

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
GENERAL SECTION
MILITARY HISTORY COMMITTEE
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED OFFICERS COURSE
1946-1947

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3d BATTALION
28TH INFANTRY REGIMENT (8TH INF. DIV.)

SIEG RIVER OFFENSIVE, RUHR POCKET

31 MARCH-4 APRIL 1945

(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)

(Personal experience of a Battalion Commander)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3d Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 8th U. S. Infantry Division in the Sieg River Offensive from 31 March to 4 April 1945 (Central Europe Campaign). This action took place on the southern rim of the Ruhr Pocket. It was part of the opening phase by elements of the First and Ninth Armies to reduce the Ruhr Pocket.

By the early part of March, 1945 the Allied Armies in the West controlled the west bank of the Rhine River from Nijmegen in Holland to its junction with the Moselle at Koblenz. (1)

The Allied Armies were in position to deliver the knock-out blow to Germany.

On 7 March 1945, elements of the 9th U. S. Armored Division seized the Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen and developed a small bridgehead across the Rhine River. By 25 March 1945,

(1) A-1, p. 88.

elements of the 1st U. S. Army had extended this bridgehead to an area of ten miles deep and thirty miles long. The German High Command, expecting a drive on the Ruhr area from the bridgehead, had concentrated strong forces of Army Group B north of the Sieg River to meet the threat. On 26 March 1945, the 1st Army broke out of the Remagen bridgehead. Instead of driving north to the Ruhr, the 1st Army spearheads drove southeast toward Lemburg, east toward Marburg, and then northward toward Paderborn. (2)

On 24 March 1945, the American 9th Army forced a crossing over the Rhine River between Wesel and Duisburg. Spearheads of the 9th Army raced toward Paderborn. On 1 April 1945, elements of the 1st U. S. Army and the 9th U. S. Army made contact in Lippstadt to the west of Paderborn. The encirclement of the Ruhr was complete. (3)

This manoeuvre constituted the largest double envelopment in history. The whole of the German Army Group B and two corps of Army Group H were trapped in the Ruhr area. There were included among the enemy, picked troops who had been massed in March to defend the southern approaches of the Ruhr against a northern offensive which the enemy had erroneously expected from the Remagen bridgehead. An estimated 350,000 enemy troops had been trapped. (4)

The 8th U. S. Infantry Division, after having participated in the drive of the 1st U. S. Army across the Rhineland

(2) A-1, p. 90. (3) A-1 p. 90, 94. (4) A-2 p. 82.

Plain from 23 February to 8 March 1945, was placed in VII Corps Reserve in the vicinity of Cologne. On 14 March, the 8th Division was ordered to relieve the 1st U. S. Infantry Division of its defensive mission along the Rhine River from a point north of Wesseling to the southern edge of Bonn. (5)

On 28 March 1945, the 8th Division was relieved of its defensive role. The Division moved across the Rhine River south of Bonn, relieved the 1st Infantry Division on the right flank of the 78th U. S. Infantry Division, and assumed responsibility for a sector just south of the Sieg River. This sector extended from Wissen to the northwest of Siegen, Germany. The Division then attacked through scattered and varying resistance to the line of the Sieg River. (6)

The 28th Infantry Regiment relieved the 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, on the right flank of the 78th Division. At this time the 26th Infantry Regiment occupied a general line on the high ground about 3 miles south of the Sieg River and west of Wissen.

With the 1st and 2d Battalions the 28th Infantry Regiment pushed to the line of the Sieg River during the afternoon of 28 March and during the day of 29 March 1945. Resistance varied from light resistance offered by small scattered enemy groups to stiff resistance met in the towns of Wissen, Scheurefeld, Alsdorf, and the southern portions of Betzdorf. From Division Headquarters, orders were received to hold

(5) A-3 p. 62, 80, 81. (6) A-3 p. 81, 86.

along the south bank of the Sieg River. (7)

By the evening of 29 March 1945, the regiment was holding a front of eight and one half miles extending along the south banks of the Sieg River from the western portions of Wissen to the eastern side of Brachbach. The 2d Battalion was made responsible for the sector from Wissen to the Re-entrant terrain feature west of Scheurefeld. The 1st Battalion assumed responsibility for the sector from Scheurefeld to the right flank of the regiment. The Re-entrant between the 1st and 2d Battalions was occupied by the 1st Platoon, Company I under regimental control. Permission was secured from Division to cross the Sieg and occupy the Re-entrant since it projected back into our sector for approximately 1200 yards and commanded the observation of the 1st Battalion sector for several thousand yards. (8)

The Re-entrant and also the towns of Wissen, Scheurefeld, Bruche, the southern portions of Betzdorf, and Brachbach were occupied in force by our troops. The terrain between the above mentioned areas was controlled by outposts, observation posts, and foot and motor patrols from the line battalions assisted by the Regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon. The 3d Battalion, in regimental reserve, was located in the vicinity of Steinberg. Arrangements had been made for sufficient transportation to make the battalion mobile. Enemy activity on our front at this time consisted of sporadic harassing fire and occasional patrols into the wide regimental sector. Enemy forces of undetermined strength

(7) A-4 p. 47. (8) Statement Col. Beck.

were located in the towns of Wissen, the northern side of Betzdorf, and along the north shore of the Sieg River opposite our regimental sector.

TERRAIN ANALYSIS

The terrain in the sector of the 28th Infantry Regiment was characterized by rugged hills and mountains with heavy growths of cultivated forests. It was essentially a mining area dotted with iron mines. The hills and mountains were cut by deep and thickly wooded ravines. The Sieg River, a tributary of the Rhine River, cut a long, narrow, and deep valley through the area. In some places, the valley assumed the aspects of a gorge. From an elevation of about 550 feet mean sea level at the river line, the ground rose abruptly and sharply to heights of over 1500 feet mean sea level both to the north and south of the river. The Sieg River itself was fordable at numerous places. The river's width averaged about fifty feet; its banks were steep, and in times of heavy rains the river was subject to flash floods.

A double track railroad paralleled the south side of the Sieg. The track joined the town of Siegen and connected with the Cologne and Giessen Railways. The north side of the river was paralleled by an excellent hard-surfaced macadam road. There were other excellent hard-surfaced roads and a fine road net in the area.

In addition, the area was dotted by small towns and hamlets. In the regimental sector, two average size towns were

located along the river. These were Wissen and Betzdorf. Of the two towns, Betzdorf was more important. In addition to the double track railroad connecting the town, several single track lines passed through Betzdorf. A large marshalling area plus several heavy industries including machinery and wagon works were located in the town. The Sieg River divided the town in two. In 1933, Betzdorf was reported to have a population of 8,781. (9)

From the defensive point of view, the terrain was adaptable to strong defensive or delaying action. Excellent cover and concealment existed for the concealment of troop movements or troop concentrations.

MISSION ASSIGNED 28TH INF. REGT., NIGHT 31 MARCH 1945

At approximately 2000 hours, 31 March 1945, Colonel Thomas H. Beck received sudden orders from Division Headquarters to attack across the Sieg River without delay, seize the high ground across the river in the regimental zone of action, and establish a bridge-head sufficiently wide enough so that the east-west road paralleling the north side of the Sieg River could be used by our forces. Colonel Beck was further notified that neither Engineer support above the normal supporting platoon nor any bridging equipment would be available to the regiment. All available bridging equipment and the major part of the Division Engineers were to be placed in support of the 13th and 121st Infantry Regiments of the Division. The two mentioned regiments were to attack in the

(9) A-5, p. 211.

Siegen area northwest of the 28th Infantry zone of action.

(10)

REGIMENTAL COMMANDER'S ORDERS AND PLAN OF ATTACK

At approximately 2030 hours, 31 March 1945 the battalion commanders and Regimental Staff were assembled at the Regimental CP in Steinroth. The regimental commander who had made a map study and map reconnaissance, issued his order as follows:

(1) The 2d Battalion on the left of the regimental sector was ordered to cross the Sieg River in the vicinity of Wissen, seize and hold the north section of Wissen now occupied by the enemy, seize and hold Hill 311, and be prepared to continue the attack to the north. No efforts were to be made to hold the ground between Wissen and Hill 311.

(2) The 3d Battalion was ordered to cross the Sieg River between Scheurefeld and Betzdorf, seize and hold Hills 312 and 313, and be prepared to continue the attack to the north. In addition, the battalion commander was told to stay out of Betzdorf if at all possible. It was known that the enemy occupied Betzdorf in strength and it was not desired to get involved in a costly and time consuming engagement there. It was felt, too, by the regimental commander that after Hills 312 and 313 were taken Betzdorf could be taken without much trouble.

(3) The 1st Battalion was ordered to hold its present position, be prepared to cross the Sieg River in the vicinity of Kirchen on the night of 1 April, and seize and hold Hills

(10) Statements Col. Beck, 27 March 1947; Witness, self.

314, 315, 316, and 317. The 1st Battalion was ordered to assist the 3d Battalion by fire wherever possible or necessary. It was to render further assistance to the 3d Battalion by providing guides who were familiar with routes of approach to the river and the possible crossing sites which the 3d Battalion might use to accomplish its mission.

(4) Cannon Company was attached to the supporting Field Artillery.

(5) Anti-tank Company and the I and R Platoon remained under regimental control.

(6) One platoon each of Company B, 644 Tank Destroyer Battalion was attached to each battalion.

(7) Time of attack for the 2d Battalion was set for 2300 hours. Mission was to be accomplished by both battalions by daylight 1 April 1945.

(8) No artillery preparations would be fired except on call from battalion commanders. (11)

THE ATTACK OF THE 2D BATTALION ON HILL 311

The 2d Battalion after a short delay jumped off at 2330 hours. After meeting stiff resistance on its initial crossings over a damaged railway bridge at Wissen, the battalion accomplished its mission by 0700 hours 1 April 1945.

3D BATTALION COMMANDER'S ORDERS AND PLAN OF ATTACK

The 3d Battalion with which we are mostly concerned in this monograph was commanded by acting battalion commander

(11) Statement, Col. Beck, 27 March 1947; Witness, self.

Captain George E. Tate. The 3d Battalion commander in a conference with Colonel Beck and Major Bob Lybrook, the battalion commander of the 1st Battalion, decided that the 3d Battalion would attempt a crossing at Point A (see sketch) in the zone of the 1st Battalion. The 1st Battalion would furnish guides to lead the 3d Battalion to the area of the crossing and to the crossing site itself. Guides were selected from Company A since that company held the sector in which the 3d Battalion was to cross.

At the 3d Battalion CP, Captain Tate gave the situation and outlined his plan to the Battalion Staff and company commanders. The plan was as follows:

(1) Lieutenant Schneider, platoon leader 1st Platoon, Company L, would lead a picked combat patrol across the Sieg River at Point A, and secure a crossing site on the north side of the river for the battalion. On securing the site, Lieutenant Schneider was to send back messengers to the battalion commander in the forward assembly area (Lasdorf) with all information secured at that time. The messengers in turn were to act as guides for the rest of the battalion in its crossing of the river. The combat patrol would leave by motor, as soon as the patrol could be assembled and briefed, for the Company A Command Post in Scheurefeld. From Scheurefeld, the patrol would leave on foot for Lasdorf where it would pick up guides from Company A and be led to the crossing site. The combat patrol was given until 0100 hours, 1 April 1945 to accomplish its mission.

(2) The battalion would move without delay by motor to the vicinity of Scheurefeld. From Scheurefeld, the battalion

would move by foot to a forward assembly area in Lasdorf.

(3) As soon as Lieutenant Schneider's patrol had accomplished its mission, the battalion would cross the river in a column of companies in the order L, K, and I Companies, pass through the patrol at B and attack immediately to seize the objectives, Hills 312 and 313. L Company would swing to the left and seize Hill 312. K Company would swing to the right and seize Hill 313. I Company (minus the 1st Platoon) would relieve the patrol and be ready to assist either K or L Company in seizing its objective.

(4) M Company, under command of Captain J. C. Hillman, would attach one section of heavy machine guns to each of the rifle companies (one section of heavy machine guns was already attached to the 1st Platoon, Company L on regimental mission). The 81-mm mortars were to support the battalion attack from positions in Bruche. An 81-mm mortar forward observer with SCR 300 Radio was assigned to Company K and one to Company L.

(12)

(5) The Battalion Anti-tank Platoon and the 3d Platoon, Company B, 644 Tank Destroyer Battalion would remain mobile in Bruche and be prepared to displace across the river on battalion order.

(6) One K ration was to be issued each man. Extra ammunition would be drawn in the forward assembly area. The kitchens were instructed to prepare a hot meal for the night of 1 April 1945. Feeding details would be given later.

(7) The S-1 and Battalion Communications officer were

(12) Statements, Capt. Hillman, 14 Feb. 1947, Capt. Tate, 12 Jan. 1947.

to proceed to Scheurefeld and set up a temporary Battalion CP.

(8) The Battalion Aid Station was to be located in the vicinity of Bruche.

(9) The battalion commander stated that he would proceed with the battalion S-2 to the forward assembly area with the battalion.

The battalion closed into the forward assembly area at Lasdorf about 0030 hours the morning of 1 April 1945 and prepared to cross the Sieg River as soon as Lieutenant Schneider had accomplished his mission. (13)

THE ACTIONS OF LT. SCHNEIDER AND THE COMBAT PATROL

Lieutenant William Schneider was a former Antiaircraft Artillery officer who, after eight weeks of special training, had been converted into an Infantry officer during the time when Infantry platoon leaders were sorely needed. He had joined the regiment late in March, and for the Lieutenant, this was his first combat action. At approximately 2130 hours, 31 March 1945, Schneider was summoned to the Battalion CP where he was briefed on the enemy situation, the battalion mission and plan of manoeuvre, and also his own mission. His orders were to proceed by motor with his patrol to the Company A Command Post where he would be furnished with guides who would lead him to Point A. He was to cross at Point A, secure a passageway for the battalion, and send guides back to the battalion commander in Lasdorf in order to lead the

(13) Statements, Capt. Tate, 12 Jan. 1947 on his plan of attack.

rest of the battalion across the river. In the briefing, the battalion S-2 informed Lieutenant Schneider that the expected enemy resistance was considered negligible.

The Lieutenant was given a patrol of two squads numbering twenty men all told. One squad came from Schneider's platoon and included Tech/Sergeant Luther, the platoon Sergeant. The other squad came from K Company. The patrol leader was also furnished one SCR 300 radio in order to have direct communications with the battalion commander.

After having oriented his patrol, Lieutenant Schneider moved the group by motor to Company A Command Post at Scheurefeld. The patrol was led from there on foot to a Platoon CP of Company A in Lasdorf. At this point Lieutenant Schneider was to pick up the guides who were to lead him to the crossing site. Something went wrong from the viewpoint of coordination and dissemination of information. The Company A platoon leader stated that he had no information or orders about providing guides, that he was not familiar with the location where the intended crossing was to take place, and that he had no intentions of providing guides for the 3d Battalion patrol. Because of the distance involved, Schneider's radio could not contact the Battalion CP or the battalion commander, both in the vicinity of the old area. In addition the officer was without a map of the crossing area.

Not dismayed by these circumstances, the patrol leader, relying on his memory and sense of direction, set out for the crossing without the assistance of guides. Fortunately, the

patrol reached the river at the exact spot where it was intended to cross. The patrol formed into single file with the patrol leader in the lead and waded through four feet of icy water to the enemy side of the river. While the patrol was still crossing, the patrol leader and a squad leader moved up to the river road in search of a path leading to the high ground when they were challenged by a German sentry. The patrol leader was about to answer the challenge when the squad leader replied with a burst of rifle fire and killed the German sentry. The entire patrol had now crossed the river. As the patrol leader and squad leader began to move again across the road an estimated four enemy machine guns opened fire from the direction of Betzdorf. From the cover of the steep river banks, the patrol became engaged in a stiff fire fight with the enemy. It was now 0300 hours. The patrol was two hours late, engaged in a fire fight, and the mission was not accomplished. The patrol leader radioed back the situation to the battalion commander who was in Lasdorf. Orders were given for the patrol to remain on its mission. Meanwhile, the patrol was pinned down and unable to manoeuvre out of its position. The enemy was delivering cross grazing fire over the road and preparing to close in on the patrol.

(14)

Realizing the futility of further attempts to force a crossing at this point on the river, the battalion commander ordered the patrol to disengage itself from the enemy and withdraw to Lasdorf. In its withdrawal and while crossing

(14) Statements, Lt. Schneider, 15 March 1947.

a flat open field south of Point A, the patrol suffered two casualties from the enemy machine-gun fire. The patrol reorganized under the cover of the railroad embankment and rejoined the battalion in Lasdorf. (15) (16)

THE CROSSING AT BETZDORF

With the failure of the initial attempts of the battalion to cross the river in the vicinity of Point A, the battalion commander ordered additional patrols to reconnoitre for other possible crossing sights between Point A and Betzdorf. Meanwhile, alerted by the battalion's initial attempts, the Germans on the north side of the Sieg increased their fires toward our side of the river and made the patrols' efforts increasingly difficult. Since there remained only a short period of darkness, the battalion commander ordered L and K Companies to move from their assembly areas in Lasdorf to a new assembly area on the south side of Betzdorf. (17)

L Company moved into a church yard cemetery overlooking the enemy side of Betzdorf while K Company moved to a location in the nearby vicinity. (18) I Company was ordered to take up a support position on the high ground in Bruche. (19)

Below the church yard cemetery, there were several large factories, an engine house, and an extensive marshalling yard

(15) Statements, Lt. Schneider, 15 March 1947. (16) Statement, Capt. Tate, 12 Jan. 1947. (17) Statements, Capt. Tate, 12 Jan. 1947. (18) Statements, Lt. Scott, 4 April 1947; Lt. Whight, 12 March 1947; Lt. Sweeney, 17 Feb. 1947. (19) Statement, Capt. Keeler, C. O. Co. I, 3 March 1947.

containing about one hundred fifty box cars. (20)

About an hour before dawn, one of the patrols reported they had found on the west edge of Betzdorf a foot bridge over which it would be possible to cross the foot elements of the battalion. Seizing this opportunity the battalion commander immediately ordered L Company to cross the river and clear the enemy of that portion of Betzdorf lying on the north side of the river. K Company was ordered to follow L Company and seize K Company's assigned objective, Hill 313. (21)

On receiving the battalion commander's orders, the company commander of L Company ordered Lieutenant Larry Whight, platoon leader of the 3d Platoon, to take a patrol to the area of the foot bridge and investigate the area prior to the crossing by L Company. (22)

The platoon leader moved out immediately with two scouts and Tech/Sergeant Soposki, the platoon sergeant of the 3d Platoon. The patrol made its way through the factory yards and marshalling area and without too much difficulty located the damaged foot bridge.

The damaged bridge was about four feet wide, forty feet long, and was supported in a rickety fashion by steel cables

(20) Personal reconnaissance, 1 April 1945. (21) Statements, Capt. Tate, 12 Jan. 1947; Lt. Scott, 4 April 1947. (22) Statement, Lt. Whight, 12 March 1947; Lt. Scott, 4 April 1947.

stretched across the river. The bridge was approximately eight feet above the water's surface. The approach to the bridge was by way of a steep embankment fully exposed to the enemy. The patrol also learned that during the night the enemy had laid planks across the bridge in order to facilitate their own crossing.

Cautiously the patrol moved across the bridge. Reaching the enemy side no enemy movements were observed. The platoon leader dispatched one of the scouts to the company assembly area to bring up the 3d Platoon and to request from the company commander the use of the light machine gun section.

While the scout was gone for the 3d Platoon, the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and the remaining scout began to reconnoitre the immediate area on the enemy side of the river. On entering the first house, the patrol discovered several Russian slave laborers who informed Sergeant Soposki that there was a German outpost in the adjacent house and that two enemy machine guns were located on the small hill overlooking the houses.

The first rays of daylight had already begun to appear. Realizing that his platoon would not have the benefit of darkness to cross the bridge and realizing the dangerous effect this outpost would have on his platoon and the rest of the battalion, the platoon leader immediately decided to attack the outpost in the adjacent house. While the scout guarded their rear, the platoon leader and platoon sergeant moved into the house occupied by the enemy. This surprise action re-

sulted in the capture of one prisoner. Two enemy were killed and two enemy escaped through a bomb hole in the rear wall of the house.

It was believed later that the two enemy who escaped were responsible for alerting the rest of the enemy in the area and causing the battalion to lose its initial element of surprise in crossing the river. This loss of surprise was to cause many hours of delay and casualties for the 3d Battalion.

Shortly after the elimination of the enemy outpost, the 3d Platoon with the light machine gun section attached began to cross the foot-bridge. The platoon crossed none too early for it was getting light. The platoon leader met his platoon and led them into a nearby factory and two adjacent buildings which had been cleared of the enemy. After posting local security the platoon leader assembled the squad leaders at a vantage point, gave them the situation as he knew it, and outlined his plan to knock out the two known enemy machine guns.

The plan was for the 1st and 2d Squads to advance abreast along the streets until the area on the hill containing the machine guns was reached. The two squads would then assault the positions by fire and movement. The 3d Squad would remain in the area of the factory to protect the platoon's rear and the advance of L Company which was now on its way to cross the bridge.

No sooner had the platoon leader outlined his plan to

the squad leaders when a large volume of small arms fire was heard emanating from the vicinity of the factory where the 3d Rifle Squad and the light machine-gun section of L Company had been posted. The platoon leader and squad leaders emerged from a stone house in time to assist in the firing on a German combat patrol that had been sent to investigate the area about the foot-bridge. The fires of the 3d Platoon scattered the enemy patrol. One wounded enemy was captured.

Realizing that the Germans were aware of the crossing, the platoon leader moved out immediately to attack the known enemy machine-guns. In a short time after moving out the platoon was taken under heavy fire by mortars, snipers, and the two enemy machine guns. Using the cover of the buildings and bomb craters (Betzdorf with its large marshalling yards had been subjected to previous heavy bombardment by the Allied Air Forces.) the platoon leader and his men moved forward as rapidly as possible under enemy fire to the objective. At this time the platoon leader noticed that L and K Companies across the river had come under mortar and artillery fire in the area of the railroad yards.

While advancing ahead of the platoon, Lieutenant Whight and Private Taxacher were surprised by an enemy machine gun located in a building to their front. In the firing that followed Taxacher was seriously wounded and died that night. The enemy machine gunner was killed. The platoon continued its advance, knocked out the two machine-guns and began to clear out the rest of the high ground to the right and left

of the two destroyed enemy guns. (23)

As it was stated above, when Lieutenant Larry Whight, the platoon leader of the 3d Platoon, Company L, had crossed the foot bridge with his patrol, he sent back one of his scouts as a guide to pick up the 3d Platoon and to orient Lieutenant A. D. Scott, the company commander of L Company, about the existing situation on the enemy side of the river.

When the 3d Platoon moved out to rejoin its platoon leader across the river, Lieutenant Scott moved the rest of L Company from the church-yard cemetery down to the engine house bordering the marshalling yards. K Company followed. The 3d Platoon safely crossed the bridge and rejoined its platoon leader, Lieutenant Whight.

It was now daylight. Under the partial cover of the empty box cars and coal cars, L and K Companies deployed in the railroad yards in anticipation of crossing the footbridge. L Company was leading the formation. Just as the two companies were ready to begin crossing, the Germans opened up with concentrations of artillery fire, mortar fire, and direct fire from self-propelled weapons located on the enemy-held high ground overlooking the Railroad area. Most of the fire was falling in K Company's area. (24)

Lieutenant Scott, now at the bridge site, led his company

(23) Statement, Lt. Whight, 12 March 1947. (24) Statement, Capt. Tate, 12 Jan. 1947; Lt. Scott, 4 April 1947.

across the foot bridge. The 2d Platoon crossed and swung to the right of the bridge. It had advanced about 175 yards when it came under machine gun fire to its front. The Weapons Platoon less the light machine-gun section followed the 2d Platoon and went into firing positions behind the 2d Platoon. (25)

The battalion commander, Captain Tate, and his command group were beginning to cross the bridge about this time when a German artillery concentration fell along-side the foot-bridge. The concentration wounded Captain Tate in the legs to the extent he was unable to get up and walk. Realizing his condition, Captain Tate radioed Company K and ordered Captain Chastain, the company commander of Company K, to take command of the battalion. (26)

Captain Chastain was with his company in the area of the marshalling yards preparing to lead his company across the bridge when the battalion commander's order was received. Chastain turned over the command of K Company to Lieutenant Morgan, a battle-field commissioned officer, and proceeded to the area of the foot bridge. He had not gone far when a mortar concentration dropped in the vicinity of Captain Chastain, seriously injuring the Captain in the legs and he too had to be evacuated. (27)

(25) Statement, Lt. Scott, company commander, Co. L, 4 April 1947. (26) Statement, Capt. Tate, 12 Jan. 1947. (27) Statements, Lt. Morgan, executive officer, Co. K, 1 March 1947; Lt. Sweeney, executive officer, Co. L, 17 Feb. 1947.

The last element of Company L, the 1st Platoon, was preparing to cross the foot-bridge. Lieutenant Sweeney, the company executive officer, was bringing up the rear. While the platoon was crossing, Lieutenant Sweeney received a request from Lieutenant Morgan, now commanding Company K, to check the tail of K Company to see that all men got across. (28)

The 1st Platoon, Company L succeeded in crossing the bridge without casualties. On reaching the enemy side, the platoon cleared a small area to the left of the bridge and reverted to company reserve. (29)

Company K followed the 1st Platoon, Company L. On reaching the enemy side of the river, K Company swung to the left and began to clear the enemy of the western end of Betzdorf in preparation for the company's attack on its objective, Hill 313. (30)

During the above action of the 3d Battalion, only vague and meager information about the 3d Battalion's progress had been reaching the Regimental Headquarters. Except that the battalion had failed in its initial attempts to cross the river and that the battalion was now fighting to get a foothold in Betzdorf, the situation of the 3d Battalion on the morning of 1 April 1945 was very obscure from the regimental level. In addition, the mission to seize the high-ground on

(28) Statement, Lt. Sweeney, 17 Feb. 1947. (29) Statement, Lt. Schneider, 15 March 1947. (30) Statement, Lt. Morgan, 1 March 1947.

Hills 312 and 313 by daylight had not been accomplished.

At approximately 1000 hours, 1 April 1945, the regimental commander ordered a member of the regimental staff to the 3d Battalion to determine the situation. The staff officer was to contact the battalion commander and learn from him personally the situation of the 3d Battalion.

The staff officer arrived at the 3d Battalion Command Post in Scheurefeld (approximately 8 miles from the Regimental Command Post) at about 1045 hours. Contact was made with the battalion executive officer whose information of the situation was also obscure. Radio communications with the battalion commander had been difficult all morning. No wire communication had been established as yet with either the battalion commander at Betzdorf or with the Regimental CP in Steinbach. At about 1110 hours word was received by the battalion executive officer that Captain Tate, the battalion commander, had been wounded, and that the company commander of Company K was assuming command of the battalion.

At approximately 1130 hours, Lieutenant Colonel Ben C. Chapla, the regimental executive officer, arrived on the scene with orders for the staff officer to assume command of the 3d Battalion and carry out the battalion's assigned mission. Coincident with the receipt of these orders, word was received from Betzdorf that Companies K and L were both fighting in the town and that Captain Chastain who had taken over from Captain Tate had been wounded in the legs. Further information could not be obtained due to difficult radio re-

ception and lack of wire communications.

The first concern of the newly designated battalion commander was to arrange for satisfactory wire and radio communications between the company forward elements, the battalion command post, and Regimental Headquarters; secondly, to get to Betzdorf at the scene of the action; thirdly, to effect tentative co-ordination for the capture of Hills 312 and 313 after the capture of Betzdorf.

After a brief conference with Captain Tom Lowry, the acting battalion executive officer, and with the battalion S-3, S-1, and communications officer it was decided that:

(1) Captain Lowry would accompany the battalion commander to Betzdorf with an SCR 300 radio and operator.

(2) The communications officer with a wire crew and the battalion Sergeant Major would follow to Betzdorf to establish a new battalion command post.

(3) The S-1 would displace the present CP to Betzdorf as soon as he was contacted by the communications officer.

(4) The 3d Platoon, Company B, 644 Tank Destroyer Battalion attached to the 3d Battalion would displace from its positions on the high ground overlooking Scheurefeld to the high ground overlooking Betzdorf in order to be able to support the attack in Betzdorf and the attack on Hills 313 and 312. Communications with the platoon leader would be by SCR 300 radio.

(5) There would be no change in the dispositions of Company M, the Heavy Weapons Company.

(6) The battalion S-3 would establish a series of map check-points between Hill 313 and Hill 312 to facilitate

co-ordination in the attack and to simplify the relay of information concerning the battalion's advances.

The route Scheurefeld, Bruche, Betzdorf was under enemy direct fire and observation. It was decided to move via Dauersberg, Steineroth, Betzdorf. This route likewise was under enemy observation but subject only to occasional harassing mortar and artillery fire.

Upon arrival in Betzdorf, radio communication was re-established with the company commander of L Company located on the enemy side of the river.

Arrangements were made by radio for a guide from L Company. Meanwhile the battalion commander and executive officer located an observation post from where the action in Betzdorf could be observed. Fighting could be observed in the northeastern portion of town and small groups of enemy were seen infiltrating back into houses which supposedly had been cleared. From K Company's sectors on the western edge of town, heavy firing had broken out when elements of the company were attempting to scale the high ground toward Hill 313. It was impossible for the company to manœuvre. On the north of K Company's position there was steep, open terrain controlled by enemy machine gun fire. To the front was a narrow defile flanked by the high bluffs along the river and the steep wooded terrain of Hill 313. This area likewise was strongly covered by machine gun and mortar fire.

By radio, the battalion commander ordered the commander

of L Company to send out a patrol beyond the northeast end of town in an effort to find a soft spot through the enemy position and which might assist the battalion to take Hill 313. Due to the exposed nature of the terrain and the heavy enemy fire, the patrol was unable to accomplish its mission.

A delay now was experienced by the battalion commander. The guide sent from L Company failed to locate the battalion commander and returned to his company. The company commander, L Company returned the guide with all haste. Rather than lose additional time by moving out alone and probing for the L Company CP in an obscure situation in Betzdorf, the battalion commander and battalion executive officer decided to wait until the guide returned to Betzdorf again.

In the meantime, the battalion commander and executive officer made a field glass reconnaissance and terrain study of the battalion's objectives on the enemy side of the river.

It was past mid-afternoon by the time the battalion commander reached the CP of Company L. There the company commander and battalion S-2 oriented the battalion commander and executive officer on the situation. The battalion occupied approximately half of Betzdorf and was engaged in clearing out the northeast portions of town. K Company occupied the western approaches to Betzdorf but was unable to push further due to the enemy fire and difficult terrain. I Company occupied positions in Bruche.

Wire communication with Regimental Headquarters was established and the regimental commander, Colonel Beck, was

contacted. After orienting Colonel Beck on the situation the battalion commander received permission to hold up the attack on Hills 312 and 313 until nightfall when a co-ordinated attack would be made by the 3d Battalion on its assigned objectives.

The remaining few hours of afternoon light were spent in mopping up the town and preparing a hasty defense of the area against any possible counterattacks. Arrangements were made for ammunition, rations, and other supplies to be brought in to Betzdorf after dark. A warning order was sent to Company I, the reserve company, to be prepared to move to Betzdorf on order and secure the town while K and L Companies attacked the battalion objectives.

PLAN OF ATTACK ON HILLS 312 AND 313

At 1930 hours, the battalion commander held a conference with the battalion executive officer, the battalion S-2, and the company commander of Companies K and L, and the artillery liaison officer (Captain Williamson). It was decided to make a sneak night attack on Hill 313 that night. K Company was assigned the mission. K Company would seize and hold Hill 313. It would approach Hill 313 generally from a southeasterly direction and infiltrate through the suspected enemy positions located on the high ground at the northern edges of the town. Wherever possible, known enemy resistance would be by-passed. When K Company seized its objective, it would dispatch immediately a patrol to Company L Command Post. The patrol would act as guides for Company L. Time of attack for K Company was set at 2300 hours. Line of Departure was a

known row of houses on the north central edge of town.

While K Company was launching its attack on Hill 313, Company L would stand by in Betzdorf prepared to move out as soon as contacted by the K Company patrol. L Company's mission would be to pass through K Company on Hill 313 and seize Hill 312. Utilizing the K Company patrol as guides, Company L would use the same successful approaches to Hill 313 as those used by K Company. It was estimated K Company could accomplish its mission by 0300 hours, 2 April and that the patrol could reach L Company by 0400.

(It was felt that the darkness would permit infiltration through the enemy positions. It was desired to by-pass enemy resistance wherever possible in order to prevent further delay in reaching the assigned objectives. Enemy resistance by-passed during the night would be liquidated by mopping up detachments attacking on the enemy rear during daylight hours.)

On closing into Betzdorf that night, Company I would relieve Companies K and L in Betzdorf and assume the security mission for the town. The company would be prepared to displace to Hill 312 or Hill 313 on order. There were no changes in the mission of M Company. Its mortars would continue to support the attack from positions in Bruche. The machine gun attachments would remain the same.

Beginning at daylight, the artillery would fire intermittently a round of smoke on Hill 312 in order to assist L Company to maintain directions of attack on that objective.

The battalion commander's conference ended at about 2015 hours and plans and co-ordination for the attacks on Hills 313 and 312 were ready to put into effect.

ENEMY COUNTERATTACK ON BETZDORF

The night had become extremely black. Low ceiling storm clouds blacked-out all starlight. The walls of the stone houses and the piles of rubble in the narrow streets interspersed with bomb craters helped to intensify the darkness. It was almost impossible to see or identify friend or enemy except on physical contact.

At about 2030 hours a message was received from K Company that a group of Germans had infiltrated through their right flank. Another report came in from L Company's right flank that voices of a group of Germans were being heard in the immediate area. Lieutenant Morgan came storming into the battalion CP in a rage, stating he was unable to reach his company CP because of enemy groups in the streets of his area. In a few moments word was received from the guard stationed on the north side of the house containing the battalion CP and the Company L Command Post that he could hear movements and German voices from the two houses across the street. These two houses were located in an open lot about fifteen yards away and across from the battalion CP.

It was apparent at once that the Germans were making a sneak night counterattack. Under the cover of darkness, the enemy's leading elements had successfully infiltrated into

our positions.

Captain Williamson, the artillery liaison officer, was ordered to call for the previously planned defensive fires around our positions. A few riflemen were stationed around the bottom floor of the CP. The rest of the command group personnel and some riflemen were dispersed among the top floors.

From a window on the second floor of the CP, Lieutenant Colley, the Weapons Platoon leader of Company L was directing 60-mm mortar fire on the enemy across the street. The mortars were located in defilade about two hundred yards away. They had been laid by azimuth and registered by actual fire before darkness. Utilizing the creeping method of adjustment, Lieutenant Colley adjusted the fire of the mortars to within fifteen yards of the CP and directly on the enemy across the street. The mortars fired approximately twenty-seven rounds for effect. The rounds landed in the open lot and in and around the two enemy houses. For a few moments between mortar bursts, loud screams, yells, and orders were heard from the enemy across the street. When the mortar fire subsided, not a sound could be heard. It was never determined how many of the enemy had been killed. (31)

From L Company's right flank, it was reported that one enemy machine gun and crew were knocked out and that no further enemy movements could be seen or heard. The enemy

(31) Eye witness, self.

machine gun and crew advancing down the street toward L Company's right flank had moved to a crater alongside a house occupied by Lieutenant Larry Whight and Sergeant Sposki. A guard reported the initial movements of the crew. Waiting until it was definitely established that the crew was an enemy one, Lieutenant Whight permitted the crew to set up its machine gun in the crater alongside the house. Sergeant Sposki, the platoon sergeant of the 3d Platoon, ran up to the attic with a white phosphorous grenade. Back in a corner of the attic Sposki pulled the grenade pin in order that the enemy would not hear the "popping noise". Sposki then leaned out the window, dropped the grenade in the midst of the enemy and eliminated the machine gun and crew. (32)

From K Company a report was received that the enemy that had been running loose in their area had been cleared out. Several of the enemy had been killed, a few captured and the rest, from all indication, had withdrawn.

Of the several enemy captured, one was a German Lieutenant who was in a dazed and confused condition when captured. The Lieutenant had lead the enemy counterattack. According to his statements one hundred twenty five enemy had participated. He further stated that they had experienced difficulty maintaining contact and control due to the darkness. In addition, he estimated that over half his men had been killed during the attack by our mortar and artillery fire. It was

(32) Statements, Lt. Larry Whight, 3d Platoon, Co. I during attack and on 12 March 1947.

learned too, that enemy forces in appreciable numbers were located on the high ground beyond the western edge of Betzdorf. Because of the officer's dazed condition and his refusal to answer further questions no additional information was gained from the prisoner. The prisoner was dispatched to Regimental Headquarters. (33)

After the counterattack, the battalion S-4 with carrying parties brought resupplies into Betzdorf for K and L Companies. Company I moved across the river and relieved Companies K and L while the latter two companies prepared for the pending attack.

NIGHT ATTACK ON HILL 313

At 2300 hours, 1 April 1945, using the north central edge of town as a line of departure, K Company began its attack on Hill 313. The company advanced in a column of platoons in the order 1st Platoon, Company Headquarters, 2d Platoon, Weapons Platoon with the attached machine gun section from Company M, and the 3d Platoon. Platoons advanced in a column of single file. The leading platoon was ordered to advance in bounds of 100 yards. At the end of each bound, if no resistance were met, the leading platoon was to send back two men to guide the rest of the company forward.

The night was still so black that it was impossible for an individual to see for any appreciable distance in front of

(33) Personal interrogation through interpreter.

him. The men were ordered to hold on to each other in order that contact would not be lost. The difficulties of movement were further increased by the steepness of the ground leading to Hill 313, the rubble in the streets, the water filled crater and shell holes in the area, and the heavily wooded area which had to be traversed before Hill 313 would be reached.

In the first two hundred yards of movement, the leading platoon surprised a small group of Germans and four of the enemy were killed. The enemy group had mistaken the leading elements of the platoon for an expected friendly relief.

Further advance was slow, tedious, and nerve-racking because of the darkness and the terrain. By 0200, 2 April 1945, K Company had reached a position about 100 yards from the crest of Hill 313. Expecting resistance at this point, the company commander deployed his company in a perimeter defense with Lieutenant Humphrey, platoon leader of the 3d Platoon in charge. Lieutenant Morgan himself led the 2d Platoon to the top of Hill 313. No resistance was met. A search of the area revealed some partially dug fox-holes of recent construction, supplies of ammunition, and field rations. Lieutenant Morgan then sent Tech/Sergeant Swartz with six men to return and lead the rest of the company forward. On the arrival of the remainder of the company, Lieutenant Morgan organized the objective with a perimeter defense. A three man patrol was dispatched to the battalion CP to guide L Company over the same route employed by K Company. The patrol left K Company at about 0300 hours.

At 0600 hours, 2 April 1945 four German soldiers were seen approaching from the southeast toward the positions of the 3d Platoon, Company K. The enemy were approaching toward Sergeant Laskowski's squad. Holding the fire of his squad until the enemy were about thirty yards from the position, the squad leader gave the order to fire. Two of the enemy were killed, one was wounded, and one escaped.

From the enemy wounded it was learned that the four Germans were sent to Hill 313 for a load of ammunition which was to be taken to a position below the heights and on the western edge of Betzdorf. The prisoner stated that two companies of German Infantry were located along the river between Kol Bahnhof and Walmenroth.

Realizing he was directly behind the enemy positions and that if the enemy withdrew from Kol Bohnhof they might withdraw to Hill 313, Lieutenant Morgan shifted the light machine gun section from the north side of Hill 313 to the southeastern side of the Hill facing the river. At about 0745 hours a K Company outpost in front of the machine gun section withdrew to the top of the Hill. It stated that approximately 30 German soldiers were rapidly advancing toward Hill 313 from a southeasterly direction. The company commander immediately moved to the position of the light machine gun section to observe and wait.

When the Germans were within fifty yards of the position, Sergeant Schitz, the section leader of the light machine guns, gave the order to fire. The initial burst from Private

Smith's machine gun killed four Germans. In a few minutes the enemy were beaten off with heavy casualties. Fire then broke out in the area of the 3d Platoon on the right of the light-machine gun section. By the time Lieutenant Morgan arrived at the 3d Platoon position, Lieutenant Humphrey's platoon had seven prisoners, and eleven dead Germans were piled in front of the position. The company commander dispatched combat patrols to his immediate front to comb the area for any further enemy activity. It was now about 0830 hours. At this time the battalion commander with L Company arrived on Hill 313. (34)

THE ATTACK ON HILL 312

From the time K Company jumped off at 2300 hours, 1 April 1945 until it reached its objective, radio communication between K Company and the battalion commander was excellent. At 0300 hours, 2 April 1945 the battalion commander received word that K Company was on its objective and that a three man patrol was on the way to lead L Company forward through the route used by K Company. It was estimated the patrol could return over the 1000 yards distance within an hour to an hour and a half. L Company commander was informed that the patrol was on the way and to be ready to move out on arrival of the patrol.

At 0400 hours, the patrol had not arrived. At 0415 hours there were no signs of the patrol. The battalion commander

(34) Statement, Lt. Morgan, company commander, Co. L to battalion commander, 2 April 1945 and 1 March 1947.

informed Lieutenant Scott to be prepared to move out at 0445 hours, and that if the patrol had not arrived by that time the company would move off without the patrol's assistance. It would be light by 0545 hours. Unless the company reached the concealment afforded by the woods on the heights prior to daylight, the entire company would be in danger of observed fire from the open flank on our north and the open ground above the town.

At 0445 hours the patrol had not yet arrived nor was L Company ready to move out. Difficulty was experienced in assembling the 3d Platoon. One of the squads could not be located. At 0515 the entire company was finally assembled and ready to jump off. Just then one of the members of the patrol sent back by K Company arrived on the scene. It was learned that at approximately 0345 hours, the patrol had been ambushed and captured. This one member was able to escape through the woods and find his way back to the CP. With this one member of K Company as a guide, Company L jumped off in a column of platoons in the order: 2d Platoon, 1st Platoon, Battalion Command Group, 3d Platoon, Company Headquarters, and the Weapons Platoon. Lieutenant Sweeney, company executive officer brought up the tail of the column. The company commander with his radio operator and body-guard were with the 2d Platoon. (The Battalion Command Group at this time consisted of the battalion commander, the battalion executive officer, a radio operator, a two man wire crew, two runners, the artillery liaison officer, and the artillery radio operator.)

The leading elements of L Company had not moved 150 yards when an enemy group of about six men was encountered on the edge of town. This group was immediately cut down by fire. Open daylight found the company on the edge of the woods about six hundred yards southeast of the crest of Hill 313.

The woods facing the company consisted of thick growth of tall pine trees ranging 40 to 50 feet in height. The floor of the woods was covered with heavy underbrush averaging five feet high.

When the company had advanced about one hundred yards into the woods, the leading elements came under cross fire from two enemy machine guns. Hampered by the dense growth, the company's initial efforts to locate and knock-out the guns were unsuccessful. Five casualties were already inflicted on L Company. (35)

Feeling that too much time was being spent in this vulnerable area, the battalion commander ordered Lieutenant Scott to by-pass the enemy machine guns and continue the advance to Hill 313. The company by-passed the enemy weapons and succeeded in contacting K Company on Hill 313 at about 0830 hours. (The enemy machine guns were knocked-out later by K Company.)

On Hill 313, while L Company re-organized and the men took a brief rest, the battalion commander with Lieutenant Morgan and Lieutenant Scott made a visual reconnaissance of

(35) Eye witness, self.

the immediate area and the approaches to Hill 312, the next objective. A narrow trail was located on the northwest slope of K Company's position. This trail passed over an open piece of ground about 200 yards long and then disappeared into the thick growth of tall pine trees toward Hill 312. Intermittently, the prearranged smoke and high explosive shells from our own artillery were falling on Hill 312. To the southern tip of Hill 313, portions of the river road connecting Betzdorf and Walmenroth could be seen. The road was about 500 feet below us. Through field glasses there was detected what appeared to be a small enemy outpost on the south slopes of Hill 312. On the river road below we detected a column of enemy moving on foot and on bicycles toward Walmenroth. Because the road was partially obscured by trees and the high bluffs, the entire length of the column could not be observed but it was estimated that there were at least 100 German soldiers in the column. Artillery fire was placed on the column but the casualty effects of the artillery could not be estimated due to limited observation, and because the column took to the cover of the nearby ravines.

Realizing that this enemy force presented a possible threat against Company L's capture of Hill 312, the battalion commander decided to move immediately toward the objective. At approximately 0900 hours the company moved out in a column of platoons preceded by a patrol under Lieutenant Larry Whight.

The leading elements of the company had advanced about eight hundred yards to the northwest of K Company's position

when the patrol reported it had seen two German officers move off the edge of the trail to their front and then disappear into the woods. The patrol advanced to the spot where the enemy were observed but no enemy were seen. Some empty fox-holes were observed in the area. In the meantime, Lieutenant Scott ordered Lieutenant Schneider's 1st Platoon to deploy in a skirmish line with the bulk of the skirmishers to the right of and roughly paralleling the trail from where the enemy were last seen. The patrol moved about 75 yards when a column of enemy was observed moving down the trail toward L Company. It was estimated that there were approximately 125 Germans in a loose column formation. All men were ordered to hold their fire until Lieutenant Scott at the lead of Schneider's platoon gave the order to fire. Elements of the 1st Platoon blocked the trail. The rest of the 1st Platoon formed a skirmish line on the enemy's left flank. It was planned to allow the entire enemy column to move into the trap before the order to open fire was given. One of our men accidentally fired his rifle before the manœuvre was completed. No sooner had the rifleman discharged his rifle when the entire 1st Platoon opened fire with every weapon firing as rapidly as it could be aimed and fired. The surprise paralyzed the enemy. In several minutes it was all over. A German officer was the only known enemy to have escaped. Three wounded prisoners were taken and the rest of the enemy were killed. L Company casualties were one killed and one BAR man wounded. An aid man was left with the wounded soldier while the company pushed rapidly toward its objective. (36)

(36) Eye witness statements, Lt. Scott, Lt. Whight, Lt. Schneider; eye witness, self, 2 April 1945.

Without meeting further resistance, L Company moved on Hill 312 at about 1130 hours. The position was immediately organized with a perimeter defense.

On Hill 312, an interrogation of the prisoners revealed that the enemy knew of and was expecting a crossing in the vicinity of Walmenroth. The sector between Walmenroth and Betzdorf had been occupied in force. The prisoners also stated that the group we had ambushed had moved from Walmenroth during the night and was on its way to assist the German force at Betzdorf. The prisoners stated they had no indication we were so close at hand and believed that they were well behind their own lines. (37)

While the company was digging in, a 12 man patrol was dispatched to Betzdorf with the mission to pick up the wounded BAR man and to act as an escort for the ration and ammunition carrying parties which would be coming up that evening from Betzdorf.

As the patrol left the position the battalion commander relayed by radio to the battalion CP in Betzdorf that Hill 312 had been taken. In return the battalion commander received information that approximately 200 enemy soldiers had been seen withdrawing northward from Walmenroth at about 1130 hours. The battalion commander also received orders to take Wingendorf on Hill 321. It was left to the discretion of the battalion commander whether it would be a day or a

(37) Interrogations, Lt. Whight; self, through interpreter.

night attack.

About fifteen minutes after the above radio conversation with the battalion CP, heavy small arms fire was heard from the direction of our patrol. In a short while the patrol leader returned with his patrol stating he was unable to move back toward Betzdorf. A group of enemy of undetermined strength had taken up positions astride the path 300 yards west of Hill 312. Because the strength of L Company on Hill 312 was only about 85 total, it was decided not to send any additional men to attempt to eliminate the enemy that had infiltrated on our rear. An attempt was made to knock out the enemy group with mortar and artillery fire but no visual effects could be observed due to limited observation.

By radio the battalion commander issued the following instructions to the battalion CP and to K Company: (Note: All radio conversation was carried out by pre-arranged code words and jargon or implied words.)

(1) A platoon of I Company was to be dispatched from Betzdorf immediately to relieve K Company on Hill 313.

(2) As soon as relieved, K Company was to move to Hill 312 and knock out the enemy group which had infiltrated between Hills 312 and 313.

(3) The remainder of I Company was to move that night from its positions in Betzdorf to Hill 313 where it would relieve L Company.

(4) A composite group composed of members of the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon and the battalion Anti-tank Platoon would be organized to relieve Company I of its security

mission in Betzdorf.

At this same time it was learned that I Company was mopping up the northeast section of Betzdorf against enemy snipers and small enemy groups. Three enemy were killed and 15 captured. I Company's losses were 1 killed by sniper fire and 3 wounded. (38)

At 1530 hours Lieutenant Morgan informed the battalion commander on Hill 312 that the relief of his company by a platoon of Company I had been completed and that he was ready to move out. By previous radio conversations with the battalion commander, Lieutenant Morgan knew approximately where to expect the enemy resistance located west of Hill 312.

Company K moved out toward Hill 312 in a column of platoons. Lieutenant Morgan and Sergeant Schwartz were in the lead with the 2d Platoon. This platoon was followed by Lieutenant Humphrey with the 3d Platoon, then the Weapons Platoon, Company Headquarters, and the 1st Platoon. The route of advance was the same as that used by Company L. At about 1630 hours, the head of Company K had reached a position about 400 yards west of Hill 312 when the two lead scouts drew fire from a small ravine to their front. The lead scout was hit. The 2d Platoon immediately built up a firing line on the second scout who at this time was about twenty-five yards behind the leading scout. Lieutenant Humphrey and the 3d Platoon began

(38) Information from Capt. Keeler to battalion commander, 2 April 1945; statement, 3 March 1947.

a short flanking movement to the left under the cover of the fire of the 2d Platoon. The 60-mm mortars were immediately placed in position to fire when the enemy group filtered out of their position to surrender. Sixteen enemy were captured including two wounded prisoners. K Company suffered one casualty. Company K then moved on to Hill 312 without further resistance. (39)

On the arrival of Lieutenant Morgan with his company, another patrol from L Company was dispatched to Betzdorf with the mission to pick up the wounded man from L Company who had been wounded earlier in the day and to act as an escort for the battalion ration and ammunition carrying parties coming from Betzdorf.

The patrol found the wounded member of L Company and carried him to the battalion aid station. It was learned from the wounded man that the Germans had captured the Company L aid man that had been left with him. (40)

THE ATTACK ON WALMENROTH AND ON WINGENDORF AT HILL 321

With Lieutenant Morgan, Lieutenant Scott, and Captain Williamson (the artillery liaison officer), plans were completed for the actions to take place that night and the next morning. K Company was assigned the mission to make a night attack and seize Wingendorf on Hill 321. I Company less two

(39) Statement, Lt. Morgan to battalion commander, 2 April 1945; statement, 1 March 1947. (40) Statement, patrol leader, 3 April 1945; Lt. Scott to battalion commander, 3 April 1945.

two platoons would relieve Company I on Hill 312 that night. Company I would attack the next morning at 0500, 3 April 1945, seize the town of Walmenroth, and clear the river road to Betzdorf. No changes were made in the attachments or dispositions of the Heavy Weapons Company.

L Company selected a previously reconnoitred route for its attack on Walmenroth. The route followed a wooded ravine leading southwest from Hill 312 for a distance of six hundred yards, and then joined with another deep ravine which lead directly to the rear of Walmenroth.

From our location on Hill 312, the approaches to Hill 321 were through heavy woods and deep ravines. This type terrain existed for over 1500 yards before the approaches broke into steep open country leading to Hill 321. Hill 321 itself was the commanding terrain feature over a 2000 yard radius.

Lieutenant Morgan dispatched a reconnaissance patrol under Sergeant Tom Lawson of the 1st Platoon to reconnoitre for a route to the objective.

A cold, heavy, and dismal rain began to fall at about 1400 hours that afternoon. The rain continued throughout the night, adding to the discomfort of the soldiers in the fox holes, and increasing the gloomy air of the forest.

At 2100 hours carrying parties arrived with rations, ammunition, radio batteries and other supplies for K and

L Companies. Along with the carrying parties arrived the Weapons Platoon, Company L, the Company Headquarters, and several riflemen from the 3d Platoon all of whom had been separated from the company in Betzdorf earlier in the day. The group lost contact when the company was having the skirmish with the enemy machine guns above the heights of Betzdorf.

It had been planned that K Company would jump off for Hill 321 at 2300 hours. About 2030 hours Lieutenant Morgan requested an extension of time in hopes the storm clouds would lift and decrease the intensity of the darkness. An extension of time was granted and the company jumped off from Hill 312 at 0130 hours, 3 April 1945.

The company moved out in a column of platoons. Sergeant Tom Lawson and the six men who made the daylight route reconnaissance lead the formation. The patrol was followed by the 1st Platoon, 3d Platoon, Weapons Platoon, Company Headquarters, and the 2d Platoon. Combined with the difficulty of moving through woods in the darkness was the obstacle presented by the steep terrain which had been made very slippery by the rain. The men had to hold on to each other to keep from losing contact. It was practically daylight (0545) when K Company came in sight of Hill 321 and Wingendorf. (41)

For the moment we will leave K Company and return to Company L.

(41) Radio information from Lt. Morgan to self, 3 April 1945; statement, Lt. Morgan, 1 March 1947.

At 0400 hours, 3 April 1945, I Company arrived on Hill 312 to relieve L Company. The elements of I Company consisted of the 3d Platoon, a machine gun section, the 60-mm mortar section, a part of Company Headquarters, and Captain Keeler, the company commander. The relief was completed by 0445 hours. At 0500 hours Company L with the battalion commander and small Command Group jumped off for Walmenroth. Except for the difficulties of terrain and weather, Walmenroth was taken without incident by about 0800 hours. The enemy had cleared the town and the immediate adjacent heights. One stray prisoner was found in the town. The 1st Platoon was sent along the river road to Betzdorf to clear out any enemy in that area. A patrol was dispatched to contact the 2d Battalion located on the high ground about 2500 yards west of Walmenroth. The Tank Destroyer Platoon from Company B, 644 Tank Destroyer Battalion was moved into Walmenroth via a ford on the eastern edge of town. Several more supply and command vehicles were also moved across the ford. Later in the morning attempts were made to bring additional vehicles across the ford but it was too late. The Sieg River, subject to flash floods after heavy rains, had already built up a height of over four feet at the ford and the river was steadily getting deeper and more swift.

Up in K Company's sector, Lieutenant Morgan and his company did not fare as easily as L Company. It was 0545 hours, 3 April 1945 when K Company came in sight of Wingen-dorf. Lieutenant Morgan decided to attack with three platoons abreast. The Weapons Platoon would remain under company control. The 1st Platoon was ordered to attack the east side

of the town. The 3d Platoon was ordered to attack the west side of town while the 2d Platoon attacked through the center of Wingendorf. The 1st and 3d Platoons were ordered, in addition, to push as far as the road on the north end of Wingendorf and then take up a defensive position along the road. The company met heavy opposition before the town fell at about 0830 hours. A perimeter defense was immediately organized and defensive fires were registered around the town. K Company had suffered two killed in action and eight wounded while the enemy had suffered 16 killed and 42 captured.

At 1100 hours K Company received a counterattack from the wooded area to the north of Wingendorf. The attack lasted for over two hours before the enemy withdrew. Lieutenant Schoon and two riflemen were injured in this attack. Seven prisoners were taken and unestimated casualties in dead and wounded were inflicted on the enemy. (42)

On the morning of 3 April 1945 after the capture of Walmenroth, the 1st Platoon, Company I was released from regimental control and returned to the 3d Battalion. Under the command of Lieutenant Ennis, the 1st Platoon, Company I was then assigned the mission to secure and hold the town of Katzwinkle. Due to the unexpected resistance encountered in the town, Lieutenant Larry Whight with the 3d Platoon, the light machine gun section, one 60-mm mortar Squad and the artillery forward observer, all of Company L, were sent that

(42) Information to Battalion Headquarters by Lt. Morgan, 3 April 1945; statement, Lt. Morgan, 1 March 1947.

afternoon to the assistance of Lieutenant Ennis in Katzwinkle.

By the combined efforts of the two platoons, the resistance in Katzwinkle was overcome. Approximately 300 German prisoners including three officers and numerous non-commissioned officers were captured. (43)

During the night of 4 April 1945, the 3d Battalion was relieved by elements of the 78th Infantry Division. The battalion assembled in Walmenroth and prepared to move to the location of its next mission on the right flank of the 8th Infantry Division.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation the following analysis and criticism are noteworthy of mention:

1. The 28th Infantry Regiment was not given any warning order by the 8th Division Headquarters. It is believed by this writer that the Division itself did not receive any warning order for the attack from the VII Corps under which we were operating. Had a warning order been issued, more adequate preparations could have been made for the night attack. As it turned out, the regiment had to make a night attack across a river on the spur of the moment with no time allowed for reconnaissance and preparation by the battalion commanders.
2. The orders from the regimental commander to the battalion commanders were as thorough and as complete as possible.

(43) Statement, Lt. Whight, 12 March 1947.

3. There was no prior daylight reconnaissance made of the crossing site by the 3d Battalion commander or his subordinate commanders. The 3d Battalion had made extensive reconnaissances of the regimental sector during the periods 29 March-31 March 1945; however, because of the eight and one-half mile regimental front it was impossible for the battalion to reconnoitre in detail so wide a sector over such a limited period of time.

4. The 3d Battalion commander should have selected a more experienced officer to lead the combat patrol across the initial crossing site. Instead, Lieutenant Schneider, an officer without prior combat experience was given the difficult and important mission.

5. The Regimental Headquarters, the 3d Battalion commander and staff, and the 1st Battalion commander and staff are to be criticized for having failed to check and make certain that Lieutenant Schneider was provided with the promised guides from Company A. This could have proved disastrous had the Lieutenant not exercised his initiative and intelligence.

6. The 3d Battalion executive officer and staff are to be criticized for failing to keep Regimental Headquarters informed on the exact situation of the 3d Battalion during the night 31 March and early morning of 1 April 1945. Only meagre information was reaching the regimental commander. A unit commander cannot make sound decisions unless he is kept informed by his subordinates. In this particular case, the battalion commander was with the forward elements of the battalion and much occupied. Communication was difficult due to the rough terrain; however, the battalion executive officer

should have kept closer contact by utilizing members of the staff to act as liaison with the battalion commander, thereby gaining the much needed information required by regiment.

7. Although the initial attempts to cross the Sieg River east of Walmenroth failed, the failure was turned into success at Betzdorf through the initiative of Captain Tate and his subordinate unit commanders.

8. The boldness with which the 3d Battalion attacks were launched against the dispersed objectives served to so confuse the enemy that he never did regain his balance.

9. Despite the wide regimental sector, artillery support was continuous throughout the operation.

10. The conduct of the officers and men of the battalion was outstanding. Despite the fact that adequate time for thorough preparation and reconnaissance were denied the battalion, the unit moved into strange mountainous terrain and made a night attack across a river without engineer support. The success of the operation reflected on the ability of the officers and men of the battalion to adapt themselves readily. It also displayed their ability to exercise superior initiative and aggressiveness in every situation.

11. The enemy failed to capitalize on the 3d Battalion's initial attempts to cross the river east of Walmenroth. Had the crossing been permitted, the enemy could have ambushed the 3d Battalion with disastrous results in the draws leading to Hills 312 and 313.

12. The enemy failed to launch sizeable counterattacks against the 3d Battalion. The counterattacks were launched by comparatively small groups. Had these forces been consolidated and directed at the dispersed positions occupied by

the 3d Battalion, the enemy's efforts might have been successful.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. As it has been previously indicated by other unit actions, it is indicated here also that proper reconnaissance and good communication are paramount in any attack. The lack of reconnaissance, especially in a night attack, complicates an action with confusion, delay, and invites unnecessary casualties. At least the unit commander, his staff, and his subordinate commanders must make a reconnaissance of the forward assembly area and routes of approach to the enemy positions along with a visual terrain study of the enemy area.

The SCR 536 radio is inadequate for operations over rough terrain. The assault platoons and rifle companies of the battalion were equipped with SCR 300 radios while the Heavy Weapons Company was equipped with a minimum of five such radios. All operated in the Battalion Command net without any confusion. Without the above communication system it would have been impossible to successfully control the actions of the battalion in this operation.

2. Surprise is a prerequisite both in night and day attacks.

3. Men must be trained to pass the word back when the leading elements of a column resume the advance after a halt. When Company L resumed the advance after having been held up by the enemy machine guns above Betzdorf, someone in the column failed to continue passing the word back. Consequently the Weapons Platoon lost contact and the company was without

its supporting weapons for several hours.

4. Night attacks when properly launched increase the success of a unit and decrease the casualties of the unit.

5. When an attack is launched it must be pushed aggressively in order to keep the enemy off-balance.

6. Staff officers of units lower than Division must be prepared and must be capable of assuming command responsibilities on the spur of the moment during a battle.