.H. Nash, Co CO's, 820th Tank Destroyer Bn.

Brundage's report

the Army Class II & IV Depot, on the morning of 16 December and draw clothing and accessories more suitable for winter use, such as ever-shoes, lined mittens, heavy socks, etc. Gun crews had been having a difficult time in remaining at their gun positions trying to operate their guns and keep their feet and hands warm at the same time. There were no further orders from Division at this time, 2000 hours 15 December. So far as is known no mission, except to relieve the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion was ever given the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion. It is interesting and conjectural to note that the sector in which the 820th was located was partially in Germany and Belgium and that most of the young men of this area were serving in the German Army. Several families in whose homes units of the 820th were quartered having as many as five sons in the German Army. During the 14th and 15th of December the populace appeared to be quite nervous and ill at ease. They would go to the top floor of their homes and look out continually. Even getting up at night to do the same thing. These actions were noted and commented upon, but no especial significance was attached to them until several days later.

At 0530 hours, 16 December, the command post was alerted by heavy enemy artillery fire. This was not usual as all previous artillery fire had begun at 0600 hours and was over in a few minutes. This present firing was constant. The S-4 contacted the Battalion Command Post to learn what the firing might mean and if it would change his plan to go to Spa for supplies. He was informed that no messages had been received and to go to Spa as planned. At 0700 hours the S-4 left the rear echelon for Spa with a driver and the Battalion Supply Sergeant. At this time the roads were clear of

traffic and had not been shelled. No incidents, or further information was experienced, or learned by the S-4 on the way to Spa. Upon arriving at the Class II & IV Depot the S-4 drew all the supplies desired, and was informed prior to his departure for the battalion that "Something Big" was going on at the front, but no details were given. On the return of the S-4 to the Battalion Command Post at Eimerscheid, he found most of the cross roads between St. Vith and Eimerscheid had been shelled heavily.

After checking in at Battalion Headquarters, the S-4 was given the situation in so far as it was possible to do so. The S-2 did not know the exact situation at this time, 1530 hours, due to no radio contact or wire contact with 106th Division or with any of the three companies, or 14th Cavalry Group. A liaison officer from the 820th who had been at Division Headquarters, brought word that the 820th rear echelon had been ordered to move to a small town near St. Vith, Crombach, by not later than 1730 hours. The battalion was not ready to move at this time, 1530 hours. There was about 1200 gallons of gasoline in five gallon drums stacked on the ground. This gas could not be loaded as there were not enough trucks available to carry it. The S-4 had all trucks filled and extra cans of gas put on each vehicle. The remaining gas, about 1000 gallons was poured out on the ground. One days rations for the battalion were also abandoned when the rear echelon left Eimerscheid. (see pg 11)

The rear echelon left Eimerscheid for Crombach at 1700 hours. Due to the previous heavy shelling by German artillery the roads between Eimerscheid and St. Vith were full of shell holes, thus slowing down the movement of the column considerably. Traffic on this route was heavy since it was the main route of entry and withdrawal.

Between Eimerscheid and St. Vith the rear echelon of the 820th met units of the 422d Infantry moving toward the north. It was necessary to remain halted on the road until the units of the 422d Infantry had cleared the road. The 820th rear echelon closed in Crombach at 2100 hours, covering 23 miles in four hours and parallel to the front. All supplies drawn in Spa by the S-4 that day were then broken down and distributed to the representatives of all companies who were with the rear echelon at that time.

The writer believes that for the sake of clarity it would be better to treat the Rear Echelon Situation and that of the combat elements separately from this point on; since the rear echelon did not have contact with any of the combat elements again for six days. The S-4 being the senior officer in the rear echelon was instructed to move the rear echelon the next day, 17 December, to the vicinity of Houffalize, Belgium. This was the last order from the Commanding Officer of the 820th that was received during the following 5 days. The situation confronting the combat elements will be covered later.

At 0400 hours, 17 December, the rear echelon of the 820th was on the road to Houffalize. This distance, about 28 miles, was covered in about 9 hours, again being slowed down and halted for long periods of time because of heavy traffic and narrow roads. The rear echelon arrived at an old chateau about one mile from Houffalize at 1300 hours, 17 December. Since the S-4 had no radio contact with the battalion, he contacted units of the U.S. Military Government then in Houffalize to try to learn the situation. No one in Houffalize at that time seemed to be aware of exactly what was happening. Rumors were considerable, and much activity by Military Government Units in preparation for moving out of Houffalize had begun. No

actual movement had yet begun, since no orders from battalion had been received either by radio or messenger, and since no units of the Military Government had moved out of Houffalize, the S-4 decided to remain in the present location, one mile from Houffalize, until the following day, 18 December, in hopes of receiving definite orders from battalion. The S-4 also decided to remain in this area because he had been ordered to the Houffalize area by his last orders and no following locations had been given after the rear echelon reached Houffalize. The officers and men of the rear echelon were informed of the situation so far as it was known. Local security was established for the rear echelon. The amount of supplies and rations were determined. At 1700 hours, one ration for each company of the battalion was on hand and also one basic load of ammunition was being carried in the battalion train. Since rations had not been drawn, or delivered, on the 16th or 17th of December, nor any contact made with battalion, the S-4 sent out a liaison party with rations to try to contact Battalion Headquarters and to receive orders, but due to the confusion around St. Vith, and not knowing the location of the command post; the liaison party was unsuccessful and returned to the location of the rear echelon during the night 17 - 18 December.

On 18 December the S-4 again contacted Military Government Units in Houffalize and learned that the situation as it concerned our front had deteriorated considerably. The S-4 was advised to move further to the rear. Still no actual information as to location, enemy strength, or direction of attack was known to the S-4 at this time. He therefore decided to proceed toward La Roche, Belgium the same day rather than remain in the present location. This decision was reached after considering the total lack of information or contact

with battalion, and also because Military Government Units had now begun to withdraw from Houffalize. The S-4 then directed one officer and one enlisted man to remain in the present bivouac area to act as guides, should anyone from battalion try to contact the rear echelon. The rear echelon was on the road to La Roche by 0900 hours 18 December. Approximately three miles from La Roche the rear echelon was halted by units of all description. Artillery, Quartermaster, and single vehicles also halted trying to proceed in the same direction. During the next six hours the rear echelon was only able to move 2 1/8th miles. The reason was not apparent until La Roche was in sight. A narrow, one way, and down hill road led into La Roche and this road carried all the traffic. Just on the edge of La Roche was an engineer bridge over the Ourthe River. This was also a one way bridge. Across on the south side of the river were elements of the 7th Armored Division attempting to cross the bridge and proceed toward St. Vith. While the column of vehicles of which the 820th rear echelon was a part, was trying to cross the bridge in the opposite direction. Since the column of vehicles proceeding toward La Roche could not turn around, or clear the road, it was necessary for the elements of the 7th Armored Division to pull back and allow the south bound column to clear before the elements of the 7th Armored could proceed toward St. Vith. At this time, about 1530 hours, 18 December, La Roche was occupied by the 7th Armored Division Train. (17) A billeting party had been detailed at Houffalize to locate a bivouac area in or near La Roche. This billeting party was contacted as the 820th rear echelon crossed the Ourthe River at La Roche. The location of the bivouac decided upon was Rendeux, a small hamlet about five miles west of La Roche and between La Roche

(17) Personal knowledge.

and Marche, Belgium. Battalion rear closed in Rendeux about 1830 hours, covering the 28 miles from Houffalize in $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours. The Train Commander of the 7th Armored Division was contacted at this time by the 820th S-4, and given the situation as it concerned the rear echelon of the 820th. The 7th Armored Division Train Commander decided to use the rear echelon of the 820th as a part of his train. This decision lasted only about two hours, at which time the rear echelon of the 820th was released. (18) Still without orders and no radio communication with any unit.

About 2100 hours, a messenger from Battalion Headquarters arrived at the bivouac area having contacted the two guides left at Houffalize and La Roche. The instructions brought by the messenger were for the S-4 to outfit as large a group as possible with $\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks, machine guns and other small arms which were to be used by as a Reconnaissance Unit by Battalion. The reason for this request was that the original Reconnaissance Platoon of the Battalion had been lost in the last days fighting.

A total of eleven $\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks were made ready, plus thirteen machine guns, .30 caliber, and one .50 caliber. Rifles were re-assigned to those men whose weapon was a pistol or sub-machine gun M-3 and who were going out on this reconnaissance party. Approximately 30 men and weapons were sent to the Battalion Command Post with the messenger. Loaded on the $\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks were as many rations as could be safely carried. There were no further orders or instructions received during the night of 18 December neither to remain at this location or to withdraw further to the rear, or to move toward St. Vith.

During the morning of 19 December, the Commanding Officer of the 14th Cavalry Group appeared at the rear echelon area of the 820th in (18) Personal knowledge.

where was the contact at this time?

Rendeux. His intention was to use the remainder of the 820th rear echelon as an infantry unit. This plan was not feasible nor possible since all available weapons, except a few sub-machine guns, M-3 had been sent to St. Vith the preceding night. The Cavalry Group Commander no longer had any organized troops to command, as most of them had been knocked out of action, and/or killed or captured in the past three days fighting. That was the reason for the Cavalry Group Commander trying to organize a small force. (19) The S-4 of the 820th could not convince the Group Commander that there were neither the men, nor the weapons available to outfit the group he desired nor could the S-4 make it clear that he was attempting to maintain the rear echelon as a unit capable of providing supply and assistance to its combat elements. The Battalion Surgeon, after a conference with the S-4, was of the opinion that the Cavalry Group Commander was a battle fatigue case. To calm the Group Commander, the Battalion Surgeon gave him a cup of coffee. Shortly thereafter the Group Commander was evacuated to a hospital. (20)

The S-4 arrived at the conclusion at this point, that nothing was to be gained by remaining in each location in hope of receiving orders or information. Attempts by the S-4 to locate the Battalion Command Post had failed. The situation, as far as the rear echelon was concerned, was critical and confused. No information of the enemy had been received. The Class I Supply Point at Gouvy had been closed and rations were practically non-existent as none had been drawn for three days. After considering all factors the S-4 decided to go to First Army for instructions as to what was desired to be done with the rear echelon of the battalion, numbering at this time

(19) (20) Personal knowledge.

about 250 men. (About a platoon of men from the combat elements had now arrived without guns, or weapons. Their 3" guns had been destroyed earlier as they were unable to get the guns out of position.) Before leaving for First Army, the S-4 gave instruction to the Headquarters Commandant to move the rear echelon the following day 20 December, or sooner if necessary, to Marche, Belgium and then turn north toward Liege. The Headquarters Commandant was oriented as to what road was to be taken north from Marche to Liege. At about 1000 hours, 19 December, the S-4 and driver left for First Army. Since the location of Army was not then known to the S-4, it was necessary to go to Namur, Belgium before the location of Army was learned. In Namur the S-4 was told that Army was then located in Chaud Fontaine, Belgium. The S-4 arrived in Chaud Fontaine about 0900 hours 20 December.

After reporting to the G-1 Section of Army, the S-4 was taken immediately to the Army Artillery Officer who controlled all Tank Destroyer Units in Army. The information given the Army Artillery Officer was as follows: of the 35 Tank Destroyer guns of the bat- *alison* talion there were 9 left. One company, C Company had been captured except for one section with the rear echelon. One platoon of B Company had been captured plus some men from each of the remaining platoons. The S-4's estimate of casualties, from all information he had been able to piece together from men who had joined the rear echelon and the messenger from battalion, was about 250 - 300 men. The location of the rear echelon was made known to the artillery officer, as well as the strength of the rear echelon. The lack of radio communication and orders between rear echelon and Battalion Command Post was pointed out. Following a conference between the Army Artillery Officer and

the G-3 of Army, the S-4 of the 820th was given orders to return to the rear echelon of the 820th and take it to Esneux, Belgium, with further orders to report to First Army upon arrival in Esneux with the rear echelon. The rear echelon was to be placed on Line of Communication duty for First Army, guarding bridges, roads, etc., and that as soon as the situation permitted the remainder of the battalion would be withdrawn for the same purpose, to guard bridges from Huy to Liege along the Ourthe River.

Following receipt of these orders the S-4 returned to Marche along the route prescribed for the rear echelon to follow toward Liege. The S-4 met the rear echelon about 10 miles north of Marche, and at this point the Battalion S-3 joined the rear echelon. The S-3 was given the orders which the S-4 had received from Army. Since it was then about 1900 hours, the S-3 decided to have the rear echelon bivouac in the first available location, and to send out a billeting party to Esneux so as to be ready the following day to quarter the rear echelon and the remnants of C Company which had now joined the column. The bivouac selected was about half way between Marche and Liege. *P* During the night of 20 - 21 December, the S-4 was given the entire situation as it concerned the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 106th Division. The S-4 was told that on the preceding day, 19 December, the Executive Officer of the Battalion had been inebriated, and while in that condition had taken a Rocket Launcher and fired several rounds at the Battalion Command Post, a brick house, hitting it twice. This action caused some additional confusion in the area and destroyed a switchboard, phones, and wire lines. Although no one was injured, it shook up the occupants considerably. The Executive

Officer had been drinking steadily since joining the battalion. (21)

The information received from the S-3 was the first actual information the S-4 had received in the last five days concerning the 820th. This situation was unavoidable on the part of the S-4, due to the lack of radio communication, and the fact that repeated attempts to send messengers from the rear echelon to the battalion command post had failed.

The rear echelon cleared its bivouac area for Esneux at 0600 hours 21 December, arriving about 1500 hours. Immediately following their arrival in Esneux the S-4 prepared to contact the remnants of the battalion now located near St. Vith, Belgium. Prior to his departure for St. Vith, the S-4 and Supply Sergeant drew 300 rations. This amount was drawn since it was approximately the last known strength of the combat elements and the Battalion Command Post. The 106th Division (-), with attached 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion (-) was now attached to XVIII Airborne Corps. (22) The 820th (-) was then deployed along road junctions east and north of St. Vith. (23)

Combat Elements
The dispositions of the combat elements of the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion as of 16 December, 1944 were as follows: Company A was attached to the 14th Cavalry Group, and further attached to the 18th Cavalry Squadron, a part of the 14th Cavalry Group. The Command Post of Company A was in Manderfeld, Belgium. The 1st Platoon, less one section, (13 men and two guns) occupied the Merlscheid area, one half of the 3d Platoon occupied Berterath, approximately 2,000 yards southeast of Merlscheid. The other half of the 3d Platoon occupied an unnamed village about 1,000 yards southeast of Berterath. The remaining section of the 1st Platoon occupied Roth and was attached

(21) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major W.C. Adams, Bn. S-3, 820th Tank Destroyer, Bn.; (22) A-2, p. 111; (23) A-2, p. 113.

to Troop A, 18th Cavalry Squadron. The 2d Platoon occupied Lanzerath, also in this immediate area was the Reconnaissance Platoon of the battalion. The frontage over which Company A was deployed was about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. (See Map E)

Company B Command Post was located in Kobscheid. The 1st Platoon occupied positions on the Schnee Eifel, northeast of Kobscheid; the 2d Platoon occupied positions on the Schnee Eifel, northeast of Schlausenbach; the 3d Platoon occupied the general area of Hascheid. (See Map E) The frontage held by this company was about 2 miles.

Company C Command Post was located in Eleialf, as was the 1st Platoon; the 2d Platoon occupied Buchet while the 3d Platoon occupied Oberlascheid. C Company's front was approximately 2 miles too. (See Map E)

The positions held by Companies B and C were at the top of the Schnee Eifel, a long wooded ridge, running generally northeast to southwest and generally parallel to the front.

At 0530 hours, 16 December, all three companies began receiving heavy artillery fire. This fire was directly on the majority of platoon positions, unlike the artillery fire of the previous three days which had been over and short. (24) Since none of the company commanders or the battalion commander had been permitted to move any gun positions, and since most of the guns had been winched into position originally, it was practically impossible to get them out of this heavy fire. During the first two hours of the attack all communication wires were destroyed between the 99th Division on the north flank and the 14th Cavalry Group. (25) The enemy was pene-

(24) Statement of Major W.C. Adams, S-3, 820th Tank Destroyer Bn.;

(25) Statement of Capt. S.H. Nash, CO, Company A, 820th TD Bn.

trating the front between the 99th Division and the 14th Cavalry Group. The 1st and 3d Platoons of A Company were now receiving heavy infantry attacks in conjunction with fire from self propelled guns and mortars. (26) The section with Troop A, 18th Cavalry had been surrounded after receiving heavy tank attacks. The 2d Platoon of A Company at Lanzerath which had received no attack were withdrawn at about 1000 hours on orders from 14th Cavalry Group, and detailed to protect the south approach to Manderfeld, (27) after German Infantry units had reached the outskirts of the town. These German units had arrived at Manderfeld on bicycles, in platoon and section columns. At this point the 2d Platoon halted their advance by direct fire of 3" guns, using high explosive and white phosphorus shells. At the same time an emergency barrage by the 275th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was laid on the enemy positions. Spotting for this artillery barrage was done by the A Company Executive Officer. The 14th Cavalry Group had been using their artillery in support of units further to the south. German units bypassed the 3d Platoon of A Company at about 1100 hours. The 1st Platoon was then withdrawn, on Group order, to positions on higher ground to the west only to be immediately hit by enemy infantry attacks from Berterath. About 1130 the 1st Platoon was bypassed by the German attack. These bypassed men were later able to infiltrate back to the Schonberg - St. Vith Road, but had to leave their 3" guns in position though they were able to incapacitate them prior to leaving. (28) Orders received by A Company Commander at this time were that A Company was attached to the 32d Cavalry Squadron, by order of the 14th Cavalry Group S-3. Further orders from the 32d Cavalry Squadron were for Company A to

(26) (27) (28) Statement of Capt. S.H. Nash, CO, Co A, 820th TD Bn.

withdraw with them to Andler. Despite adequate liaison with the 32d Cavalry Squadron and Company A, 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the Cavalry units had withdrawn completely, except for the Squadron Headquarters, before A Company Commander was informed of this action.

(29)

On the 17th of December, A Company Executive Officer acting as Liaison Officer at the 32d Cavalry Headquarters reported that detailed reconnaissance was necessary as Andler had been bypassed by the enemy who were now fighting in Schenberg, which left A Company and the 32d Cavalry beyond the enemy lines. The 32d Cavalry made no reconnaissance for routes of withdrawal. A Company Commander sent out a reconnaissance party, who upon their return reported that certain trails to the west were clear through to St. Vith, whereupon Company A prepared to withdraw to St. Vith upon orders from the 32d Cavalry.

As the 32d Cavalry had made no reconnaissance, half of its column was put on the wrong road, which proved to be practically impassable without chains. When the column halted on a high, bare hill to put on chains they were attacked by German aircraft. Three U.S. P-51's drove off the German planes, thereby preventing a complete roadblock by the knocked out vehicles. During the remainder of 17 December Company A was able to withdraw to St. Vith as ordered. (30) In the first two days of the German attack, A Company lost nine 3" guns, five by enemy action and four destroyed to prevent their capture; one section captured with their 3" gun, 10 men killed, 17 wounded (10 by small arms fire and 7 by artillery and mortar fire).

B Company at 0530 hours also received heavy artillery concentrations on all platoon and command post locations. One round hit

(29) (30) Statement of Capt. S.H. Nash, CO, Co A, 820th TD Bn.

the command post directly, killing three men and disrupting wire lines to Battalion Headquarters. The company remained in their original locations until about 1200 hours, 17 December, and at that time they had four 3" guns able to be fired. At this point orders were received from Battalion Headquarters for B Company to withdraw to St. Vith. The withdrawal was successfully accomplished by following small roads and trails to Andler and then following small roads and trails west of the Schenberg - St. Vith Road, then south to St. Vith.

Company B lost during the first two days of the German attack eight 3" guns, seven destroyed by enemy action and one by the company when they were unable to winch this gun from its dug in position. The 1st Platoon had been captured after expending all their ammunition for both the 3" guns and their small arms. The fatalities suffered by B Company numbered 12 killed by artillery fire, six by small arms fire, and one by mortar fire. (31)

Company C, with its command post in Bleialf reported to the Battalion Command Post, by messenger, in the afternoon of the 16th, that they were running short of all types of ammunition. Company C was then resupplied by the Battalion Ammunition Sergeant. Again at approximately 1700 hours C Company's messenger reported that the company was almost completely surrounded and again low on ammunition. This was the last information received from them and it is believed that all of C Company was captured as no one from that company was reported after that date. Neither the number of casualties sustained nor the effectiveness of that company against the enemy was known.

From the 18th of December to the 22d of December, the remnants of the 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion were located at road blocks

(31) Statement of Capt. J.J. Lane, Co, Co B, 820th TD Bn.

and road junctions northeast and east of St. Vith. During this four day period B Company lost two 3" guns and crews, by artillery fire. The Battalion lost thirty of its original thirty five 3" guns during the period 16 - 22 December and also lost about 275 men, killed, wounded, and captured.

During the late afternoon and evening of 22 December, the remnants of the Battalion were withdrawn to Crombach, a small town about five miles southwest of St. Vith. (32) During the night of 22 - 23 December they were further withdrawn to the vicinity of Harre, and placed in XVIII Airborne Corps reserve. Here they remained for the next two days, and it was here that the S-4 from the rear echelon element made his first contact in seven days with the Command Post.

Upon arriving at the Battalion Command Post on 23 December, radio frequencies were assigned to the S-4 radio, an SCR 193. These were the first frequencies to be assigned since the 820th relieved the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion. From 23 December to 25 December the S-4 attempted to draw more 3" guns from First Army Ordnance, as the Battalion had more men than guns. At Army, on the 25th of December, the S-4 was informed that the remnants of the Battalion were to be withdrawn to Esneux, the present rear echelon location, and be placed on the line of communication duty for First Army, and while on this duty would be changed over to a self propelled battalion.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

After studying this operation, it is the writers belief that *the* original disposition of the Companies was not sound as the three Companies of the Battalion were extended over an eight mile front.

(32) Statement of Lt.Col. J. F.deV.Patrick, 820th TD Bn., CO.

This greatly reduced the capability of the Battalion to deliver effective artillery fire in mass, and of which a towed tank destroyer unit was capable of delivering. The greatest error of the operation is believed to be the failure on the part of the 106th Division Signal Officer to assign frequencies to the Battalion, and his failure to provide them with an S.O.I. This one error prevented the rear echelon from gaining contact with the Command Post after contact had been lost.

Although the 820th Tank Destroyer relieved the 612th Tank Destroyer successfully, the writer believes it was a mistake for the 106th Division to refuse permission for the Company Commanders to choose more suitable gun positions for their 3" guns. Especially as all three Company Commanders felt that better gun positions were available and also because they felt, prior to the attack, that the enemy had them bracketed by artillery.

All supplies for the Battalion were drawn directly from Corps and Army but it is believed that a unit attached to another unit will experience a closer contact and better cooperation if the attached unit is permitted to draw all supplies possible from or through the unit to which attached, this was not done in this operation.

The lack of personal weapons which could reach out in a range equal to the rifle of the enemy prevented gun crews from protecting themselves against enemy infantry small arms fire.

The incident in which the Executive Officer of the Battalion fired a rocket launcher into the Command Post, is believed to be due to lack of proper supervision by the Battalion Commander as the man was known to be a habitual and heavy drinker.

In some instances guns of the 820th and positions of units lost,

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was due to lack of ammunition, while a basic load was being carried in the Battalion Train, which was the result of the lack of communications with the Train at a critical time.

The action taken by A Company Commander, when cut off at Andler, was excellent, as he made a proper reconnaissance and consequently was able to withdraw without incident. In contrast is the action of the 32d Cavalry Squadron in making no reconnaissance at all prior to moving out.

The lack of a road net to the rear for supply and withdrawal was of prime importance as the only good road ran parallel to the Division and Battalion front.

LESSONS

1. Do not dispose artillery type units so far apart that they cannot mass their fires if necessary.
2. It is of paramount importance that radio frequencies and an S.O.I. be provided for attached units. ? *some org unit*
3. Company Commanders and Platoon Leaders should be given permission to choose positions most suited to their location after a relief is completed.
4. Attached units should draw supplies from the unit to which attached.
5. Gun crews of towed guns in the front line must have rifles, not sub-machine guns or carbines.
6. No commander should tolerate known and habitual heavy drinking at any time.
7. Reconnaissance, especially in a fluid situation, must be maintained.

8. Rear echelon units should have routes of withdrawal directly to the rear when possible, and not parallel to the front lines where they interfere with the combat elements.