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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B, 630TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION SUPPORTING THE 110TH INFANTRY IN VICINITY OF CLERVAUX, LUXEMBOURG, 16-31 DECEMBER 1944.
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: TOWED TANK DESTROYER COMPANY IN DEFENSIVE SITUATION.

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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B, 630TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION SUPPORTING THE 110TH INFANTRY IN VICINITY OF CLERVAUX, LUXEMBOURG, 16-31 DECEMBER 1944.
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion supporting the 110th Infantry, 16-31 December 1944, in the Battle of the Bulge.

In order for the reader to understand this action I will discuss the major events leading up to it.

During August and September the German Army was forced to evacuate France and Belgium and to man the defenses of the Western Frontier of Germany. In October and November the Allied Armies hammered relentlessly at the West Wall.
(1)

The Allied Armies extended from the North Sea to the Swiss Border at this time. (See Map A)

In order to mass troops for a new offensive in the area east of Aachen it was necessary for an exchange of Corps between First and Ninth Armies. The First Army taking over VIII Corps on the south flank and losing XIX on the north flank thus giving the First Army a front of approximately 60 miles. (2)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The First Army was directed in October to a general attack to the east in which the objective was to reach the

(1) A-1, p. 1; (2) A-1, p. 65.

Rhine in the vicinity of Cologne and Bonn and to seize a bridgehead if the situation should permit. Failing a successful crossing of that river, the First Army would clear the enemy from the area between the Moselle River on the south and Cologne (inclusive) on the north.

Two Corps, V and VII, were to make the attack with VIII Corps being directed to conduct aggressive defense within Corps zone, and be prepared to advance on Koblenz upon Army order. (3)

During the months of October and November, First Army conducted a series of attacks that carried to the Roer River in VII Corps zone. (4)

The VIII Corps zone was exceptionally wide, extending from the headwaters of the Our River at Loshiem Gap to the Third Army boundary south of Remich, Luxembourg. (See Map B) It was faced with a river line for three-quarters of the distance from flank to flank. The river line being on the frontier, the east bank was prepared as part of the Siegfried Line positions. So in the VIII Corps zone the front was lightly held. (5)

During November the 28th Division was moved from V Corps to VIII Corps to take over the front of the 8th Division, who then went to V Corps. (6)

The 28th Division activities in the difficult Schmidt Operation had imposed upon it severe losses in personnel (principally Infantry) and in equipment, so that it was in need of rehabilitation and absorption of substantial

(3) A-1, p. 67; (4) A-1, p. 71-91; (5) A-1, p. 66-67;
(6) A-1, p. 78.

reinforcements. (7)

The 28th Division was given a sector from Lutzkampen on the north to Bollendorf on the south. The division occupied this sector with all three regiments on a line as follows: 112th Infantry from Lutzkampen to one mile south of Lieler, 32d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron from 112th right boundary to Marnach, 110th Infantry from Marnach to Bastendorf and 109th Infantry from Bastendorf to Bollendorf. (8) (See Map B)

On December 9th, the 32d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was relieved from attachment, and the 110th Infantry assumed responsibility for that sector. The next day the 60th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 9th Armored Division relieved the 2d Battalion, 109th Infantry, on the right flank of the division zone. (9)

On the 15th of December the 110th Infantry held the zone from one mile south of Lieler to Stolzembourg with two battalions and the other battalion was 28th Division reserve. (10) (See Map C)

THE REGIMENTAL SITUATION

The 110th Infantry sector was in the center of the 28th Division and was the widest of the three regimental sectors being a total of 12 miles. (See Map C)

In the sector there were two parallel north-south ridges which paralleled the German side of the Our River.

(7) A-1, p. 72; (8) A-7, Chap. VI, p. 1; (9) A-7, Chap. VI, p. 1; (10) A-6, Chap. VI, p. 2.

There were two north-south stream lines in the sector. *where*

The main north-south highway ran down the middle of the first ridge, and for most part was in full view of the Seigfried Line.

During the period 20 November - 13 December 1944, Units of the Regiment occupied the towns in their sector with the rifle companies conducting training and receiving replacements. The mission during this period was patrolling the sector and keeping the enemy east of the Our River. (11)

On 10-11 December, the regiment moved into the area 1 mile south of Lieler on the north to Stolzembourg on the south with two battalions on line. The Regimental C. P. was moved to Clerveaux on the 13th of December. (12)

At this time a defensive plan was put into effect. Each line Battalion was to outpost the Our River line during the period of daylight and withdraw the outposts within the defensive perimeters during the hours of darkness. The defensive perimeters consisted of one company to each town with all around defense. (13)

At this time the regiment had no reserve battalion as the Division was holding 2nd Battalion, 110th Infantry as Division Reserve. (14)

THE COMPANY SITUATION

Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion was assigned to support the 110th Infantry in it's sector and

(11) A-6, Chap. VI, p. 1; (12) A-6, Chap. VI, p. 1;
(13) A-6, Chap. VI, p. 1; (14) A-6, Chap. VI, p. 2.

had been with this regiment in all of it's combat operations.

During the period 20 November - 13 December 1944, this company had conducted training for it's men by firing at German positions across the Our River by direct and indirect fire. It supported units of the regiment in local attacks on German outposts across the Our. (15)

The First Reconnaissance Platoon, attached to this company from 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion Headquarters, was given the mission of patrolling the main highway west of the Our River and keep it open to traffic within the Regimental sector. (16)

On the 1st of December this unit put into effect a plan of anti-tank defense which had been outlined in an earlier training memorandum - namely one platoon on the battalion reserve line in the most likely avenue of attack with remainder of company in reserve prepared to move to any part of the Regimental sector threatened, or to occupy fully prepared positions on the Regimental Reserve Line. (17)

On the 10th of December the 110th Infantry anti-tank officer and the company commander reviewed the sector of the regiment for the best method of anti-tank defense.

The sector being 12 miles wide made this a hard task. The final decision was made that there were two tank approaches to the first ridge with one in each battalion

(15) Personal knowledge; (16) A-6, Chap. VI, p. 1;
(17) A-8, Par. 4, p. 1.

area, but once on the first ridge tanks could go any direction.

Therefore the sector was divided with the tank destroyer company taking positions on the best approach which was the one on the north. (18)

The three tank destroyer platoons moved into positions and prepared these for defense of this approach. They were located as follows: First platoon at Hosingen, second platoon at Marnach, third platoon at Urspelt and Hupperdingen, Reconnaissance platoon at Marnach. (See Map D)

On the 13th of December the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion Commander and the 28th Division anti-tank officer inspected the prepared positions and approved the first and second platoons, but stated the third platoon was not dug in well enough. Therefore they only allowed the first and second platoons to move back to the company command post at Enscnerange in accordance with Division anti-tank plans and stated they would be back in a couple of days to reinspect the third platoon positions so they could drop back into the company assembly area. (19)

On the 14th and 15th of December the first and second platoons devoted their time to maintenance and also ran a check to see how long it would take them to move into their primary positions. The check was satisfactory.

THE BATTLE STARTS

During all this previous period the enemy had been

(18) (19) Personal knowledge.

very quiet except for a few patrols. But on 16 December the Germans started their famous counteroffensive known as the "Battle of the Bulge".

At 0545 on 16 December, the company commander was awakened by enemy artillery shelling and promptly inquired of the command post guard how long this had been going on. The guard replied, "it had just started".

The company commander observed that the fire seemed to be falling all over the regimental area so he alerted his units in Enscherange and tried to contact his third platoon at Urspalt, but his wire line to regiment was out. He then contacted his own battalion headquarters where he talked with the S-2 on the telephone and received information that the whole 28th Division front was receiving fire but no other information was available.

The company commander then proceeded to the 110th Infantry Command Post at Clerveaux arriving there at approximately 0630 hours. The town was being shelled and there was a great deal of confusion. (20)

Upon arrival at the 110th Infantry Command Post he reported to Colonel Fuller, the Regimental Commander. He stated that the situation was not clear but that all units of the First Battalion were engaging some enemy infantry and most of the action seemed to be at Marnach. (21)

The company commander informed him that he had one platoon in place at Urspelt and Hupperdingen, but the unit having positions at Marnach was in the company area at

(20) (21) Personal knowledge.

Encsnerange, but he would get that unit on the road just as quickly as he could get a radio call through. The company commander made the radio call to his Command Post and ordered his executive officer to get the second platoon on the road to it's prepared positions at Marnach. (22)

While at the radio the company commander received a call from his Battalion Headquarters stating that they had been unable to contact the First Reconnaissance Platoon at Marnach and that he should contact Lt. Miller, the platoon leader, instructing him to turn on his radio. (23)

The company commander then went back into the Regimental Command Post and informed the Regimental Commander that the Second Platoon had been ordered to move to Marnach. He also informed the Regimental Commander of the radio call from the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion Headquarters and that he was going to Marnach to make this contact. (24)

The company commander proceeded to Marnach and found the buildings of the town on fire and two Reconnaissance platoon vehicles in the middle of the road with no one near them. He searched the immediate vicinity where the Reconnaissance Platoon had been living but found the area deserted. Noticing that our own artillery was falling 200 yards to the right rear of his position he immediately checked to see what they were firing on. His Second Platoon prepared positions were approximately 100 yards from where the fire was falling. (25)

(22) (23) (24) (25) Personal knowledge.

The company commander discovered approximately 100 enemy infantry were coming up the hill to his right rear. Realizing that his Second Platoon would run right into this enemy he started down the road to inform them of this fact.

After going about 100 yards he observed approximately 10 enemy just coming upon the road in front of his jeep, whereupon he opened fire on them with a machine gun mounted on the jeep. This confused the enemy and they took cover on the side of the road allowing the jeep to pass.

At Munshausen the company commander ran into the Second Reconnaissance Platoon from 630th Tank Destroyer Headquarters on it's way to contact the First Reconnaissance Platoon at Marnach. The platoon leader was informed of the situation ahead and told to be careful. (26)

Just southwest of Munshausen the company commander met his Second Platoon and led them forward to Munshausen. Upon arrival there he was met by the Second Reconnaissance Platoon Leader, Lt. Goforth who informed him that on the way to Marnach his leading jeep was ambushed and two men wounded. He further stated that additional efforts to push his way through brought increased small arms fire from both sides of the road. (27)

The company commander then placed the second platoon in position at Munshausen with orders for them to dig in while he checked with regiment. Upon arrival at Regimental

(26) Personal knowledge; (27) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lt. Goforth on 16 Dec 1944.

Command Post he informed the Regimental Commander of his actions. The Regimental Commander gave his approval. (28)

The company commander informed the Regimental Commander that the First Platoon had not been committed and did he desire it to move to it's primary positions at Hosingen. The Regimental Commander stated he did, but to be careful as he had no contact with Hosingen and did not know the situation.

The company commander was unable to get the First Platoon on the radio so he proceeded to his Command Post where they were located. Upon arrival there he found the First Platoon in position east of the town firing at enemy infantry. The executive officer was also missing and after locating the First Sergeant he found that the executive officer had taken an armored car and a jeep to Bockholtz to help Battery C of 109th Field Artillery Battalion fight off attacking enemy infantry from their gun positions. (29)

The First Platoon leader was called in and ordered to go to Hosingen if possible. He assembled his platoon at Ensenerange with his security section bringing in two prisoners from east of town. He then moved out towards Hosingen. The prisoners were sent direct to 28th Division G-2. (30)

At approximately 1300 hours the Executive officer came in with the news that the First Platoon could go no farther than Bockholtz. They were digging in there as the enemy was holding the area west of Hosingen. (31)

(28) (29) (30) (31) Personal knowledge.

The company commander immediately proceeded to the 110th Infantry Regimental Command Post and informed the Regimental Commander of the First Platoon situation.

While at this position he was contacted by the Third Platoon Leader who informed him that his First Section at Hupperdinger was missing, and he could not account for it as the 3 inch guns and half-tracks were in position and one 50 caliber machine gun had fired about 20 rounds, but only the men were missing. (32)

He stated he was going to get the two guns and prime movers as he needed them at Urspelt. He further stated that the two guns at Urspelt had knocked out 4 tanks in the morning attack but needed support. He was informed all platoons had been committed and he would have to make out with what he had on hand but to keep the company informed of his situation. (33)

The night of 16 December fell with all three platoons on line from north to south as follows: Third Platoon (minus) at Urspelt, Second Platoon at Munshausen, First Platoon at Bockholtz. (See Map D)

Ammunition resupply was accomplished to all platoons during the night of 16-17 December. The Second Platoon at Munshausen was supplied by armored car as the Germans had the road between Munshausen and Drauffelt under long range small arms fire. (34)

On the morning of the 17th of December the Germans

(32) (33) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lt. Slepovich, 16 Dec 44; (34) Personal knowledge.

renewed their efforts to effect a breakthrough and were being resisted heavily by 110th Infantry and supporting units. The center of attack seemed to be along the Marnach-Clervaux road and was directed generally at the high ground where Urspelt was located. (35)

The Third Platoon was getting most of the action of the company at Urspelt where it knocked out 4 enemy tanks in the morning attack. The Second Platoon had fired a few rounds at enemy infantry, but after that had accomplished no firing. The First Platoon had no action with their 3 inch guns but were firing 50 caliber machine guns at small groups of enemy near Bockholtz. (36)

The company commander had gone to the Regimental Command Post earlier that morning but received little information. He inquired about the telephone wire being restored to units working with regiment as this was the only means of contact other than personal liaison. The regimental commander and staff seemed primarily concerned with the Second Battalion, 110th Infantry (minus) which the Division had released to Regimental control but which had not arrived as planned. The plans for this unit was to retake Marnach which had been lost earlier. (37)

During the early afternoon the company commander received word that his Second Platoon was cut-off and that the road between Regimental Command Post and his Command Post was cut by enemy - shortly afterwards the Regimental

(35) (36) (37) Personal knowledge.

S-3 who had been on leave arrived at the Company Command Post inquiring about the Regiment and the best way to get to the 110th Infantry Regimental Command Post.

The company commander led him to the Regimental Command Post arriving there about 1500 hours as a back route had to be taken to Clervaux. After arriving at the Regimental Command Post the company commander found out that the 2nd Battalion, 110th Infantry (minus) had arrived and was now attacking astride the Clervaux-Marnach road but had advanced only a short distance before being stopped by German tanks and infantry. (38)

A check by the company commander on his own units at this time revealed that his First Platoon had been driven out of Bockholtz but was holding at Pintsch. The Second Platoon was still in Munshausen engaged with the enemy. The Third Platoon at Urspelt was heavily engaged and low on ammunition.

The Regimental Commander ordered the Company Commander to move the First Platoon from Pintsch to Clervaux, as German tanks were attempting to drive through the Second Battalion astride the Marnach-Clervaux road. (39)

The Company Command Post at Ensclerange and the First Platoon could not be reached over the radio so the Company Commander left the Regimental Command Post to move the First Platoon as ordered. As he neared Ensclerange he contacted the First Platoon by radio and instructed the platoon leader to meet him with his unit at Ensclerange.

(38) (39) Personal knowledge.

The First Platoon then moved out in the direction of Clervaux, using the back way. After reaching the high ground southwest of Clervaux the platoon leader left his platoon to make a reconnaissance into Clervaux, and when he arrived there German tanks were in the town, so he informed his company commander and asked for instructions. He was instructed to go into position on the high west of Clervaux. (40)

About this time several changes had been taking place within the company. The Third Platoon went off the air. The last statement of the platoon leader being "we are out of ammunition but we got 4 more of them", (referring to tanks.) The Second Platoon was fighting in Munshausen but was not being pressed too hard as they were cut off. (41)

The 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion Commander then ordered the company commander to move the First Platoon back over to it's original sector. This was accomplished by moving 1 section west of Wilwerwiltz and 1 section west of Drauffelt. The company command post then moved back to Knapheschied with the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion Headquarters. (42) (See Map E)

During the night of 17-18 December the First Platoon was forced back by enemy infantry working under the light of 8 to 10 searchlights so that on the morning of 18 December found the company as follows: First Platoon with

(40) Personal knowledge; (41) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lt. Slepovich, 17 Dec 44; (42) Personal knowledge.

1 section at Knaphoschied and 1 section east of Wiltz on the Wiltz-Wilwerwiltz road. (See Map E) The Second Platoon reported heavy attacks and then went off the air. (43)

The company commander received orders from the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion Commander, who was at Wiltz, to move the section from Knaphoschied to Derenbach to protect Wiltz from the north. The other section was to remain in place and protect Wiltz from the east. The company commander placed his executive officer in charge of this section. The company commander then proceeded to Wiltz as that was now the Command Post for all activities. (See Map E)

The section at Derenbach had no infantry protection for the guns, but the section east of Wiltz had a make-shift arrangement of Division Headquarters personnel. (44)

At approximately 1100 hours a call came through from Knaphoschied that, German tanks were attacking both that town and Eschweiler north-northeast of Wiltz.

The Battalion Commander ordered the company commander to proceed to Derenbach to move that section of the First Platoon to a road junction southeast of Derenbach where the Eschweiler and Wiltz road meet. It was a race to see who would make the road junction first, our troops or the enemy. (45) (See Map E)

The two guns went into the new position and had not long to wait before two mark V's put into appearance both of which were knocked out. Then there was a period of

(43) (44) (45) Personal knowledge.

waiting during which time the Germans were maneuvering.

Just north of Derenbach there was a task force of 9th Armored Division and during the period of waiting the company commander visited this unit to ask for two tanks to protect the left flank of his two towed guns by positions in Derenbach. He also warned the task force commander of the German tank build-up east-south-east of Derenbach. The task force commanders reply was "I have my orders and I cannot spare you any tanks". (46)

The company commander then proceeded back to the First Platoon leader and instructed him to split the section leaving one gun in place and moving the other to Derenbach. He immediately made this move. Just as this move was under way the company commander left for Wiltz to report the position of the section to the Battalion commander.

After arriving back at Wiltz he found the second section of the First Platoon under the executive officer still in it's position north-northeast of Wiltz. (See Map E)

A short while later the first section called for ammunition at Derenbach and the Battalion S-4 cut in on the radio to find out how he could get the ammunition to them. He gave his position as west of Wiltz on the Wiltz-Bastogne road. The company commander proceeded out to meet him and lead him to the First Section. Contact was made and they started for Derenbach but had made only one quarter of the

(46) Personal knowledge.

distance when the Platoon Leader of the First Platoon called and said German tanks had knocked out his half-tracks and guns, and all the men were on foot scattered over the whole area. (47)

The S-4 and company commander proceeded back to the Wiltz-Bastogne road and turned for Wiltz but had proceeded only a short distance where they met the B Company Headquarters two armored cars. The first sergeant stated the Germans were in Wiltz near the factory area and near the roads west of Wiltz. (48)

Looking the situation over to decide the next move, the S-4 stated, he had 10 two and one-half ton trucks to look after and the armored cars could protect them. The two and one-half tons were picked up approximately half-way from Bastogne headed for Wiltz. After turning them around the group headed for Bastogne arriving there about 2200 hours, 18 December, thus ending the first phase of the Battle of the Bulge for Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

The company commander was taken into the VIII Corps command post and questioned by the G-2 and G-3 as to the last known location of enemy and own troops. He was released at approximately 2330 hours. (49)

REORGANIZATION

The morning of 19 December found the company commander

(47) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lt. Heagland, 18 Dec. 44; (48) Personal knowledge; Statement of 1st Sgt. Young, 18 Dec 44; (49) Personal knowledge.

helping round-up stragglers during which time his First Platoon leader and 10 enlisted men were found. This was what was left of the two sections from Derenbach. By noon the company commander had formed a platoon of about 20 men counting company headquarters personnel. (50)

During the morning the company commander ran into the Second Reconnaissance Platoon intact but at that time was to go on a mission to Wiltz if possible. This mission was never completed as this unit ran into a German road block a short distance out of Bastogne.

The night of 19-20 December fell with the company commander, First Platoon Leader and 20 men looking after the S-4 and his trucks in the southwest end of Bastogne.

On the morning of the 20th of December the company commander and S-4 went to the old VIII Corps Command Post location and were told there to go to Sibret where the 28th Division was supposed to have set up a new Division Command Post. (See Map F)

The group immediately proceeded to this area where they pulled the trucks off the Bastogne-Neufchateau road and proceeded on to Sibret. There Division Headquarters was contacted and they informed the S-4 and company commander that there were some of our battalion being sent from Bastogne and for us to wait for them. (51)

The wait was not long as Major P. E. Emmanuel the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion S-3 arrived and asked the
(50) (51) Personal knowledge.

S-4 if he could send into Bastogne and pick up some men he had left there. The S-4 left to accomplish this job.

The S-3 and the B Company Commander were given an area to assemble in at the Morhet Railroad Station and to establish 2 road blocks in that vicinity if possible. After receiving these instructions the S-3 and the B Company Commander proceeded back to the truck area where the first hot meal since 16th of December was being served to the men of the unit. (52)

Before the meal had been completed the S-4 came in with the group of men from Bastogne, most of whom were Headquarters company personnel who had been with the Battalion S-3, but also included were 12 men from the Third Platoon of Company B and their platoon leader.

This group then proceeded to Morhet Railroad Station to reorganize and set up the necessary road blocks. (53)

The road blocks were located at the junction of the Morhet-Neufchateau-Bastogne road and the other set up beyond the Railroad station underpass on the Morhet road. (See Map F)

These tasks began about 1200 hours on the 20th of December and were in operation by 1400 hours the same day. At approximately 1500 hours Major Emmanuel was called to Division Headquarters and given instructions to fight a delaying action if attacked in our present position. (54)

Upon his return to the Morhet Railroad Station the

(52) (53) Personal knowledge; (54) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major P. Emmanuel, 20 Dec 44.

area was reconnoitered and armored elements of the 4th Armored Division were found to be setting up at Pte-Rosiere. This was encouraging news for the men. (55)

The plans for a delaying movement called for the group to move to Vaux-Lez-Rosieres but if anyone was lost he should follow the railroad tracks. (See Map F)

At approximately 1700 hours roadblock number one called and said that the armored elements of the 4th Armored Division were moving out to the south and southwest. The company commander proceeded to Pte. Rosiere where he found this report to be true. (56)

On arriving back at the Morhet railroad station and informing the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion S-3 of this change it was decided to move the Second Reconnaissance Platoon to Remichampagne for protection and information to the southwest. (See Map F)

As the night of 20 December fell our situation did not look too bright as roadblock number one consisted of 12 men and the platoon leader of the Third Platoon of Company B. They were armed with small arms and one 2.36 inch rocket launcher also available were two daisy chains of mines. Roadblock number two consisted of 10 men and the platoon leader of the First Platoon of Company B. They were armed with one caliber 30 light machine gun and individual small arms but they did have a hasty minefield with a gap in the very center for vehicle passage. Neither

(55) (56) Personal knowledge.

of these roadblocks were strong enough to stop a determined attack. (57)

THE ATTACK ON THE ROADBLOCKS

At approximately 0230 hours 21 December a messenger came in from roadblock number one and stated they could hear armored elements moving southwest of their position.

The company commander immediately proceeded to that position where he found that the Second Reconnaissance Platoon had fallen back to the woods on the right of the block and were preparing to move down the road to Vauk-Lez-Rosiere. The 12 men of the Third Platoon were out of their prepared positions and near the road block in a group. The platoon leaders of both units were ordered to get into position to defend the roadblock. (58)

This was only partially completed when a German armored half-track ran into the roadblock logs. Everyone stood fast except the platoon leader of the Third Platoon, who went towards the vehicle and challenged it. His challenge was answered with the turning on of a huge light which caught 5 men in it's beam.

The fire-fight then started with the Platoon leader and platoon Sergeant of the Third Platoon throwing three grenades into the German vehicle. The company commander shot out the light with the machine gun mounted on his jeep, whereupon the Germans opened fire with machine guns at this

(57) (58) Personal knowledge.

position.

The driver of the jeep released the clutch and the company commander was thrown for a back flip as he only had one foot in the jeep and one on the ground due to firing the machine gun. When the company commander regained consciousness approximately 15 minutes later he noted that all firing had ceased and that the Germans were beginning to venture out on either flank of the roadblock.

The company commander crawled a short distance down the roadside ditch then started walking down the side of the road towards Morhet Railroad Station. Upon arriving there he found considerable confusion had taken place due to the exaggerated reports from the Company Commanders jeep driver, as to what happened at the roadblock. Everyone had departed except the Company B first Sergeant who was waiting for word that all two and one-half ton trucks were clear before moving out to cover their rear with the M-20 armored car. (59)

The company commander joined this group and after passing road block number two instructed the First Platoon leader to complete the minefield which was soon partially accomplished but interrupted by a German half-track from the east. (60)

The column of two and one-half ton trucks had stopped at Morhet and were not moving when the First Platoon leader came up to the company commander and notified him that

(59) (60) Personal knowledge.

German vehicles were following the column. The company commander proceeded on foot to the head of the column where he found the S-4 and Headquarters company commander arguing about which road to take. Since they were already on the wrong road and no one had a map, the company commander proceeded on foot with the S-4 and had the vehicles to follow. (61)

For the next four hours his group wandered through a heavily wooded area arriving at Rondu just as dawn. (See Map F) Only one incident had happened during this time and that was the German half-track which was following the column was knocked out by Lt. Hoagland, First Platoon leader with a boozka west of Morhet and a kitchen truck was wrecked in a small creek west of Morhet. (62)

THE DEFENSE OF LIBRAMONT AND RECOGNE

At approximately 0930 hours 21 December, this group arrived in Libramont, where they met with 7th Tank Destroyer Group Headquarters, commanded by Colonel Herman, who was to organize the town for defense. (63)

The group was checked for manpower and all available men were formed into two platoons of approximately 30 men each and moved to a position 800 yards east of the railroad tracks, with one platoon on either side of the Libramont-Houffalize road. (See Map G) They stayed in this position until the morning of the 22nd of December, when an engineer

(61) (62) (63) Personal knowledge.

reconnaissance party proceeded down the Houffalize road and was fired upon from the vicinity of Seviscourt. This caused the provisional company to change positions to include the secondary road from Bras to Libramont. The engineers then made 100 yards of Abatis on the Houffalize road. (See Map G)

At approximately 1500 hours the German reconnaissance probed both roads and were fired upon by the provisional company. Around 1600 hours the provisional company was ordered to drop back to Libramont behind the railroad as a reconnaissance unit had picked up German tanks 4 miles northwest along the railroad tracks.

By 1800 hours the unit was in a position facing north out of Recogne with 4 M-18 tank destroyers in support. All plans were made to evacuate the two towns that night if attacked. (See Map G) (64)

At approximately 2400 hours the night of 22-23 December fifteen vehicles were observed coming in from the north with lights on and the evacuation plan started but it was learned that the vehicles were not German but 5 ton semi-trailers coming to E-43 in Libramont for engineer supplies. But the damage had been done and the morning of 23rd was spent reorganizing but by nightfall part of the force was in position at Recogne again. (65)

On the morning of the 24th of December three significant things happened: First the balance of an self-propelled Tank Destroyer Company closed into the area, Secondly (64) (65) Personal knowledge.

Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion received 4 towed 3 inch guns and the Second Reconnaissance Platoon came in from Neufchateau with the men from the Third Platoon that had been forced in that direction from the Morhet battle. Thirdly, the Libramont-Recogne area was organized with 7th Tank Destroyer Group Headquarters, commanding all troops in the area. (66)

Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion was given an area of Defense facing north out of Recogne and took up positions there with the 4 towed 3 inch guns. (67)

Christmas day saw no change except a hot meal for everyone which made things look brighter. That evening two towed guns were moved to Ourt northeast of Libramont to give support to a small group in that town. (See Map G)

The 26th of December arrived with no change in positions. All went well until 3 German planes bombed the 7th Tank Destroyer Group Headquarters securing direct hits on the Headquarters and unit kitchens in Libramont. Colonel Herman and 10 others were killed and 13 of our group being wounded but none killed. (68)

This news was sent to 28th Division Headquarters and 110th Infantry at Neufchateau and instructions were received for the 630th units to move to that location but Colonel Fickett of 6th Calvary Group arrived with his headquarters and instructed us to stay in position. We stayed. (69)

(66) (67) (68) (69) Personal knowledge.

On the 27th of December Company B received 4, M-10 self-propelled tank destroyers adding more fire power to the unit, and now making 2 platoons instead of one.

On the 28th of December the company commander took a reconnaissance party to Morhet and found the jeep of his Second Platoon Leader which the Germans had abandoned. A careful check found a broken motor was all that was wrong so the vehicle was recovered. Also noted was one German Mark III Anti-Aircraft tank with tracks blown in the mine-field of roadblock number 2. Upon arriving back at Recogne, elements of the 109th Infantry of the 28th Division had moved in. (70)

The 29th and 30th of December saw elements of the 87th Infantry Division move through Recogne and Libramont and attack northeast. (71)

The 31st of December saw both the 110th Infantry and Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion who were at that time 7 miles apart but preparing for further operations. Although together on the 16th of December, the following 16 days brought about many changes in these units. With nightfall of 31 December it ended the operation of these two units together, by a formal order releasing the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion from attachment to the 28th Division. (72)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation it is my opinion

(70) (71) (72) Personal knowledge.

that the defensive area assigned to the 110th Infantry should have been covered by at least a division.

The emphasis of this operation should have been placed on passive defense rather than aggressive action. However, the shifting of units made the orders read aggressive defense. In being aggressive, small unit commanders followed the training of new men rather than doing much about defense.

There were no plans for alternate or supplementary positions of the towed Tank Destroyers as it was felt not necessary, due to enemy inactivity and the type of aggressive defense employed by this unit.

When the attack started and the supporting towed Tank Destroyers could not occupy primary positions, other positions taken were of a hasty nature, and as a consequence were overrun or bypassed.

The lack of knowledge of our own situation and enemy intentions led to the 2d Battalion, 110th Infantry (-) being committed to a counterattack when it would have been more advantageous, in view of the existing situation, to set up a second defensive line on the high ground behind Clerveaux, with this unit.

In trying to stop this attack the regiment, with its supporting troops, had an impossible task, but in the initial stages were successful in delaying the Germans from their initial objectives, until reinforcements could assemble at Bastogne.

In trying to analyze this operation I find two things that are paramount. One is the lack of military intelligence of the enemy among our small units and the enemy's capabilities at this time, which caused a state of mind in the troops to the extent that they had poor defensive positions, at best, simply because they thought the Germans were occupied elsewhere on the Western Front. The second thing is, even though surprised initially, the troops all along the line fought at every turn of the road to delay the enemy until help could arrive to stop them.

To sum up the results of this operation: Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion failed to stop the German tanks, but did their share when these targets presented themselves. In doing this, the unit lost all 12 of its towed guns and prime movers prior to 19 December. They continued to fight as Infantry until they were re-equipped for their primary role, at Recogne. When this operation was over, the unit had lost 2 officers and 120 enlisted men, two-thirds of its total strength. The amount of damage definitely known to have been inflicted upon the enemy was 10 tanks knocked out by direct fire, 1 half-track by bazooka fire, 1 AAA Armored vehicle by mines. No final report from Second Platoon, Company B, or the 2d Section of the First Platoon was ever received.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. To properly defend any area, the unit so assigned should be given a frontage comparable to its capabilities.
2. Towed tank destroyer guns should be in their primary positions when on defense.
3. Each unit in a regiment should have a reserve, including the regiment itself.
4. When on a defensive mission, all efforts should be directed towards defense.
5. When a unit suffers severe losses in personnel and equipment, it should be placed in a reserve position until it is combat effective once again.
6. When defending on a wide front, strong mobile reserves are a must.
7. When defending on a wide front, keypoints should be occupied in strength, rather than scattering small units over the entire area.
8. Units supporting infantry should have radios netted with infantry sets.
9. When radios are silent and enemy action develops, all units should turn on radios for alternate means of communication.
10. Reserve units should not counterattack in face of major offensive by the enemy, but should establish a successive defensive line to slow or stop the enemy.
11. Small units, cut off by strong enemy thrusts, should try to work through the enemy at night.
12. For towed guns to be effective, they should have depth to their positions.

13. Tank destroyer or tank units must be protected by infantry, to be effective block in defense.

14. Constant changes of orders confuse the small units and should be kept to a minimum.

15. Lights can be used for a night attack to guide units, or light up the area ahead.

16. Infiltration parties are a definite threat when defense is scattered out and provisions must be made to counter such moves by the enemy.

17. Any enemy information that indicates an enemy attack should be passed down to the small unit commanders for their information.

18. Engineers must set up a mine barrier and make plans for demolitions along with road blocks to aid in the defense of a wide sector.