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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 343D INFAN-
TRY (86TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT HERSCHIED,
GERMANY 10-14 APRIL 1945.
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN THE ATTACK.

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2d Battalion, 343d Infantry, 86th U. S. Division, in the "Battle of Herscheid" Germany, from 10 April to 14 April 1945, during the reduction of enemy resistance in the "Ruhr Pocket".

In order to enable the reader, to understand thoroughly, and appreciate fully, the importance of this operation, it will be necessary to delve into the economical and industrial importance of the Ruhr Valley, and parallel its influence with the aggressive militaristic desire of the Allied Forces, to encircle the Rhineland and totally liquidate all industry and enemy forces contained in this section of Germany.

The Ruhr Pocket referred to in this monograph, encompasses that section of the Rhineland encircled by the American 9th U. S. Army in the northern section of the Ruhr, and the American 1st U. S. Army in the southern part of the valley. (1)

The Rhineland formed the most important industrial section of Germany and provided the indispensable economic basis of German Military Power. (2)

The area in question, runs parallel to the Rhine River on the west, thence east from Wesel, through Hamm, to Lippstadt and on the south from the vicinity of Remagen, east through Siegen, to Frankenberg, thence north through Brilon, to Lippstadt. (3)

(1) A-10, p. 92; (2) A-8, p. 251; (3) A-10, p. 92.

This vast area, rich in natural resources and long the essential locality for the greater portion of Germany's iron, steel, coal, and ammunition supply, was about to disintegrate.

During the early stages of the war, the tremendous output of coal, iron, steel, and munitions greatly aided the German forces with the supplies needed to essentially carry on a total war. The German military forces stationed heavily armed forces, and established large field fortifications in the western portion of the Ruhr, to protect this vital locality from attacks by land, sea or air. (4)

The Allied forces, realizing the importance of this area to the German Government and the principle role it would play in shortening or prolonging the war, began to make elaborate plans to decrease the productive efficiency in the Ruhr district. (5)

As far back as 1943, the allied air forces dropped heavy bomb loads on enemy power production plants and other vital centers in the Rhineland, in an effort to eliminate the large flow of supplies going to the German Armies, thereby, shortening the span of World War II. (6)

By the early part of February 1945, the allied forces had thoroughly disrupted transportation systems, factories, coal and steel production, and other industries, on which German war economy largely depended. (7)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The first phase of the planned operation to drive deep into the heart of Germany, and successfully destroy the remnants of the enemy Wehrmacht, in the west, was begun with

(4) A-6, Vol. 82; (5) (6) A-7, p. 715; 178; (7) A-10, p. 92.

the crossing of the Rhine River, by the 2d British Army and the American 9th Army in the north, on the 23d of March 1945, and the 3d U. S. Army in the south, on the 22d of March 1945. (8)

After forcing a crossing over the Rhine River, the operational plan was to encircle the Ruhr, by making a wide pincer movement, with the 9th U. S. Army on the north, driving to the east, toward Lippstadt; and the 1st U. S. Army in the south, driving east toward Frankenberg, thence north toward Lippstadt. Here, both American Armies were to meet, thus confining approximately 250,000 enemy forces in an area 80 miles in diameter. (9)

Approximately one week after the crossing of the Rhine River, the allied spearheads were executed with such skill and precision, that Corps and Divisions were isolated and German Armies completely cut off from one another. The great task of exercising unified command over small German detachments had become almost an impossibility. Units were separated from their parent organizations; communications were completely severed, reports filtering back to higher headquarters, were of no essential value, due to their tardiness. By the time information was received by the German High Command, the allied advances, had probably pressed forward 50 miles, transforming the entire situation. Under such adverse conditions, small unit and local commanders were forced to make their own decisions, irrespective of what was happening elsewhere, and act completely independent of the operational plan of the higher echelon. The advances of the British and American

(8) A-2, p. 104; (9) A-3, p. 26-27.

Armies in the north, and the American Armies in the south were so rapid, that the German High Command found exercise of control increasingly difficult. (10)

From our beachheads on the Rhine River, armored thrusts quickly forced penetrations through the enemy lines in the east. After the penetration of enemy fortifications by armored columns, motorized elements of our Armored-Infantry teams were brought up into position to reduce enemy strong points. (11)

By the 1st of April 1945, the encirclement of the great Ruhr Pocket was completed. The American 9th Army driving from the north, and the American 1st Army driving from the south, made contact in the general vicinity of Lippstadt. This vital industrial area of the Ruhr Valley, was finally denied the German armies. (12)

The encirclement of the Ruhr Pocket constituted the largest and most skillfully executed double envelopment ever attempted and successfully accomplished in military history! (13)

Upon completion of the encirclement, operational plans were carefully prepared to render innocuous, the forces trapped in the Ruhr Pocket. To accomplish this task, higher headquarters, selected a total of seventeen divisions, or a total of 240,000 men, to reduce the enemy resistance in the Ruhr Pocket. (14)

Elements of the 9th U. S. Army began ^{their} ~~its~~ aggressive drive from the vicinity of Hamm, in the north, south toward

(10) A-2, p. 103-104; (11) A-6, Vol. 82; (12) A-1, p. 42;
(13) A-2, p. 103-104; (14) A-9, p. 1893.

the city of Hagen, on the Ruhr River. From the south, elements of the 1st U. S. Army struck in force, toward the north, to eliminate enemy strong points in the vicinity of Hagen, on the Ruhr River. (15)

On the 5th of April 1945, the 86th Infantry Division was relieved from the "Watch on the Rhine", by elements of the 82d Airborne Division, and assigned to the 18th Airborne Corps, under 1st U. S. Army. At approximately 1100 hours, 5 April 1945, the 86th Division made a semi-tactical move by motors, from Cologne to the vicinity of Dillenburg, Germany, a distance of 115 miles, to participate in the Ruhr Pocket operations. (16)

The first operation of the 86th Infantry Division, in the Ruhr Pocket, took place on the 6th of April 1945. The 1st Battalion of the 343d Infantry was attached to the 8th Infantry Division at Siegen, and assigned the mission of mopping up and outposting the above mentioned town. (17)

On the 10th of April the Commanding General of the 86th Infantry Division was given a zone of advance from Attendorn to Hagen on the Ruhr River. The mission of the Division was to push forward aggressively and reduce all enemy resistance encountered. (18)

To properly implement this plan the division commander decided to attack with two regiments abreast. The 342d Infantry, attacking on the left, was given the mission of seizing the town of Hagen, by making a wide encircling movement to the north, from a position west of Attendorn. The

(15) A-3, p. 26-27; (16) (17) (18) A-5, p. 3-5.

343d Infantry on the right of the division zone, was given the mission of attacking north from the vicinity of Attendorn, and capturing the town of Altena, on the Lenne River.

(19)

To facilitate the accomplishment of the regimental mission, the regimental commander decided to attack with two battalions abreast. The general plan was to attack at 0630 hours on the 12th of April 1945. The 2d Battalion, on the left flank of the regimental zone, was to push aggressively forward, astride highway number 2, and capture the town of Augustenthal, by noon (1200 hours), on the 14th day of April. The 3d Battalion on the right of the regimental zone, would attack abreast of the 2d Battalion and seize the town of Altena, on the Lenne River. (20)

The morning of 11 April 1945, the battalion commanders, and separate company commanders were summoned to the regimental command post, given a brief orientation on the impending operation and an overlay showing the battalion's zone of advance. (21)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

At approximately 1400 hours, on the afternoon of 11 April 1945, the battalion commander returned to the 2d Battalion command post, located in the town of Attendorn. The battalion commander directed the executive officer to call a meeting of all company commanders and attached unit commanders, for 1530 hours, 11 April. He then made a hasty map study of the impending area of operation, to ascertain if the

(19) A-5, p. 3-5; (20) (21) A-5, p. 4.

road nets leading from Attendorn, were as shown on the map. The Battalion Commander and the Battalion S-3 made a hasty ground reconnaissance of the roads leading out of the town. By 1445 hours, Colonel Kaine, the Battalion Commander, returned to the command post, and began to formulate a battalion plan of attack, in conjunction with the recommendations made by special staff officers. (22)

By 1515 hours the commanders plan of attack was completed and necessary administrative matters incorporated in the final operational order. (23)

At 1530 hours all company commanders and attached unit commanders were physically present at the battalion command post ready to receive the attack order.

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The plan in substance was as follows: "The 2d Battalion will attack at 0630, 12 April, tomorrow morning, with 2 companies abreast. The battalion will move out with "E" Company on the left; "G" Company on the right, Company "F" will be in reserve and will follow Company "E" at a distance of approximately 400 yards, paying particular attention to the exposed left flank of the battalion. The battalion anti-tank platoon will follow within supporting distance of the two front line companies. The general line of advance will be along highway number 2, as shown on the overlay." (24)

This completed the battalion commanders plan of attack to the company commanders, staff and attached units. The subordinate commanders studied their notes, made a hasty map

(22) (23) A-11; (24) Personal knowledge, statement of Lt. Col. Tom Kaine, Bn. Cmdr., 16 March 1948.

reconnaissance, discussed the general plan and then departed from the battalion command post with hopes of making a hasty reconnaissance prior to darkness.

At 2000 hours, on the 11 April, the company commanders reported to battalion headquarters, that all was in readiness for the anticipated attack at 0630 hours, 12 April. (25)

Prior to daylight, 0500 hours, 12 April, the troops of the battalion were fed a hot breakfast and issued one K-ration and one C-ration to last the remainder of the day.

0630 hours found the lead elements of the battalion moving along their pre-designated routes as scheduled. The lead companies moved out toward Reblin, with Company "E" on the left of Highway #2 and Company "G", on the right of the designated control line. Other elements followed in their respective order.

The movement forward in the battalion zone of advance was very rapid. Lead companies managed to send back hourly reports of the progress made. Some resistance along the route was encountered; however, ^{the resistance was} not sufficiently strong enough to slow or stop the movement forward of Companies "E" and "G". (26)

At approximately 1400 hours, 12 April, the battalion had advanced a distance of ten miles and suffered no casualties.

However, upon reaching the forward slopes of the high ground, directly south of Reblin, the lead elements of Companies "E" and "G" came under heavy, direct, automatic small arms fire from the vicinity of hills 521 and 550 at

(25) Personal knowledge, statement of Lt. Col. Tom Kaine, Bn. Cmdr., 16 March 1948; (26) A-11.

Reblin.

The company commanders of the lead companies, immediately built up a strong firing line, by advancing two platoons, per company, as far forward as physically possible. Company "E" on the left flank of the battalion had advanced to a position roughly 600 yards south and west of the town. This operation left the front or forward elements out in an exposed position, susceptible to heavy enemy fire, and possible heavy casualties. The platoon sergeant of the 1st Platoon of Company "E" and four enlisted men pushed forward approximately fifty yards, in an effort to determine the strength and general disposition of the enemy troops, located on the high ground northwest of Reblin. This small force was soon brought under heavy enemy automatic fire, resulting in the platoon sergeant and three of the four enlisted men becoming casualties. (27)

The enemy and the 2d Battalion, both exchanged a large volume of fire, for an estimated period of one and one half hours. During this small operation the total wounded casualties for the battalion amounted to nine. The number of casualties inflicted upon the enemy was undetermined; but was estimated at approximately three killed and seven wounded.

At 1700 hours, 12 April, the battalion commander decided to hold in position for that evening and continue the attack on Reblin the following day. Companies "E" and "G" were directed to hold their present front line position and be prepared to resume the attack on battalion order. "F" Company

(27) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. Richard Immel, Bn S-2, 15 March 1948.

was given the mission of securing the battalion rear and left exposed flank against a possible enemy counterattack. Regiment was then informed of the present disposition of the battalion and the plan to continue the attack at 0630 hours, 13 April 1945. (28)

Darkness fell at 1800 hours that evening, and plans were made to evacuate battle casualties to the rear, reorganize the front line companies and replenish ammunition. Upon completion of this, necessary security elements were posted to prevent enemy troops from infiltrating into our positions. (29)

On the evening of 12 April, the battalion commander called for a meeting of all company commanders, to plan for the anticipated attack. Companies "E" and "G" were given the mission of sending a patrol, consisting of one officer and six enlisted men, to feel out the location, strength and disposition of the enemy forces in the vicinity of Reblin. The patrols were to leave the forward position of the front line elements at 2015 hours, follow a predetermined route, and return to the company area with a complete report by 2200 hours that same evening. The company commanders were then informed, that definite plans for tomorrow's operation would be completed, when the patrols returned with the desired information. (30)

At 2100 hours, the regimental commander called and questioned the battalion commander on the possibility of a night attack on Reblin. Due to the exhausted condition of

(28) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. Richard Immel, Bn S-2, March 15, 1948; (29) A-11; (30) Personal knowledge, statement of Lt. Col. Tom Kaine, Bn, Cmdr., 17 March 1948.

the troops at this time, the battalion commander strongly urged regiment to reconsider this request, and permit the battalion to resume the attack at 0630 hours, on the morning of 13 April. After long deliberation, the regimental commander agreed that an attack early in the morning by rested troops might be more feasible. The regimental commander further stressed the importance of rapidity in movement, and indicated that the exploitation of the 2d Battalion could not be delayed, regardless of the enemy resistance encountered. (31)

The patrol from Company "G" returned at 2138 hours and stated, that they had patrolled forward as far as the high ground north and west of Reblin, and had encountered no enemy troops. However, there were indications of great movement further north, which established proof that the enemy planned to concentrate large forces in the general vicinity of Herscheid. (32)

At 2155 hours, the patrol from Company "G" reported that they had contacted enemy forces, strength undetermined, moving from the high ground in the vicinity of Reblin, north toward the town of Herscheid. The "G" Company patrol had picked up a German (Polish) prisoner, who was not lacking in knowledge of the enemy's activities, and showed an inclination or willingness to furnish the battalion with information pertaining to the enemy forces surrounding the town. The information furnished, assisted the battalion commander in formulating a definite plan of attack

(31) Personal knowledge, statement of Major R. B. Graham, Regt 1 S-3, 10 March 1948; (32) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. Richard Immel, Bn. S-2, 15 March 1948.

that would insure success.

The prisoner of war stated, that the enemy forces surrounding and defending the town of Herscheid, consisted of German soldiers from all branches of the service, under the command of many bewildered officers. Further, the troops in this area were the remnants of large armies, completely disorganized by the rapid advance of the American forces that pushed aggressively eastward, during the latter part of March. Our captive indicated that the German commanders, trapped in this area, were acting upon their own volition, in order to prevent discredit from falling on the German uniform. From this conversation the battalion commander gathered that the enemy was short of food and ammunition supplies, and would have to surrender without a great deal of fighting.

After obtaining the desired information, the conference slated for 2200 hours was held, and all the necessary details for the attack on Herscheid were disseminated. The plan of attack was the same as the previous morning. The battalion would attack with two companies abreast, and one company in reserve. No change was made in the disposition of the companies on line. The line of departure was to be the present front lines now held by Companies "E" and "G". Company "F" still in battalion reserve, was to place particular emphasis on the exposed left flank of the battalion.

(33)

At 0430 hours on the morning of 13 April 1945, the

(33) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. Richard Immel, Bn. S-2, 15 Mar 48.

troops were fed a hot meal, issued two "C" rations and made ready for the impending operation. All troops were thoroughly oriented on the plan of attack, and once again informed of the importance of aggressiveness on the part of each individual during our drive to the north. (34)

The lead elements of the Battalion, crossed the line of departure at 0630 hours 13 April, without incident. By 0730 hours, Companies "E" and "G" had passed through the town of Reblin and encountered little, if any enemy fire. This sudden silence bewildered the battalion commander and compelled him to proceed with excessive caution. (35)

TERRAIN STUDY

Let us digress a moment, for a short terrain study of the area surrounding the town of Herscheid. A study of the terrain at this time, will enable the reader to better understand the great task confronting the aggressor.

Herscheid is a typical small German town, surrounded by a gentle mountainous region, in the heart of the Ruhr Pocket. A small canal directly south of the town, approximately 15 feet wide and 10 feet deep, separates hills number 485 and 540 north of Herscheid from hills 521 and 550 to the south. Hills number 540, 550, 521 give the defender excellent observation of all approaches into the town from the south.

The road net running generally north and south, passes through a corridor, formed by hills number 521 and 550. This road is the only possible entrance into the town, by motor or foot elements, from the south.

(34) A-11; (35) Personal knowledge, statement of Lt. Col. Tom Kaine, Bn. Comdr. 17 Mar 48.

The canal and the stream bed to the east are unfordable to foot elements and vehicles. The stream approximately 800 yards west of the canal is fordable to foot troops.

Fields of fire favor the defender. Weapon emplacements, from position areas, on Hills 521 and 550, have complete surveillance of the town directly to the south and to the flanks. Hill number 540⁵ has excellent fields of fire into the area southwest of Hill 521, the town of Herscheid and any approaches therein.

With this information as a background, the reader can readily understand the difficulties encountered in capturing Herscheid, and the commanding terrain in the immediate vicinity of the town. (36)

CONTINUATION OF THE ATTACK

Upon arrival at Hills 521 and 550 the forward elements of Companies "E" and "G" came under heavy automatic small arms fire, and for the first time during our combat experience, large concentrations of German 20mm anti-aircraft flak fires. The shells were timed to burst 15 or 20 feet over the heads of our advancing troops. This heavy flak fire caused excessive casualties and an unexpected degree of confusion. The amount of German 20mm flak fire was so excessive that movement or maneuver forward of Hills 521 and 550 was practically impossible. When possible, troops from positions in the vicinity of Hills 521 and 550, would open fire with expectations of eliminating some of the heavy enemy anti-aircraft flak fire. (37)

(36) A-11; (37) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. R. Immel, Bn. S-2, 15 Mar 48.

This sudden dissipation of the battalions rapid exploitation to the north, left the battalion commander momentarily frustrated. He pushed forward to an advanced observation post in the vicinity of Hill number 550, and came under direct enemy flak fire, that pinned him to one position for a period of approximately 15 minutes. In the meantime, the artillery forward observer was desperately calling for artillery fires, on the general position areas of the enemy, known to have anti-aircraft weapons in readiness for fire. The vagueness of the artillery forward observer in designating the enemy known targets forced the division artillery to send a liaison plane forward to spot enemy targets and adjust fires.

The artillery liaison plane arrived over our front line positions, and departed to the rear without too much hesitation. The amount of enemy flak fire was so great, that it was considered impossible for any slow moving aircraft to remain in this area without becoming a casualty.

As explained in the terrain study, the only approach into Herscheid from the south was over highway number 2. The canal surrounding the town made it practically impossible to attempt a crossing anywhere else directly to the south.

The other alternative was to have one company make a wide sweeping movement to the west, by-passing the canal. Such a maneuver would necessitate sending one company an approximate distance of 800 yards west of Herscheid, then completely circling, in order to enter the town from the east.

With this information in mind, a hurried plan was made for a second coordinated attack to begin at approximately 1000 hours. The plan was to blanket the enemy positions with a heavy volume of artillery fire, consisting primarily of smoke and high explosive ammunition. During the preparation of fires by the artillery, "G" Company was to rush the town, by crossing the bridge on Highway number 2, and obtaining a foothold in the eastern part of Herscheid. "E" Company on the left, was to make a wide envelopment to the west, circle the canal, and capture the western portion of Herscheid. (38)

The battalion commander called regiment, to inform the commander of the present situation, and our contemplated plan of attack. Information was also requested from regiment, concerning the location of front line elements of the 3d Battalion on our right, and any information relative to units that might be on our left. The Regimental Commander, in a disgruntled tone, related the information desired by indicating that the 3d Battalion was not making the expected progress. He further indicated that they had met with heavy enemy resistance in the vicinity of Huinghausen. Huinghausen was a small town approximately 2 miles east of our present front line positions. No definite information on the 342d Infantry Regiment, operating far to our left, could be furnished by the regimental commander. (39)

With this information as a background, the battalion commander was finally convinced that there was only one

(38) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. Walter Weaver, Bn. S-3, 10 Mar 48; (39) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. Walter Weaver, Bn. S-3, 10 Mar 48.

logical plan of maneuver feasible to successfully destroy the enemy at Herscheid.

At 1000 hours the battalion commander called the commanders of "E" and "G" Companies, by radio, and directed them to prepare for a coordinated attack at 1100 hours, 13 April. He gave the company commanders a brief on his expected plan, and then told them to stand by their radios for additional instructions. By 1010 hours, the battalion commander contacted regiment and related his anticipated plan of attack. The battalion commander asked regiment for all available artillery, to support his plan to capture Herscheid. Regiment assured the battalion that a heavy concentration of smoke and high explosives would fall on Hills 485 and 540 at D minus 5 minutes and left on call from the battalion.

A message and an overlay, of the general plan of attack, arrived at the command posts of Companies "E", "G", and "F" at 1030 hours. The overlay and message revealed the following information: "G" Company was to cross the bridge via highway number 2 at 1100 hours, seize the eastern portion of the town, and Hill #540. Company "E" was to make a wide envelopment around the left flank, approximately 800 yards south and west of the town of Herscheid; move into the town from the west and secure Hill number 485, north of the town.

The plan of attack sounded logical and victory seemed close at hand. Artillery fell as planned on Hills 485 and 540, at 1055 hours. The entire area in the vicinity of the

objective was completely covered with planned artillery fires. The lead elements of Companies "E" and "G" made ready, to cross the line of departure and complete the final assault on the stubborn enemy forces. (40)

On the right flank of the battalion, the lead elements crossed the line of departure as scheduled, and pushed down to the banks of the river. From this position, the lead troops of "G" Company moved forward to the bridge that led into the town. The first man to attempt the bridge crossing was a Staff Sergeant from the 3d Platoon of Company "G", followed by another enlisted man. As the squad leader attempted to cross the bridge, a heavy volume of flak fire completely covered the approach. The first preparation of enemy flak to fall, burst as the squad leader and one enlisted man reached the crossing. A horrible sight was witnessed by the personnel directly following these two unfortunate creatures. The concentration burst directly in the face of the sergeant, and completely removed his head from the rest of his body. The second man was fatally wounded, and fell to the ground; thus leaving two badly battered and mutilated bodies covering the only path leading directly into Herscheid.

This unfortunate incident arrested the advance of Company "G", and a stalemate occurred that hindered the advance of the battalion. Not a single person in the lead elements of Company "G" made an attempt to move forward after the mishap. Orders were passed down to the commanding of-

(40) Personal knowledge, statement of Lt. Col. Tom Kaine, Bn. Cmdr., 17 Mar 48.

ficer of Company "G", to push aggressively forward at all cost. Orders to move appeared to be worthless; troops remained frozen to the good earth. (41)

On our left sector, the lead elements of Company "E" were successful in reaching the river bank on the west of Herscheid; a distance of approximately 700 yards west of the canal. The information on the location of Company "E" was determined by a report from the battalion observation post, located on Hill number 550. The battalion commander tried desperately to contact the "E" Company Commander, by radio, to learn more of the situation in the left sector; but was unsuccessful. Our situation at the present time appeared to be on the brink of disaster. (42)

"F" Company was still in reserve protecting the rear and the left exposed flank of the battalion. This appeared to be the opportune time to commit a reserve. However, the general configuration of the terrain, limited the number of troops that could be employed to the front.

At approximately 1200 hours, the battalion observation post reported that lead elements of Company "E" could be seen fording the small stream 800 yards west of the town. Once again hopes of capturing Herscheid seemed promising; providing "E" Company could continue to advance.

Artillery fires from our supporting howitzers continued to smoke and shell the enemy positions in the vicinity of Hills 485 and 540. (43)

Under cover of this artillery fire, Lt. Howard, weapons platoon leader, of "E" Company, picked up a light machine gun

(41) A-11; (42) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. Charles Carey, CO Company "E", 15 Mar 48; (43) A-11.

from position on Hill number 521, and made a mad dash across the bridge into the East sector of town. Four enlisted men, anxious to remain with their weapon, followed closely behind Lt. Howard. There was silence for approximately 15 minutes, and fear of what had possibly happened to this small aggressive task force left certain members of the battalion in despair. Suddenly from a window on the second floor of a store building, a rain of automatic fire from one of our light machine guns blanketed the enemy positions on Hill number 540 with a heavy volume of machine gun fire. (44)

Lead elements of Company "G" were able to advance slowly to the eastern sector of the town, under the protective fires of Lt. Howard.

1300 hours 13 April, radio contact was once again regained with "E" Company in our left sector. The report from the commanding officer, Lt. Carey, indicated that the company had entered the outer western extremity of the town and had established a foothold on the high ground, Hill number 485. During their vigorous attack "E" Company had captured 320 soldiers and destroyed 3 enemy 20mm anti-aircraft guns. (45)

No sooner had this report been received, when Lt. Carey, Commanding Officer of Company "E", stated that his Company was being hit from the west by a German counterattack. The enemy force to the west was estimated to be approximately 150 to 200 German foot soldiers, reinforced by 6 heavy enemy tanks. This placed Company "E" in a very precarious situation. The only weapons available within the battalion at this time

(44) Personal knowledge, statement of Lt. Col. Tom Kaine, Bn. Comdr. 17 Mar 48; (45) A-11.

to combat armor were the A. T. guns, the 2.36 rocket launcher and a few German Panzerfaust.

The forward observer of "E" Company immediately called for heavy concentrations of artillery fire in the general location of the enemy counterattack. The preponderance of supporting artillery fire placed on the enemy force temporarily impeded their advance. However, the enemy tanks still continued to advance slowly in an attempt to overrun our present positions.

Upon his own volition, a S/Sgt of the 1st Platoon of "E" Company obtained three rounds of German Panzerfaust from the Company organic transportation. From a good concealed firing position he fired the first round which exploded directly behind the lead tank. The second round found its mark and completely eliminated the lead tank as a dangerous threat to the battalion. The other German tanks backed off from their present positions and withdrew to safety. For the remainder of the day spasmodic fires were exchanged between the enemy and Company "E". (46)

"G" Company in the right sector of the battalion zone was making slow but definite progress in the eastern sector of Herscheid. By 1400 hours, "G" Company reduced the enemy resistance on Hill number 540 and successfully captured its objective. During this operation "G" Company captured approximately 184 enemy prisoners and eliminated or reduced 4 anti-aircraft weapons.

After the seizure of Hills 485 and 540, "F" Company was

(46) Personal knowledge, statement of Capt. Charles Carey, CO, Company "E" 15 Mar 48.

given the mission of clearing out the town of Herscheid. All buildings were thoroughly searched, and German soldiers plus enemy civilian suspects grouped for internment. To closely guard the large number of enemy captives, a battalion prisoner of war enclosure was established at Reblin.

The total number of prisoners for this particular operation amounted to 950 enemy captured and 28 killed.

The total number of casualties for the 2d Battalion during this operation amounted to two dead and 25 wounded. This number was comparatively small when we consider the enemy resistance that confronted the battalion, the type of enemy weapons employed and the hazardous terrain over which the battalion fought. (47)

The enemy prisoners were moved back to the concentration area and properly guarded by a small detachment from Company "F". Regimental headquarters was then notified of the number of prisoners captured and transportation was requested for their evacuation to the rear.

Upon seizure of the town the battalion commander contacted the executive officer and instructed him to move the command post group into Herscheid without delay. The entire battalion was reorganized and safely grouped within the town, by 1545 hours 13 April 45.

The regimental commander was contacted by 1600 hours, and informed of the general situation. Without hesitation the regimental commander informed the battalion commander of the urgent need of pushing north and capturing August-

(47) A-11.

ly withered. However, it was later learned that there were still some fanatical Germans, within the Pocket, that detested the sight of American soldiers.

Prior to the movement forward, the battalion commander sent a small patrol north to reconnoiter highway number 2. This patrol consisted of the Battalion S-2 and 4 enlisted men. The Battalion S-2 soon returned and assured the Battalion Commander that movement to the north on highway number 2 would be impossible, due to an enemy protected road block, 1000 yards northwest of Herscheid. The Battalion S-2 estimated a minimum of 8 hours would be required to completely remove the road block, and make the road passable to vehicles.
(49)

This information on the situation of our front was telephoned back to the regimental commander, along with a request for approval of the contemplated battalion plan of movement. The plan of the battalion commander, to move north to Augustenthal, was to send all foot elements cross country to the town and have the vehicles of the battalion use the road net in the 3d Battalions zone on our right. The vehicles were to follow the 3d Battalion motors and then rejoin the remainder of the 2d Battalion in Augustenthal. Approval of the plan was finally granted by the regimental commander, after great deliberation. By 2330 hours, on the evening of 13 April, all the necessary information for the impending move was passed down to subordinate units. (50)

At approximately 2400 hours, the foot elements of the

(49) A-11; (50) Personal Knowledge, statement of Lt. Col. Kaine, Bn. Comdr., 17 Mar 48;

battalion started their hectic move cross country from the town of Herscheid to Augustenthal. The battalion commander surmised that the move to Augustenthal would be a difficult task. Motivated by this supposition the battalion commander coordinated with the artillery liaison officer on a possible plan to mark our route forward. The plan called for the artillery battalion, dropping one round of white phosphorus smoke along a predetermined route of advance every fifteen minutes, at an increased range of 1000 yards.

This was purely an experimental plan on the part of the battalion commander, but proved to be very beneficial in successfully assisting the battalion on its move cross country to Augustenthal.

By 0700 hours, 14 April 45, the lead elements of the battalion reached the outskirts of Augustenthal. Little resistance was encountered and the foot elements were able to capture their objective with a minimum of effort.

The 2d Battalion vehicles followed the organic transportation of the 3d Battalion as planned, and by 1300 hours, 14 April 45, rejoined the foot elements at Augustenthal. The Battalion was once again reorganized and made ready to continue the attack on notification from higher headquarters.

The battalion casualties for the period 10 April - 14 April 1945, amounted to a total of 27 enlisted men killed and wounded. The total number of enemy killed, wounded, and captured during this period totaled 1600, officers and enlisted men. (51)

(51) A-11.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Evaluating this particular operation, it is apparent that certain aspects and phases can be analyzed from both, our standpoint and that of the enemy.

The 2d Battalion, 343d Infantry, though fairly newcomers, to the combat zone, had been passed through rigid, realistic combat tests in the Zone of Interior. From the time the 2d Battalion left the Rhine Area, until the battle of Herscheid, little resistance and lack of casualties gave the battalion an unrelented feeling of cockiness, lack of trepidation, and a distorted picture of Battle won by the loss of a few men, from time to time. This false picture soon became a battle reality, in the true sense of the word, at the town of Herscheid. The type of fire and the preponderance of fire, gave each man an ardent desire to permanently freeze to terra firma; thereby delaying the rapid advance of the battalion to the south. A more realistic combat version of "baptism of fire", portrayed to the infantry, while in the Zone of Interior, could have eliminated this temporary stalemate.

Lack of definite intelligence information, on the location of enemy strong points, types of emplacements and the effective fighting morale of the enemy soldier, contributed greatly to the battle casualties incurred in the battalion. It is my firm conviction that more effective use could have been made of air reconnaissance, to accurately determine the exact location and disposition of enemy installations for the lower echelons. Greater use of propaganda surrender leaflets should have been used to determine the fighting

morale of the enemy by his response to surrender or resist.

An intelligent surrender compromise, initiated by the battalion commander prior to this particular campaign could have greatly facilitated our rapid advance to the north. During this crucial moment, the German soldier was so bewildered and completely disorganized that some ultimatum of surrender could have eliminated battle casualties, saved ammunition, and terminated hostilities in the Pocket at an earlier date. Surrender compromises or negotiations implemented by the battalion during a latter stage of the war, proved to be extremely beneficial in overtaking our objective, without excessive resistance from the enemy.

Tanks, or some effective weapon capable of adequately combating enemy armor should be an intricate part of the infantry battalion. During this operation the battalion was at a complete loss to impede the advance of the enemy counter-attacks that threatened our positions from the west. Had the enemy known that the battalion lacked tank support or adequate counter-weapons to stop the advance of tanks, our positions could have been overrun, resulting in complete disorganization. The enemy might have exploited their success, had they been aware of the predicament of our forces.

A planned night attack on the evening of 12 April, probably would have eliminated the heavy enemy action that took place on the 13th April. Reports from the patrols on the evening of the 12th indicated that the enemy was withdrawing from Rebling to the town of Herscheide and the high ground to the north. A forced penetration into the enemy lines dur-

ing this period of reorganization and confusion might have taken the enemy completely unaware; thereby eliminating the murderous flak delivered by the enemy on the 13th April.

The artillery support rendered the battalion during this entire operation was highly commendable. At no time did the 911F. A. Battalion fail to fire effective artillery fires, when called for. The skill and accuracy of each preparation fired, assisted greatly in neutralizing the enemy flak and small arms fire. The enemy casualties resulting from artillery concentrations were heavy.

Enemy troops were well trained in the tactical employment of weapons in conjunction with the available terrain. This was exemplified by the enemies denial of all possible entrances into the town of Herscheid. Weapons were so employed on the high ground north of the town, that penetration into enemy lines was practically impossible, without suffering the loss of excessive casualties.

The ability of officers and non-commissioned officers to make a sound decision and aggressively implement this decision was an inspiration to all men in the organization. Evidence of this was brought to life by the actions of the battalion commander, other officers and enlisted men, in the battalion. During critical moments, certain officers and non-commissioned officers would push forward with utter disregard for their personal safety. This was typified by the heroic action of a "G" Company squad leader who lost his life attempting to lead his men into Herscheid.

The supply from regiment to battalion was excellent,

from the beginning of the campaign to the finish. Shortages in gas, ammunition, water and food were non-existent during this entire operation. Plans for feeding a hot meal to the troops at least once a day was given every consideration possible, irrespective of the tactical situation and the disposition of troops.

Communications were not maintained throughout all phases of this operation. During the attack on Herscheid, the morning of 13 April, the battalion commander lost contact with Company "E" on the left sector of the battalion zone. Loss of contact with "E" Company hindered the commander in logically planning for the contemplated use of the battalion reserve. It was later learned that loss of contact was caused by the operator of Company "E" turning his radio set off, to avoid the enemy from locating his position.

In summation of this operation, we might conclude that the "Battle of Herscheid", was the last point of strong enemy resistance for the 2d Battalion, 343d Infantry, in the Ruhr Pocket. The relentless drive of a well trained, well equipped, aggressive battalion, proved to be no match for the remnants of a completely disorganized German Army. The enemy remaining in the Pocket, realizing they were a defeated force, bowed to the attacking allied fires. The grim determination, cooperation, and moral of the 2d Battalion troops, aided greatly in holding our casualties to a minimum of 27 killed and wounded; and brought about the capture and surrender of approximately 1600 enemy prisoners during a four day operation.

LESSONS

Evolving from a combat operation of this nature; many lessons are learned as a result of tactical blunders, hasty decisions, lack of adequate supply and support, and lastly the inevitable evolution of tactics. Some of the more specific lessons are the following:

1. Realistic and comprehensive training in all phases of learning should be thoroughly stressed. Troops should know and understand the effectiveness and capabilities of all enemy weapons, prior to their entrances into combat.

2. Reconnaissance, both ground and air, should be a continuous process. Information once obtained by higher headquarters, should be quickly disseminated to lower echelons to be of any practical value.

3. Communications must be established and maintained at all cost. Commanders should be communication conscious. All means of communication at a commanders disposal must be used properly to insure the fullest degree of proficiency.

4. Tanks or anti-tank weapons, capable of destroying enemy armor, must be an intricate part of any task force or separate infantry unit.

5. Weapons when properly employed, on commanding terrain, are effective barriers against any attacking force.

6. To exploit a success, the attacker must be aggressive. The loss of supplies and a few personnel should not be permitted to slow or stop the advance of the attacker.

7. If battle is to be sustained, necessary precautions must be taken to rotate units. Overworked troops will ev-

eventually reach a saturation point, beyond which he becomes an ineffective fighting soldier.

8. Artillery fire can be used as a route marker or guide for infantry troops operating over cross country at night. White phosphorus dropped on a predetermined location, at a fixed time, and yardage interval, can be easily recognized and followed by advancing troops.

9. 20mm flak fire is a very effective and demoralizing weapon when employed against ground force troops.

10. A continuous estimate of the situation by the commander is essential to intelligently employ troops, replenish supplies, and fulfill his mission.

11. Officers and non-commissioned officers must be intelligent, aggressive, and courageous, to gain the respect and admiration of the enlisted personnel.

12. Time must be taken into consideration during the preparation of an attack plan. A minimum of 3 hours should be allotted for any attack.

13. An effective fighting force is achieved, by the commander's ability to know and understand his own capabilities, and the capabilities of the enemy.

14. Prisoners of War, when properly handled, are a prolific source of information.

15. Time, effort, endurance, and endless hardships are essential on the part of the commander, if success in combat is to be achieved.

This lesson is amply portrayed in a passage taken from the book, "War As I Knew It", by General George S. Patton Sr., "A pint of sweat will save a gallon of blood". (52)

(52) A-4, p. 405.