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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION
291ST INFANTRY (75TH INFANTRY DIVISION)
NORTH OF ALDRINGEN, BELGIUM, 22 JANUARY 1945
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Intelligence Officer)

Type of Operation Described: INFANTRY BATTALION ATTACKING
IN EXTREME COLD, SNOW, AND THROUGH WOODED TERRAIN

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. II

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION
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(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Intelligence Officer)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 291st Infantry, 75th U. S. Infantry Division, in the combat approach to ALDRINGEN, BELGIUM, on 22 January 1945, during the Ardennes-Alsace Campaign. In order for the reader to have a better understanding of this operation, let us view some of the dominating events directly preceding this campaign.

Since the 6th of June 1944, when the Allies invaded the Normandy Coast of France, they had been able to push steadily forward, and in the space of approximately six (6) months stood poised on the western frontier of Germany. Morale was high, fighting reduced, supply lines long, weather severe, and that particular phase of the war known as the Ardennes-Alsace Campaign was about to begin. (1)

Note Map A. This shows exactly what Hitler hoped to accomplish in his offensive of 16 December 1944, and the units with which he hoped to accomplish it. Der Fuehrer's plan was to make a quick, hard thrust straight through the center of Belgium to ANTWERP, a distance of 145 miles, and in so doing he hoped to isolate some twenty (20) to thirty (30) allied divisions north of ANTWERP. He believed that a successful operation of this kind and the destruction of the troops caught in the north would force the allies to withdraw from the western front and perhaps from the entire continent. (2)

This map also shows the approximate areas assigned to the 1st and 3rd U. S. Armies on 16 December 1944. It is well to note the extremely large frontage allotted to the 1st U. S. Army, a distance of approximately

(1) A-1, in entirety. (2) A-3, pp. 8-13.

150 miles. The Ardennes Sector stretched north from the southern boundary of the 1st Army for eighty (80) miles and was defended by three (3) infantry divisions, the 4th, 28th, and 106th, and the 14th Cavalry Group. (3)

Now look at Map B. Hitler ordered his attack for the morning of 16 December 1944, and the attack was so executed that complete surprise was attained; however, he encountered many difficulties. Among these were lack of adequate logistical planning, bad weather, bad luck, and a stubborn, ever-increasing allied resistance. By the 26th of December the great crisis of the European Theater was over and Hitler had failed. For ten (10) days the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies and the Seventh and Fifteenth German Armies had thrown their combined might against the western front and had been unable to effect a complete breakthrough. The greatest penetration was made by the Fifth Panzer Army, a distance of about forty-five (45) miles. (4)

On Map B we can also see the general deployment of the U. S. Corps on the morning of 2 January 1945. From the 26th of December 1944, to the 2d of January 1945, both the Allies and the Germans held generally their same respective positions and consolidated forces. The German main concentration was on BASTOGNE during this period. (5)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

On the morning of 3 January 1945, we find the allied air forces pounding the German lines of communication, troop and supply concentrations. At the same time the 3rd Army continued its fighting around BASTOGNE and the 1st Army began its offensive from the north, Seventh Corps leading the attack, Eighteenth Airborne ^{NE} Corps on the east and the British Thirtieth Corps on the west. (6)

For the next eleven (11) days the 1st Army under General Hodges attacking from the north and General Patton's 3rd Army attacking from

(3) A-3, pp. 75-78, 109. (4) A-3, pp. 189, 215. A-4, p. 65.

(5) A-3, pp. 174, 176-177, 205. (6) A-3, p. 205.

the south ground their way steadily forward against a still unbeaten enemy and weather conditions at least as formidable as the enemy. The snow in many cases was two (2) feet deep and practically every move was accompanied by the loss of troops because of frozen hands, feet, or faces. (7) The winter of 1944-45 in the Ardennes Forest of Belgium was the most severe in over sixty-three (63) years. (8)

On 16 January 1945, the 1st Army and 3rd Army joined at HOUFFALIZE, BELGIUM, and then executed turns to the left and right respectively and attacked due east. (Map B) From this time forward in the campaign most units were confronted with the task of fighting a retreating enemy from one road block or ambush to another. (9)

DIVISION AND REGIMENTAL SITUATIONS

Prior to 15 January 1945, the 75th Division had never fought as a unit. Now together for the first time under the Eighteenth Airborne Corps the division was ready for offensive operations, and during the next seven (7) days it received its baptism of fire as a unit. (10)

On 22 January 1945, the division headquarters was in VIELSALM, BELGIUM, and the division about to start a new operation (Map C). The enemy had hastily but skillfully organized defenses along the line, ROGERY, COMMANSTER, HINDERHAUSEN, and the division was given the mission of taking the towns of BRAUNLAUF, MALDINGEN, and ALDRINGEN. The division was deployed generally along the aforementioned German line a distance of approximately five and one-half ($5\frac{1}{2}$) miles and planned to move southeast with two (2) regiments abreast. The 290th Infantry, with elements of the 750th Tank Battalion attached, occupied a position on the left flank of the division sector from a point north of COMMANSTER north to the limiting point between the 75th Division and the 30th Division on its left. The 291st Infantry, with Company C of the 750th Tank Battalion attached, occupied the right

(7) A-3, pp. 205-206. A-5. (8) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Belgians interrogated during campaign. (9) A-4, p. 64. (10) A-10, p. 10.

half of the division sector from a point north of COMMANSTER to the right limiting point between the 75th Division and the 84th Division on its right. The 289th Infantry was held in division reserve. (11)

The 30th Division on the left and the 84th Division on the right were making simultaneous movements in conjunction with the 75th Infantry Division. (12)

The 291st Infantry occupied a position about one and one-half (1½) miles south of BECH, BELGIUM, and faced generally southeast. The 1st Battalion, with one (1) platoon of tanks from C Company, 750th Tank Battalion attached, was on the right and the 3rd Battalion, with an equal platoon of tanks attached, was situated on the left. The regiment planned to move out (when directed) with these two (2) battalions on line and the 2nd Battalion in reserve. (13) The regimental mission was to secure the ground this side of ALDRINGEN and MALDINGEN and ultimately to capture the towns. The 1st Battalion was to move out at 0200 on 22 January and seize the small town of COMMANSTER and the high ground to the east, then on to the dominating terrain north of MALDINGEN. (14) The 3rd Battalion was to leave its IP at 0800 and move southeast to secure the Belgian railroad this side of ALDRINGEN in preparation for attacking the town. (15)

Map shows difference between the original and the corrected

THE BATTALION SITUATION

The 3rd Battalion after having fought in this area for almost a month had lost heavily in personnel. Most of the evacuations of troops resulted from parts of the body being frozen, trench foot, or dysentery. A relatively small percentage was due to actual gun inflicted wounds, although fighting had been continuous. It was impossible to secure replacements and the men were extremely tired physically. (16)

The battalion was relieved from Petit Thier on 21 January 1945, and moved to the rear through VIELSALM and on to the area one and one-half (1½)

(11) A-6, pp. 10, 16-17. (12) A-15, pp. 122-124. Personal Knowledge.
(13) Personal Knowledge. (14) A-7, p. 6. (15), (16) Personal Knowledge.

miles southeast of BECH to relieve elements of the 289th Infantry. It left L Company in BLANCHE FONTAINE as a holding force as the 1st Battalion reorganized. When the 3rd Battalion was short one (1) company, the 2nd Battalion furnished F Company to take its place. L Company saw no action with the battalion during the period covered by this monograph. (17)

The battalion closed in the area by 1300 hours the afternoon of 21 January and the battalion command post was set up in a large farmhouse which was the only shelter in the battalion front line area (Map D). F Company was on the left and K Company on the right with I Company in reserve. The two (2) front line companies occupied the military crests of their respective positions. (18)

The battalion aid station and the ammunition and pioneer platoon were located in woods about 1200 yards northwest of the battalion command post. The battalion kitchens were with the regimental train. It was planned to feed a hot meal the evening of the 21st just prior to darkness and a hot breakfast the next morning. (19)

The area to the battalion front was thickly wooded with scattered fire breaks which seemed to run, in most cases, parallel to the front. Except when looking down a fire break, the visibility in the timber was limited to approximately thirty (30) yards. There were a few small clearings throughout the area where timber had been cut, and in these areas the snow was over two (2) feet deep. The snow in the densely timbered areas was only a little over a foot deep as much of the snow was held on the branches of the heavy pine timber. No dominating road of any kind existed in the battalion area of advance, and the fire break trails with snow over two (2) feet deep were impassable to the vehicles of the battalion. From the battalion position neither side could observe the other to any great advantage. (20)

The weather had taken a turn for the worse and the temperature had

(17), (18), (19), (20) Personal Knowledge.

dropped to a few degrees above zero. Everything was frozen solid and the snow which seemed to blanket the entire world made any movement by vehicle or troops very difficult.

During the afternoon reconnaissance patrols were sent out from both F and K Companies. All patrols returned with negative reports except that K Company's patrol reported tank movement further south in the direction they thought to be the town of BEHO, BELGIUM. Any previous tracks of German vehicles or troops had been obliterated by the heavy snows. No additional patrols were sent out before the battalion moved out.

Telephone contact with the Regimental S-2 and personal contact with officers of the 289th Infantry gave very little new information regarding the enemy. Apparently the Germans were withdrawing from the area with all possible haste using delaying rear guard action and their morale was reported as extremely low. Their poorest troops were being used to delay the Americans and the only reason they manned their weapons at all was because of the one (1) or two(2) SS troopers left behind with each detachment to enforce resistance. The Regimental S-2 did state that Intelligence Agents had reported from Corps that all Germans had withdrawn to the area of St. Vith. (21)

At approximately 2100 hours the evening of 21 January, Major Bruce B. Bissell, the battalion commander, received orders to report to regiment for the battalion order. Major Bissell took Captain Commador Fergeson, the battalion S-3, and left for regiment immediately. Major Bernard S. Handy, the Executive Officer, was instructed to notify all company commanders to stand by. At about 2300 hours the battalion order was issued - "March Objective". (22)

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The 3rd Battalion was given a "March Objective" which was to sweep the woods to its front by moving southeast a distance of approximately

(21), (22) Personal Knowledge.

six (6) miles and take up positions along a Belgian railroad in preparation for attacking the town of ALDRINGEN. Since the enemy was reportedly fleeing the area, the battalion expected no resistance. The plan of movement was to move out at daylight (0800) with F and K Companies abreast and I Company in reserve. (Map D) F Company was to move out in a column formation on a magnetic azimuth of 135 degrees using such trails and fire breaks as available. F Company was to secure the railroad from B to C and be prepared to move against ALDRINGEN on order. K Company on the right was to use the same general plan and azimuth and secure the railroad from A to B and be prepared to move against ALDRINGEN on order. (23)

I Company was to follow to the left rear of K Company at about 150 yards and maintain contact with the 84th Division on the battalion's right. Lieutenant James Caskey with his platoon was to keep this contact. I Company was also to be prepared to relieve or pass through F or K Company should a situation so dictate. Contact on the left with the 1st Battalion was to be maintained by F Company. D Company was to furnish regular forward mortar observers for the rifle companies and be prepared to fire on call. No preparatory fires were planned or fired. One (1) platoon of machine guns was attached to each of the two (2) forward companies. (24)

The battalion command group was to follow the right half of F Company and the battalion rear command post was to be maintained in the farmhouse until such time as it could be displaced forward to the area of BEHO. Artillery and mortar concentrations were plotted over the entire area to the front. All prominent features were plotted and given a numbered concentration; however, none of the numbered concentrations were registered in prior because of lack of observation. No artillery planes were up because of the bad weather and the absence of landing fields. One (1) platoon of tanks was to arrive the morning of 22 January and proceed with the battalion as soon as a route could be determined. Line of departure was as shown on Map D, H hour, 0800, 22 January 1945. (25)

(23), (24), (25) Personal Knowledge.

The battalion command group was to lay wire as they moved forward, giving the battalion communication with battalion rear and regiment. SCR 300 radios were to remain open and this was practically the only means of communication for the companies with battalion. Messengers could be used but since the terrain was rough and the snow deep, movement would be very slow. The Artillery Liaison Officer's radio offered the battalion an alternate contact with regiment. (26)

The battalion ammunition point and aid station were to move forward to the vicinity of the farmhouse just as soon as the battalion moved out. The ammunition supply was to follow behind F Company using fire breaks and trails as they were cleared. All individual equipment not actually needed was to be left behind and brought up on vehicles in the afternoon (bedrolls, etc.). A small amount of extra ammunition and K rations were issued the evening of 21 January. (27)

THE ATTACK

As 0800 hours neared on the morning of 22 January, all seemed to be in order except that the tanks promised the battalion had not arrived. This was not a deciding factor at the time because the tanks could not proceed with the battalion until route was cleared. I and K Companies were feeding a hot breakfast, but F Company encountered difficulty in feeding because of a misunderstanding between its commander, Captain James S. Drake, and the 2nd Battalion Executive Officer, Major Paul M. Woods. Some of the troops were forced to move out without food. (28)

F Company crossed its line of departure at 0800 in a column formation with scouts out in front. K Company reported at 0800 that it, too, was moving southeast. Because of the densely wooded terrain the battalion commander planned to follow the advancing company as closely as possible to insure contact at all times.

(26), (27) Personal Knowledge. (28) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Captain James S. Drake, then Commander, F Company, 5 November 1948.

At 1000 hours K, F, and I Companies had reported their approximate positions several times. F Company reported that movement was extremely difficult because of the rough terrain. K Company was somewhat less than one-half mile west of F Company and had lost much time in by-passing several deep ravines. Both companies were forced to take numerous halts in order for troops to remove snow from equipment and clothing. The snow was so deep on the ground and so thick on the low hanging pine branches that it was impossible to travel for any distance without being literally covered with snow. The battalion commander directed that all companies would move slowly in order to conserve the strength of the men.

At 1145 unexpected contact with the enemy was made by F Company at a position where two small trails crossed (Map E). Two (2) German riflemen in a dugout were discovered and killed. At about the same time K Company scouts were fired upon from a dugout and one man wounded. One German was taken prisoner and the other who refused to leave the dugout was killed. The prisoner was sent to the rear by way of battalion forward command post where he verified the report that all forces had withdrawn from the area the previous day. He and his comrade had been left behind for unexplained reasons. He wore an SS Trooper's uniform, but insisted that he was not an SS Trooper. He said he was wearing the coat only because it was warmer than his own and of a white camouflage material. Although he looked about fourteen (14), his "souldbook" stated that he was sixteen (16). After these encounters the battalion proceeded with a little more caution. (29)

At 1400 hours it was obvious that everyone was extremely fatigued. For almost six (6) hours the battalion had moved through the deep snow and thick timber and because it had been necessary to lift the knees very high with almost every step, all felt they had traveled at least six (6) miles. It was later learned that the battalion had actually covered only a little more than three (3) miles. Much time and distance had been lost by lengthy detours and continuous doubling back for better walking conditions.

(29) Personal Knowledge.

The battalion command post group caught up with the rear elements of K Company at about 1500 hours and at this time the wire communication with battalion rear went out. It was necessary for the battalion forward command post group to drop back, set up the battalion SCR 300 radio with long antenna and try to contact battalion rear. After over thirty (30) minutes the contact was made and it was learned that a repair crew had already started forward checking the telephone lines.

It was also learned that plans at battalion rear were not progressing as previously arranged. Lieutenant John M. Donahue, the ammunition and pioneer platoon leader, with two (2) squads had located several box mines along the trail over which the tanks and battalion vehicles were to be moved. Also the retreating Germans had felled timber to hinder the advance of allied troops. What normally would have been an easy task was turned into an almost impossible one because of the deep snow. One of the five (5) tanks while trying to proceed up the trail had thrown a track when attempting to cross what appeared to be a small depression but actually was a 500 or 1000 pound bomb crater concealed in the deep snow. However, the other four (4) tanks were on their way and if at all possible would be with the forward platoons by the time they reached their objectives. The route was still too rough to permit passage of the battalion vehicles. It was found that even after a tank had moved along a fire break, it was impossible in many places to move a jeep and much pioneer work was necessary.

Wire communication was still out to battalion rear, but the command post group continued to string wire and move forward. As soon as they again caught up with the rear elements of K Company, they found the company halted at the edge of a large clearing which seemed to be the dominating terrain just prior to the Belgian railroad which the battalion was to occupy. Captain Alexander J. Mikules of K Company wasn't sure of his location and ^did not know whether or not his company had been able to keep on the azimuth. F Company which should have been a short distance to the east could not be contacted.

The battalion S-2, who was directing the command post group, had taken an azimuth reading when the group moved out in the morning, but had not thought it necessary to repeat this procedure during the day. Since the area to the front was not as shown on the map, the battalion commander directed the battalion S-2 to proceed to the top of the large cleared hill to their front to see if he could orient himself.

At this point every man in the battalion was so tired that the thought of further movement was particularly discouraging. Although the cleared hill to which the S-2 had been ordered was only a few hundred yards away, he doubted his ability to reach the top. However, some twenty (20) minutes later he found himself at the top of the hill only to discover that the view to the southeast was further restricted by a ridge a quarter of a mile away. Unable to determine his exact location, he returned to the area of the woods to report to the battalion commander.

Meanwhile the battalion Artillery Liaison Officer had set up his radio to request one (1) round of smoke fired on concentration forty-two (42) which, in the opinion of the battalion commander was located about three hundred (300) yards to our front. Soon the round was reported on its way and the battalion expectantly awaited it. When no sign of the round was observed, the battalion commander felt sure that the battalion was off its course. At this time the Liaison Officer's radio failed to function so about thirty (30) minutes were lost before contact was again made. An additional round was requested and considerable relief felt when it landed far to the left, but visible.

The battalion commander decided to move east where the woods continued on to the south and from there obtain information on the area to the front. (Map D) Shortly after this Lieutenant James Caskey of I Company, who was maintaining contact with the 84th Division, arrived in the area very tired and disgruntled to check on the location of the battalion. When the S-2 was unable to furnish the exact location, Lieutenant Caskey stormed off with three members of his platoon in the direction of a small trail that led around the hill to our front and further southeast. He had reported

to the Battalion S-3 that the 84th Division was moving as scheduled on our right and that he would try to contact the division again before dark. (30)

The time was about 1700 hours and F Company was again in contact but had never been able to locate the 1st Battalion on its left. No check could be made with regiment regarding the progress of the 84th Division since wire communication was out and the SCR radio was not adequate in the hilly, timbered terrain; however, there were no indications of contact with the enemy.

As the battalion moved east it discovered the hull of a German tank which the Air Corps had bombed and destroyed the previous day. Also the bombs had removed part of the snow and disclosed large roots of trees and sawed off trunks. Apparently the cleared and open area that the battalion encountered had previously been a wooded area as shown on the map. The battalion then was on its course; however, since the battalion commander was still not certain of the exact location of the Belgian railroad which was his objective, he ordered the battalion S-2 to proceed down the trail to the front to make a reconnaissance. I, K, and F Companies were halted to await further orders. (31)

At about 200 yards down the trail the S-2 with two (2) men of his section searched the area with the S-2 observation scope. The trail could be clearly seen moving south past a farmhouse and on under what appeared to be a railroad overpass. As the S-2 looked through the scope he saw someone walk along the overpass and though he wasn't sure, he thought the man could have been in German uniform. At this time one of the men accompanying the S-2 accidentally discharged a machine pistol (M-3) while removing it from his shoulder. The bullet entered his left hand, went up his arm and came out at the elbow. The man screamed in agony and fell to his knees. As the battalion S-2 turned to the aid of the injured man, the

(30), (31) Personal Knowledge.

person he had seen on the overpass was forgotten. It took approximately twenty (20) minutes to get the wounded soldier back up the trail to a medic and on his way to the rear.

The S-2 reported the incident of the ^{wounded} soldier to the battalion commander and was informed that the companies had been ordered to move forward and that the S-2 was to proceed directly to the farmhouse (Map E) which was directly down the trail in the direction of the battalion objective, and to clear the place for the battalion command post.

F Company was to proceed straight south from its present location across the field to seize the road overpass at C and the railroad embankment from C to B. K Company was to proceed down the trail, occupy the railroad overpass at B and also the embankment from A to B. I Company was to stay in the woods at D.

As he started down the trail again, this time on his way to the farmhouse, the S-2 heard tank movement to his rear and was told that the tanks attached to the battalion had made it through.

Captain Drake of F Company, again noticing the extreme fatigue of his men and the half mile of open ground with snow almost waist deep between him and his section of the railroad, decided to move his company west along the edge of the woods to the trail K Company was to move down, then down this and left again to his objective. Though this was a longer route, the walking would be easier. This decision was not cleared through battalion. As F Company, moving in single file, approached the trail, it ran into K Company moving out in the same formation and the two (2) companies moved down the trail side by side as darkness settled.

As the battalion S-2 moved through the two companies he was reminded of the lone person he had seen near the overpass of the railroad. Lieutenant Caskey and the three men who had stopped for a short time as they passed through K Company now seemed to be leading the battalion. Lieutenant Caskey was about 100 yards out in front of the battalion, one man to each side of him and the third man bringing up the rear. Actually they were on their way to contact the 84th Division.

It was dark now and the men were walking very closely together. They looked more like vintage 1776 than a part of a victorious army of the Twentieth Century. The trail made a slight turn to the west as it passed the huge farmhouse which was to be the battalion command post and just across the trail from the farmhouse was a typical Belgian barn made of sandstone. Just past this light turn in the trail was a small culvert over a creek and then the trail went straight into BEHD, BELGIUM. The railroad overpass which was included in the battalion objective was about 250 yards farther up the trail.

As Lieutenant Caskey neared the railroad overpass and the forward elements of the two (2) companies had cleared the culvert by almost one (1) platoon and all felt that the objective had been reached, "Hell" seemed to break loose. For a few minutes the night air was filled with criss-crossing tracer fire. At first it seemed to the battalion S-2 who had just reached the road between the farmhouse and the barn that German machine guns were everywhere. As he hit the ground, he heard someone immediately forward yell, "I'm hit!" Then he heard another voice, "Hit the creek!"

At the battalion front two (2) German machine guns seemed to be firing continuously from the vicinity of the railroad overpass and to the battalion right were small flashes of light spaced several yards apart all along the ridge. The battalion S-2 thought of the tanks and started to run ^{NORTH} (up) the trail. Then he noticed what was causing the vast column of tracer fire. The fire of the two (2) machine guns in the vicinity of the overpass was coming straight down the trail, hitting the stone barn, and ricocheting on up the trail in all directions. As he ran on up the the edge of the trail he noticed that the men had hit the ground when the firing started; however, because they were so tired and worn out practically none had moved. It was necessary to use force in moving them off the trail into the ditches for protection against the ricochet and cross fire.

Captain Mikules of K Company, who when the firing started had yelled, "Hit the creek!", and over one (1) complete platoon had taken cover in

the creek. As they jumped, slid, or fell into the creek the ice broke and most of the men found themselves in water to the waist. The remaining platoons were scattered back up the road, some in or near the farmhouse and others in or near the barn. Confusion reigned in K Company at this time. Since the sun had set, the temperature was down to about fifteen (15) degrees above zero, and all fight had gone from the men. K Company seemed to shiver and shake and wait for someone to start moving. The time was now about 1810 and the extreme darkness did not help matters. Finally as officers and non-commissioned officers regained control, and the company began to react return fire was directed on the enemy.

When the firing started Captain Drake's company seemed to crumble with the shock and most of the men were mixed in with K Company and strung all along the trail. Captain Drake took a few men and established the left flank along the creek. He ordered the rest of his men to move back up the trail into the woods. Then he reported to Captain Mikules who was in the farmhouse and told him what he had done. Captain Mikules had ordered the men who were with him in the creek to get into the farmhouse during the intermittent bursts of machine gun fire, as the men wet to their waists could do nothing but shiver. Upon entering the farmhouse they found it occupied by sixty (60) to seventy (70) civilians who had fled from the town of BEHO.

The above took place in a matter of minutes and was noted by the battalion S-2 as he ran back up the trail to get the tanks. The battalion commander and S-3 had heard the firing and were on their way to the front when the S-2 arrived. After the explanation of the situation the battalion commander directed one (1) tank (since it was felt that perhaps even one (1) tank could not move over the terrain at night) to go with the S-2 and engage the German weapons.

As the tank left the woods and started down the trail the firing could still be heard and the small flashes of light could be seen in the field to the right of the farmhouse. However, as soon as the tank cleared

the woods and started down the small grade to the creek all firing seemed to stop. The tank commander proceeded to the culvert just past the farmhouse and started to pump HE rounds in the direction of the railroad overpass. The firing was to have been directed by someone firing the .50 caliber AA gun on top of the tank, but the gun was so packed with snow and ice that it wouldn't function automatically and had to be loaded each time by pulling the handle back. However, tracer rounds were pulled out of the belt and loaded singly and the firing conducted. HE rounds were fired throughout the field and machine gun fire from the tank swept the railroad embankment. No return fire was received.

The S-2 asked Captain Mikules for someone to go with him up the road to find out about Lieutenant Caskey and his men but was refused on the grounds that it was not necessary and the men were wet and cold. Captain Drake couldn't be found so the S-2 took two of his men and one medic and spread out in front of the tank started up the trail past the culvert. The tank commander when asked if he would go, said, "Hell, yes! Just get me a little flank protection against the brush and I'll take this tank anyplace."

Lieutenant Caskey and his three (3) men were found about fifty (50) yards from the overpass. Their bodies had been riddled by machine gun fire. They had received the brunt of the enemy machine gun fire and as Lieutenant Caskey was picked up and placed on the rear of the tank, it was noticed that his web equipment was almost completely shot from his body. The group returned to the farmhouse and reported to the battalion commander that the Germans appeared to have withdrawn and that Lieutenant Caskey had apparently drawn their fire before they were aware of the remainder of the battalion. A complete check showed one (1) officer and three (3) enlisted men dead and five (5) enlisted men wounded. (32)

K Company was in bad condition because of the wet men so I Company was passed through and took up the position previously designated for that

(32) Personal Knowledge.

company. F Company was ordered to reassemble and proceed to their assigned objective. By morning of 23 January 1945, the battalion was again organized and the men on their objectives; however, it had taken most of the night to complete the task. The 84th Division had taken BEHO, BELGIUM, and the 1st Battalion on the left was on its assigned section of the railroad. (33)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

✓ In analyzing this operation it is my opinion that the use of the battalion in its entirety was not necessary. Since no enemy in strength was expected in this area, the battalion might have been saved this arduous march. One (1) reinforced company could have accomplished the same with less loss to the battalion. In considering the condition of the troops of the battalion, they should not have been forced to march under the prevailing conditions (of the operations) unless such a march was imperative.

The one (1) day allotted the battalion to move from one (1) front to another, a distance of ten (10) miles, make reconnaissance, occupy a position and be ready to cross and IP by 0800 hours the following day was not sufficient time under these conditions. In normal weather and with fresh troops such time would have proved adequate. It must be remembered that all troops of the battalion were tired before the operation started.

No one realized the true condition of the terrain over which the battalion was forced to move. Complete reconnaissance should have been made prior to 0800 on the morning of 22 January. There is no doubt that the patrol activities the day prior to this operation were inadequate; however, lack of experience on the part of the battalion S-2 (he had held the position for only five (5) days prior to 22 January) resulted in the improper use of time and the patrols were not organized or dispatched.

(33) Personal Knowledge.

Leaving the bedrolls and individual equipment at battalion rear and bringing them upon the mess vehicles in the evening was an excellent idea and might well be practiced where possible; however, care should be taken to insure the arrival of this equipment in time for use. In this particular operation the battalion vehicles did not manage to get through that evening and consequently the men were without bedrolls; however, had the troops been carrying them, many bedrolls would not have reached their destination and the soldiers would have been slowed down with the extra burden.

The only way the companies could move through this area was by azimuth directions; however, if the battalion S-2 had checked the battalion direction more frequently, there is no doubt that much time could have been saved in determining the exact location of the battalion. Also aerial photos of this area could have been secured as they were later delivered to battalion; however, it did not once occur to the inexperienced S-2 to attempt to secure aerial photos. Much time could have been saved as the photos would have shown the error in the maps. The S-2 did secure all available information concerning the enemy, but this actually resulted in a detriment rather than an aid. ^{because} All felt sure no resistance would be encountered and therefore were not prepared when it did occur.

The fact that the tanks attached to the battalion did not arrive to accompany it made little difference during the fore part of the day. But had prior and more detailed plans been made regarding the tank route, the operation might have been more successful. If the tanks had been forward with the battalion, I feel sure the German rear guard action would not have taken place since the Germans probably would not have fired upon tanks.

Communication throughout this operation was inadequate. The battalion commander's SCR 506 should have been brought with the forward command post group. This radio was not with the group because there was no one to carry it; however, the true importance of communication should have been known

and if necessary the battalion runners could have been used to transport the radio since they were of no value during this operation.

The fact that the battalion S-2 noticed an individual on the overpass and did not report it to the battalion commander was probably the greatest mistake of the operation. Because of the accident with the machine pistol the incident was completely forgotten. I do not believe this would have happened, if the S-2 had not been so completely fatigued mentally and physically.

The mistake made by F Company commander in moving his company from one (1) zone to another without notifying the battalion commander was very serious in this operation; however, under other circumstances such action might have proved disastrous to the battalion. Captain Drake may have failed to notify the battalion commander for the same reason the S-2 failed to remember the individual on the overpass, or since he and his company were new to the battalion, he may have put consideration for his men before the mission of the battalion. Action of this kind is understandable but not justifiable.

Captain Drake has stated that in his opinion the battalion command post group was always too far behind during this operation. I do not believe this to be true as the battalion command post group was in most instances on the heels of K Company. If the command post group had moved a little further east, it would have been close to the planned route of advance, but I feel sure control would have been little better.

The strategy of the Germans was excellent; however, I dread to think of what could have happened if they had permitted Lieutenant Caskey to go through and trapped the entire battalion in ambush.

To sum up the results of this operation: the 3rd Battalion, 291st Infantry did succeed in accomplishing its assigned mission. It took ALDRINGEN on 23 January 1945 and this was their last contact with the Germans during this particular campaign. After two (2) additional weeks

More analysis needed regarding the march formation which resulted also more analysis is needed on the actual engagement.

in the Colmar Pocket the 3rd Battalion put I, K, and L Companies on line and had a total of 69 officers and men remaining. If anything defeated the battalion, the weather was number one.

LESSONS LEARNED

As a result of this operation the following facts seem indisputable to me:

1. Proper recognition and dissemination of intelligence information must be understood and practiced at all times.
2. Adequate communication is imperative for the complete success of an operation.
- ✓ 3. There is a maximum point of endurance beyond which an individual is no longer effective in combat.
- ✓ 4. Complete reconnaissance of an area of operation should be made if adequate time is available.
- ✓ 5. Aerial photos of an area of operation should be obtained and used to substantiate maps.
- ✓ 6. The psychological effect of tanks in combat must not be overlooked.
7. If troops are required to fight upon reaching an objective, their strength must not be entirely utilized to reach that objective.
- ✓ 8. An unbelievable amount of cold can be endured, if there is promise of warmth in the near future.