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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3d BATTALION, 513th PARACHUTE
INFANTRY, SEVENTEENTH AIRBORNE DIVISION
"THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE"
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
25 DECEMBER 1944-9 JANUARY 1945
(Personal experience of a Battalion S-2)

Type of operation described: A BATTALION IN A ^{the} ~~REGIMENTAL~~ ATTACK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	3
Geographical Features	10
The First Combat, Battalion in Reserve	12
The First Objective, Battalion in Attack	20
Flamierge, Battalion in Defense and Withdrawal	31
Analysis and Criticism	35
Lessons	38
Map - General Map of the 513th Parachute Infantry Area	
Map - Flamierge Area	

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NOTE: Statements not authenticated by reference to source material are based upon the personal knowledge of the writer.

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 513TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY
(17TH AIRBORNE DIV.) BATTLE OF THE BULGE,
25 DECEMBER 1944-9 JANUARY 1945
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Battalion S-2)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3d Battalion, 513th Parachute Infantry, 17th Airborne Division, for the period 25 December 1944 to 9 January 1945 in the "Battle of the Bulge", Ardennes Campaign. It includes the movement forward to its first assigned mission in a combat zone, the battalion's first action in combat, to the forced withdrawal from Flamierge, Belgium, 9 January 1945.

The Battle of the Bulge was fought to stop and expel a counter-offensive launched by the German High Command against the First and Third Armies in the Ardennes, Belgium on 16 December 1944. This assault was a desperate gamble to prolong the war by seizing the initiative and delaying the Allied offensive. The attempt met with considerable success because of overwhelming superiority in men and materials. The westward attack of the Germans consisted of two prongs: one in the North toward Liege was made by the Sixth SS Panzer Army; the second was made by the Fifth Panzer Army toward Bastogne. (1) ?

In order to stop the enemy's breakthrough, orders were issued on the 18th December to the First and Third Armies to regroup and reorganize, which placed the First Army on the northern flank and the Third Army on the southern flank of the enemy salient with the mission to attack and expel the Germans from this salient. (2)

When this order was received, the Third Army had been preparing for an all-out offensive on the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Zweibrucken, to begin on the 19th December 1944, an operation which had been planned prior to the German counter-offensive. (3)

(1) A-1, p. 245; (2) A-1, p. 245; (3) A-1, p. 168

By the 22d December at 0600 hours, the Third Army had begun attacking the southern portion of the enemy salient with the III Corps. To the left the VIII Corps, also attached to the Third Army, was directed to remain on the defensive, since the enemy continued to penetrate their lines. One of the components of the VIII Corps, the 101st Airborne Division, with attachments, was ordered to continue to hold at Bastogne. This division had closed in the Bastogne area three days before, with the mission of holding the city of Bastogne, a hub of seven highways and three railroads and therefore the key to the Battle of the Ardennes, because the rough terrain and the adverse weather made control of the roads and communication networks vital. By 22d December the 101st Division had been completely enveloped, but continued to repel attacks made by tanks, self-propelled guns, infantry, artillery and mortar fire. The weather was turning bitter cold and snow had been falling since the previous day. (4)

After intense fighting, loss of many troops killed or captured, and heavy losses of equipment, the Germans' westward movement finally stopped on Christmas Day, 1944 after reaching its peak when German armored elements entered Ciney and Gelles, an advance of about fifty miles. (5)

On the 25th December 1944 in Mourmelon, France, the 3d Battalion of the 513th Parachute Infantry learned that all elements of the 17th Airborne Division were to move forward to their first assigned mission in a combat zone. The regiment had arrived at Mourmelon on the night 24-25 December after traveling 40 miles by truck from A-70 Air Strip, six miles north of Laon, France, to which they had been flown that day from an airstrip near Chilboton, England.

The 513th Parachute Infantry had received orders on 19 December 1944 that the 17th Airborne Division would move to the vicinity of Reims, France, air-landed as soon as weather permitted. This regiment had

(4) A-1, p. 245; (5) A-2, p. 147

closed into its assigned marshalling area within 24 hours after being alerted from Camp Barton Stacey, Wiltshire, England, and awaited flying weather for four days. There the troops had time to recall the many days of training they had undergone in preparation for that first day of combat. Since their arrival in England on 28 August 1944, the 17th Airborne Division had been undergoing rigorous training for probable employment in a future Airborne operation. All airborne soldiers require the same training as a regular infantry soldier plus training in the technique of initiating the attack by a vertical envelopment. The majority of the men going into combat with the regiment had received all of their military training, including Basic training, since joining the regiment in July-August 1943 at Fort Benning, Georgia.

At one time during training in England several of the troops had the feeling that the European war was about over. The Commander of the 513th Parachute Infantry, Colonel James W. Coutts, promptly dispelled this attitude. He assembled his command and told his men that the regiment had great achievements to accomplish and would be utilized in helping to ring down the final curtain in Europe, which would be the greatest show of all. The German counter-offensive in the Ardennes soon taught the men that there were indeed many battles yet to be fought.

The movement of the 17th Airborne Division from England to the Reims area by the IX Troop Carrier Command required 1297 troop carrier planes to land 13,397 personnel with their personal equipment. (6)

The vehicles and artillery pieces traveled to the continent in a seaborne echelon, which, unhampered by the poor air visibility which had delayed the airborne movement, closed in Mourmelon on 24th December at about the same time the air-landed troops reached the city by trucks from Laon.

(6) A-3, p. 18

At Mourmelon the unit learned that the 17th Airborne Division would continue by truck to the Meuse River to prepare a defensive line and remain there in SHAEF reserve. Upon arrival at Buzancy, about 50 miles east of Mourmelon, the battalions of the regiment were given their exact location along the Meuse River. All CP locations in the Division were determined from a map study. (7) The 513th Parachute Infantry, with engineers attached, received the mission to relieve the 11th Armored Division located along the Meuse River from Stenay south to Verdun, about a 46-mile frontage.

The mission of the 17th Airborne Division along the river line was to stop the further penetration of the German break-through, prepare all crossings for demolition, improve defensive positions, and be alert for enemy parachutists. This Division was given responsibility for the Meuse from Givet south to Verdun, about 80 miles.

On 26 December 1944 at daybreak the 3d Battalion, 513th Parachute Infantry, closed in their assigned sector at Verdun and the relief of the elements of the 11th Armored Division in that sector was completed by noon. On the same date the Fourth Armored Division of the III Corps made a break-through to Bastogne after fighting for four days to gain sixteen miles. They continued to attack with the forces in Bastogne, widening their salient. (8) The Germans put up constant terrific opposition but were never again able to encircle Bastogne.

Meanwhile, at Verdun, during the period 26-31 December, the 3d Battalion, 513th Parachute Infantry, improved the defenses along the Meuse River but saw no action except light strafing and light bombings of towns, railroads, and bridges. While at Verdun the S-2, 3d Battalion, located the headquarters of the aircraft section of the 12th Army Group, and at their landing strip for observation planes he was able to see the

(7) Statement, Brig. Gen. William M. Miley, Div Comdr, March, 1947;

(8) A-4, p. 172

daily situation map of the Battle of the Bulge. This was the only up-to-the-minute information of the battle situation as a whole that the battalion had, and was disseminated daily to the troops.

On the 31st December 1944 the 17th Airborne Division was released to the Third Army, to be replaced by the 28th Infantry. (9) On 1 January 1945 the 17th Airborne Division was attached to the VIII Corps and the Division was ordered to move from the Meuse River line, to attack through the 11th Armored Division at 1200 hours, 3 January 1945. (10) The VIII Corps at this time was composed of the 17th and 101st Airborne Divisions, the 11th Armored Division, and the 87th Infantry Division. (11)

On 1 January 1945 the 17th Airborne Division began to move to designated forward assembly areas near Bastogne, Belgium. The Division order was very brief, giving only forward assembly areas, Division objective, time of attack, and a route overlay. It included no definite enemy information.

It was about eighty miles from Verdun to the forward assembly area, near Bastogne, for the 3d Battalion, 513th Parachute Infantry. On the night of 2-3 January, as soon as trucks were available, the 3d Battalion began its movement forward. The troops entrucked with their combat equipment: individual arms, 60 and 81mm mortars, light machine guns, bazookas, ammunition, and two K rations each, sufficient to initiate combat. All roads were slick as grease over the entire route, the sky was overcast, and a light drizzle froze into a sheet of ice when it hit the highway. The road wound through extremely rough terrain. All the trucks were large, open-panel, semi-trailer cattle trucks. Often the troops were obliged to detruck to sand the road in order to keep the cumbersome vehicles moving, or heave back onto the highway a truck that had slid off.

(9) A-1, p. 246; (10) A-1, p. 204; (11) A-1, p. 204

Miraculously only one truck was a complete loss after sliding over a steep bank, and none of its occupants was injured. Its badly shaken troops were crammed into the remaining overloaded trucks.

The 3d Battalion arrived at Jodenville, Belgium, late in the afternoon 3 January, having taken more than sixteen hours to travel 80 miles, too late to launch the attack that had been scheduled for 1200 that day. There the Battalion received orders to detruck and remain in the village overnight in regimental reserve. The battalion commander was ordered to report immediately to the regimental CP at Flohamont to receive a regimental attack order, the attack to take place the following morning, 4 January. While the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Edward F. Kent, 3d Battalion, with his artillery liaison officer and the battalion's S-3 and operations sergeant were at regiment to receive the attack order, the battalion executive officer was left in command. A battalion warning order was issued, troops were moved into designated buildings in the assembly area where only local security was necessary, and the cold, wet troops got a much-needed rest after the long truck ride in snow and freezing temperatures.

The same adverse weather and road conditions that delayed the 513th Parachute Infantry had also retarded the travel of the rest of the 17th Airborne Division, so the entire Division's attack was postponed until the next day, 4 January. The Division planned to attack with two regiments abreast, the 513th Parachute Infantry to the right and the 193d Glider Infantry to the left, with the remainder of the Division in reserve. The Division at the time was composed of the 513th and 507th Parachute Regiments, 550th Parachute Battalion, 193d and 194th Glider Regiments.

The 3d Battalion Commander, 513th Parachute Infantry, returned to the Battalion CP and completed the issue of his attack orders by 2400 hours, 3 January. Maps were issued that covered the area to the division objective, both 1/100,000 and 1/50,000 scale, to the Company Commanders and the Battalion Staff Officers.

The Regimental attack order prescribed that the 1st and 2d Battalions would attack through the 11th Armored Division at 0815 hours on 4 January from present locations, moving due north to the L'Ourthe River about 10 miles north with the 2d Battalion on the right to capture Flamizoulle and the 1st Battalion on the left to capture Flamierge and to be prepared to continue the attack on orders. The 3d Battalion would be in Regimental reserve in the Bois de Fragotte, and would occupy that mobile reserve position by 0815 hours, 4 January. All artillery fires were to be on call, and a total of 14 battalions of artillery was to be available for the attack.

The only enemy information given to the battalions was vague and indefinite. It stated that small detachments of German infantry and tanks had been operating in the regimental zone of action and that the 2d Battalion had repulsed an attack made by tanks and infantry shortly after its occupation of its forward assembly area at Monty.

During the afternoon on 3 January the 2d Battalion closed into its area in Monty and all elements of the 11th Armored Division there immediately withdrew, which left no-one between the 2d Battalion and the enemy. Earlier that day the 11th Armored Division had engaged the enemy for the fifth consecutive day, had gained 9 miles and suffered heavy losses from repeated counter-attacks. (12) Soon after the 11th Armored Division withdrew, the 2d Battalion was hit by a German attack by a company of infantry and nine Mark V tanks. Colonel Allen C. Miller, III, 2d Battalion Commander, ordered the battalion bazooka teams to be employed. These knocked four tanks out of action and captured 30 German prisoners, identified as being from the 29 Panzer Grenadier Regiment. The other five tanks withdrew toward Flamizoulle. (13) Thus the 2d Battalion had first-hand definite enemy information, having engaged the enemy prior to its first attack order.

(12) A-1, p. 246; (13) Statement, Col A.C. Miller

By the time the 513th Parachute Infantry had issued its attack order, the 87th Division, VIII Corps, had issued orders to continue the attack to the north on the left flank of the 17th Airborne Division. (14)

The 101st Airborne Division, VIII Corps, on the right flank of the 513th Parachute Infantry, was ordered to continue to defend Bastogne. (15)

All battalions of the Regiment had completed issuing their orders by 0400 on 4 January. The Battalion Commander of the 1st Battalion, located in the Boise des Valet, last to complete issuance of the orders, was forced, by lack of time to prepare a better installation, to issue his orders to his company commanders and staff officers one at a time in a two-man fox-hole, where a raincoat covered the top of the foxhole so a flashlight could be used. The 1st Battalion had moved into area after dark and the deep snow and cold wind made moving about in the strange area extremely difficult. (16)

Reconnaissance was continuous up until the time of the jump-off, but neither battalion found any definite enemy information.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The entire sector of the Ardennes has terrain characterized by a continuous range of hills, affording excellent commanding ground. The hills and ridge lines are separated by narrow valleys and deep ravines, and a veritable network of streams appears to flow in all directions. The L'Ourthe River is the main stream within the German salient; it flows in every direction along its course, but its general direction of flow is to the north. This broken terrain forms a series of cross compartments for the attacker in almost any direction of attack. The hilltops and ridge lines permit excellent observation in clear weather, and the uniform heights permit unobserved freedom of movement on the reverse slopes of the hills.

(14, 15) A-1, p. 246; (16) Statement, Lt. Col. Alton R. Taylor, Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion, March, 1947

Fields of fire are good on the terrain except in the heavy woods, but the deep snow and poor visibility during the offensive restricted fields of fire of the attacker. The terrain is favorable for reverse slope defense.

Much of the area is heavily forested and there are also many small patches of woods, one after the other, which provide excellent cover and concealment for the defender. To the attacker, however, snow storms had turned the wooded areas into an obstacle even to foot troops, forcing them to advance across open country.

The steep hills and woods restrict^{ed} movement of mechanized forces generally to or near the roads. In good weather this is no obstacle, as there are a few excellent highways and the secondary road system is good. The frequent streams afford no obstacle because there is usually plenty of timber along the banks for bridging. During the Battle of the Bulge, ice and deep snow not only prohibited cross country movement, but even restricted advance on the best highways. Consequently the tiny villages astride the roads were made into strong points. There are three main road centers in the Ardennes: St. Vith, Houffalize, and Bastogne. Of these, the city of Bastogne is the most important, since there are seven highways and three railroads entering the city. The roads into Bastogne are the best routes of advance to the west within the enemy salient. In addition there are many secondary routes in the immediate area to permit the enemy to by-pass Bastogne to the north and still emerge on the main East-West Bastogne-Marche highway. This was the Germans' main supply route to the west.

The village of Flamierge, first objective of the 3d Battalion, consisted of twenty stone and brick buildings housing a population of less than 100 persons prior to World War II. Flamierge was located in a hollow surrounded by rolling hills, none more than 100 feet high. The village was the center of a secondary road system, a road leading to the West, another to the East, and a third to the South.

Snow began falling in the Bastogne area on 21 December 1944. (17) By 3 January 1945 there had been a 6" fall, which increased to 18" by 9 January, and many snowdrifts exceeded a depth of four feet. During this period the temperature remained below freezing, on a few occasions approaching zero.

Visibility was poor during most of the month of January. The sky was almost continually overcast, either from fog or blinding snowstorms, and therefore no air support could be received until toward the end of the offensive.

THE FIRST COMBAT BATTALION IN RESERVE

On 4 January, at 0815 hours, elements of the 513th Parachute Infantry began to move into their first attack in an inverted V formation from their departure areas. The 3d Battalion in regimental reserve had occupied its assigned mobile reserve assembly area in Bois de Fragotte. The regimental command post had moved from Flohamont to the vicinity of the reserve battalion area for the attack.

Neither of the front line battalions had been able to secure any definite enemy information before the attack even though patrolling to the front had been continuous.

At this time the Reserve Battalion Commander and his S-2 were at the Regimental Command Post.

By 0900 hours the 2d Battalion advanced 700 yards, over-running the resistance of small arms fire, and captured several prisoners. But shortly after 0900 hours they were counterattacked by self-propelled 88's, tanks, artillery and mortar, and infantry with automatic weapons. The battalion was able to hold the ground gained by digging in under fire while taking heavy casualties. The only supporting fires that the battalion had at the time was 75mm pack howitzer artillery and their own mortars. The other 14 battalions of artillery which had been promised

(17) Statement, Captain Clarence A. Thompson, March, 1947

did not become a reality until 1200 hours when the Corps Artillery Liaison officer reported to the battalion. With this additional artillery fire the battalion was able to hold the ground gained and to reorganize in place.

The 1st Battalion moved from its departure area about thirty minutes late, because of the snow and unfamiliar terrain making organization for the attack difficult. First contact with the enemy was made near the Bastogne-Marche highway 1000 yards from the departure area. Company B on the right captured 20 prisoners at the road junction with the Bastogne-Flamizouille highway. In the meantime Company A on the left had halted when their scouts located 8 tanks at the road junction with the Bastogne-Flamierge road. An attempt to get artillery fire placed on the tanks failed because the artillery radio would not work. Company A was ordered to attack the tanks after Company B secured the high ground located just north of the Bastogne-Marche road and south of the road junction. As Company B crossed the highway they came under machine gun and small arms fire from the front, and almost immediately they were hit on their left flank by direct fire from tanks which had moved during a brief period of fog to 200 yards east on the Bastogne road. This enemy force consisted of six tanks, two self-propelled 88's, and infantry. Company B attempted to knock out this force with small arms, bazooka, and mortar fire. In so doing the Company was annihilated, all members either killed or captured. The Regimental S-3, Major Rosen, who had joined Company B shortly before the company moved across Bastogne road, was also taken prisoner. (18)

The depleted battalion withdrew to Bois des Valet, where they reorganized and went into an all-around defensive position.

When the Regimental Commander learned that a 1500 yard gap existed between the front line battalions, he ordered 3d Battalion to move in

(18) Statement, Lt. Col. Alton R. Taylor, Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion, March, 1947

and fill the gap immediately and take an all-around defensive position astride the Bastogne road on high ground 400 yards west of Monty, maintaining constant contact with the front line battalions.

By 1200 hours the Third Battalion was in the new position, so organized that fire could be delivered into the zones of action of either of the other two battalions, and so it could either attack or defend in all directions. The S-2 established the battalion observation post, which site had been previously selected by making a map study and had been approved by the Battalion Commander.

The Battalion Intelligence Section, 13 men, dug in near the observation post where they furnished security and operated the observation post. The S-2 remained at the observation post for the first four hours. Visibility from there was good for 1000 yards even though the sky was overcast. The battle in the 2d Battalion area could be seen plainly, 500 yards to the north. The movement of several enemy patrols was plotted as was also the general location of enemy mortar positions. Only a few scattered rounds of artillery and mortar fire fell in the 3d Battalion area on 4 January. No injuries were sustained.

By nightfall the position of the 3d Battalion was dug in, a road block was established 1000 yards west on Bastogne Road, liaison had been established, and a fire and patrol plan was completed.

At 0430 hours 4 January, the 3d Battalion S-2 visited the 2d Battalion command post. The whole area was still being shelled. Upon reaching the command post the S-2 was informed by the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Irwin A. Edwards, that the rear area was getting as much shell fire as the front lines, and he knew where-of he spoke because he had just returned from the front lines. So the S-2 returned to the 3d Battalion Observation Post. The new information received from the 2d was that casualties had been heavy from both enemy and friendly shell

fire, and that one platoon had broken through the enemy position to Flamizoulle but there they were killed or captured. (19)

On the night 4-5 January, patrols from the 3d Battalion observed two small enemy patrols in the sector between 1st and 3d Battalions, and made contact with an enemy outpost at ^{the} road junction ^{of the} Flamizoulle and Bastogne Roads. Also the men at the road block on Bastogne Road fired on a five-man patrol which withdrew to the north. No other enemy action was reported.

After darkness, the other two battalions reorganized to continue the attack on the following morning.

On the morning of 5 January the 1st and 2d Battalions again moved into the attack, blinded by a windblown snowstorm.

The 2d Battalion was able to advance 250 yards, despite heavy casualties inflicted by heavy shelling and small arms fire. The German tanks and self-propelled guns had pulled back into Flamizoulle and were firing from there. The 2d Battalion fought tenaciously and men with minor shrapnel wounds refused to leave their units. They took several German prisoners in these woods. (20)

The 1st Battalion was unable to dislodge an estimated 10 tanks, Mark IV's and Mark V's, from the road junction Bastogne and Flamierge roads, so they were forced to withdraw to their defensive position. (21)

The 3d Battalion on this day improved its positions and continued trying to learn more about the enemy.

The temperature was very low, the visibility zero except for one brief period in the afternoon. Thus it was necessary to have listening posts rather than observation posts. For information, the battalion depended primarily on liaison officers who were with the regiment and the other two battalions.

(19) Statement - Major Irwin A. Edwards, Ex. O, 2d Bn., 4 Jan 1945;

(20) Statement, Intelligence Section, 2d Bn., 5 Jan 1945;

(21) Statement, S-3, 3d Bn., 5 Jan 1945

Several rounds of artillery and mortar fire fell in the 3d Battalion area during the day. Two men from the artillery liaison party were killed at the Observation Post, hit by direct fire from a self-propelled 88 during a brief period of visibility at 1400 hours. The self-propelled gun was located 1200 yards to the northwest on the Flamizoulle Road. Artillery fire was placed on the gun by the artillery liaison officer and the self-propelled gun withdrew to Flamizoulle after it had fired ten rounds at the Observation Post.

The artillery liaison officer returned to his battalion to get replacements and to reorganize his party. This left the battalion without artillery support during the night 5-6 January because the artillery liaison party did not return until the next morning.

Shortly after dark the patrol leader of a 4-man patrol of the 3d Battalion Intelligence Section arrived half-frozen at the Observation Post and reported an enemy outpost at the road junction Bastogne and Flamizoulle roads. He estimated the enemy to be a platoon of infantry, and reported that no enemy vehicles appeared to be in that area. Then he told how two men of his patrol had been shot in both legs by machine gun fire and that the third man of the patrol remained with them to protect them until evacuated. The patrol leader stated that after the patrol had been fired on from a distance of 75 yards at 1500 hours, all four men fell into the deep snow at the same time, and were forced to remain lying there until dark.

The Intelligence Section evacuated the wounded to the Battalion Aid Station. These two men were the 3d Battalion's first casualties in combat.

On the night 5-6 January the enemy was inactive in the area immediately to the front, except for a half-track reported by the men at the road block on Bastogne Road. At 2100 hours one half-track approached to

within 50 yards of the road block but withdrew before bazookas could be moved close enough to be effective. Apparently the half-track was on a reconnaissance, or could have been flank security for an enemy mechanized movement that took place later.

From the observation post during the hours 2200 to 2400 enemy tracked vehicles were heard moving north from Bastogne Road on to the Flamierge road and moving into Flamierge. When this movement was first detected, the S-2 telephoned the battalion command post and reported this to the Battalion Executive Officer then on duty. The Executive Officer replied, "What the hell can I do about it?" and hung up. So the S-2 notified the Regimental Command Post by telephone of the enemy activity, and also the 81mm mortar platoon of the 3d Battalion. The mortars attempted to take the mechanized movement under fire, even though it was beyond the extreme range.

By this time enemy were known to be concentrated in the Flamierge and Flamizoulle area. By midnight this area was taken under artillery fire, including that of Corps Artillery, for the rest of the night. After the artillery fire began, no further enemy movement was heard.

On 6 January the regiment remained on the defensive throughout the day. Enemy artillery and mortar fire were very active all along the front. Some shelling occurred in the regimental area, apparently from Nebelwerfers (six-barreled rocket guns.)

Snow fell throughout the ~~previous~~ night and it was very cold. Visibility during the day was poor, but in the afternoon there were brief periods of unlimited visibility.

At 0800 hours 6 January a message came to the 3d Battalion Observation Post which ordered the Battalion Commander to report to the Regimental Command Post immediately. The Battalion Commander expected an attack order so he took with him his artillery liaison officer, S-3, and the operations sergeant.

They returned to the Battalion Command Post before noon and issued a warning order. It stated that the 3d and 1st Battalions were to attack at 0900 hours on 7 January, and that the Battalion attack order would be issued to the subordinate officers at 1300 hours.

For the attack the battalion had a battalion liaison officer and one forward observer. Infantry was to assist in adjusting the artillery fire. The artillery support was to be 75mm pack howitzers.

One platoon of three 57 antitank guns, towed, was the only other support available to the battalion. The platoon leader and his company commander of the antitank company were present for the attack order.

The enemy in the Flamierge area was estimated to be a battalion of infantry and its support of at least 20 tanks and 5 self-propelled guns.

By 1300 hours all Company Commanders, artillery officers, and anti-tank officers were assembled at the Battalion Command Post. They accompanied the Battalion Commander to a vantage point near the observation post and there the attack order was issued. The Intelligence Section was security for the Command Group.

The mission of the Battalion was to capture the village of Flamierge, to attack with two companies abreast at 0900 hours, 7 January 1945, from present positions. The axis of the advance would be west astride the Bastogne Road to the road junction at Flamizoulle Road, and at that road junction the advance would change direction and move on a magnetic azimuth of 335 degrees into Flamierge. The intermediate objective was to be the high ground 300 yards beyond the road junction Bastogne and Flamizoulle roads. The assault companies were to be G and I companies, with I company on the right. The Light Machine Gun Platoon of Battalion Headquarters Company was to support Company G. The antitank platoon was to remain in present position ready to displace forward on order. Company H was to remain in battalion reserve, to maintain contact with the 193d Glider Infantry attacking on the 3d Battalion's right and to protect the flanks

and rear. The reserve company was to be ready to displace forward on order. All mortar and artillery fire was to be on call, and the infantry would adjust the artillery fire. There was only one forward observer for the attack.

The Battalion Commander completed issuing his orders by 1330 hours, and he warned everyone to avoid exposing themselves to the front, because visibility was good at this time.

Scarcely had he made this warning than a mortar concentration fell directly on the command group. It was 120mm mortar fire and at least 8 rounds fell in less than one minute's time, coming from the direction of Flamierge. This was the first and only mortar fire to fall on this position. It killed three officers and one enlisted man, and there were three officers and nine enlisted men seriously injured. The officers killed were the Antitank Company Commander, the Antitank Company Platoon Leader, and the artillery forward observer. The injured officers were Lieutenant Colonel Edward F. Kent, Battalion Commander; Captain Harvey O. Fry, Company I Commander; and Captain Elmer, Artillery Liaison officer. Six of the wounded men were from the Battalion Intelligence Section. There now remained five of the original thirteen in the Intelligence Section.

The S-2 assisted in giving first aid until the Battalion Medical Section arrived and evacuated the wounded. Then he returned to the observation post to try to learn more about the enemy.

Major Morris S. Anderson assumed command of the battalion, First Lieutenant Eugene S. Crowley assumed command of Company I, and Captain Charles Jones reported to the battalion during the night as artillery liaison officer. The platoon sergeant of the antitank platoon assumed command of his platoon. This was the reorganization necessary in the battalion prior to its first attack.

New enemy information reported during the afternoon was the movement and location of enemy armor. There were 15 tanks, five of which were

Royal Tigers, observed in the vicinity of the Flamierge and Flamizouille roads. The 1st Battalion also reported undetermined numbers of tanks at road junction Bastogne and Flamierge Roads. (22)

On the night of 6-7 January contact was maintained with the enemy outpost at road junction Bastogne and Flamizouille roads. The only other patrolling was that of security patrols. No other enemy activity was reported.

Up until the time of the battalion's jump off in their first attack the effective fighting strength was approximately 765 men. The men in the battalion had a feeling of being very lucky because their casualties had been so few; two officers and ten enlisted men had been wounded and no one had been killed. The officers and enlisted men who had been killed were with supporting units, artillery and antitank. Actually the men were so tired of staying in their frozen foxholes covered with snow that the prospect of action was welcome.

The battalion went into the attack with two boxes of K ration and some extra ammunition, and to facilitate speed they took neither overcoats nor bedding. Their uniform was the fatigue-combat clothing and combat boots.

THE FIRST OBJECTIVE, BATTALION IN ATTACK

On 7 January at 0900 hours the 3d Battalion moved into its first attack. Both assault companies moved rapidly forward in the cold, grey morning. Visibility was less than 100 yards.

The S-2 was directed to follow the attack on the left with Captain Henry P. Stoffregen, Commanding Company G. At this time the five remaining Intelligence men were disposed as follows: one with the contact patrol on the battalion's right, two with Company I, one with the S-2 and one at the command post.

(22) Statement - Regimental S-2, Captain Gates Ivy, 6 Jan. 1945

By 0930 hours Company G had made the first contact with the enemy at road junction Bastogne and Flamizoulle roads. This twelve-man outpost was taken by surprise and they were wiped out before they could return any effective fire.

Company I had equal success in over-running a small outpost of four men in a house near Flamizoulle road, and by 0945 hours they reported they had reached the battalion's initial objective. Company G had also reached the objective.

But no sooner had the lead elements of the assault companies reached the high ground than both companies received a terrific bombardment by artillery, mortar and tank fire. Two tanks accompanied by infantry were driven off the objective in Company I's sector by three bazooka teams, but not until after Company I lost one rifle squad either killed or captured. Visibility remained less than 100 yards.

Armored vehicles were heard in the vicinity of both flanks of the objective, so the assault companies halted on the near side of the crest of the hill, extending back to the Flamizoulle road, and the four bazooka teams of each assault company occupied the objective. The teams found shell holes for gun positions.

At the time of the bombardment the radio of Company G would not work so the S-3 returned to the Battalion Observation Post and reported the present situation at the front. The Battalion Commander passed on the information to the command post, then ordered a section of the antitank guns to the road junction Bastogne and Flamizoulle roads, and ordered the reserve company forward to a position 100 yards east of the Flamizoulle road.

The observation post moved forward to the front line companies at 1000 hours and remained with the front line companies throughout the remainder of the attack.

When the Battalion Commander reached the Flamizoulle Road he found the assault companies attempting to dig fox holes in the frozen ground while scattered artillery and mortar fire fell in the area. He learned that the bazooka teams of Company G on the objective had forced a counter-attack of four tanks to withdraw back into the fog toward Bastogne Road. Also he noticed signs of confusion. For example, at one place, seeing several men milling around near an officer, he asked the officer why he did not settle these men down, to which the officer replied, "These aren't my men." That officer soon learned that any and every man was "his" if that man needed help.

At 1030 hours another counterattack by six enemy tanks hit the objective in Company G's sector, again approaching from Bastogne Road firing their machine guns and cannon. Company G's bazooka teams were able to force back all of the tanks except one; a Mark IV tank charged over the high ground toward the Flamizoulle road and was finally knocked out by a bazooka team from Headquarters Company, just short of the road.

Also at this time one Mark IV tank and one half-track came in behind Company I from Flamizoulle south along the Flamizoulle Road. The fire of these two vehicles covered the area all along the road up to the Bastogne Road. Company I was able to drive them both toward Flamizoulle with small arms fire. Then the vehicles were taken under artillery fire until they vanished beyond the range of visibility. This was the first artillery fire support that the battalion had received, because until this time the radios of both assault companies would not work.

Five tanks from the 11th Armored Division came out of the fog to the south, approaching the road junction Bastogne and Flamizoulle roads while the last fight with the enemy tanks was going on. The Battalion Commander directed the S-2 to stop the tanks and put them in position behind the high ground on the south side of Bastogne road, from which position they could take up either a full defilade or partial defilade position.

The S-2 stopped the lead tank and explained the situation to the tank platoon leader, but the platoon leader insisted that he must see the Battalion Commander first. So the platoon leader dismounted and lead the tanks toward the road junction. He then directed the lead tank to park near the Bastogne road, east of a brick house near the road junction. The first tank moved to the designated spot and lost a track from anti-tank mines. Without investigating for further mines, the platoon leader immediately waved numbers two, three, four and five in beside the number one tank. Consequently numbers two and three also lost tracks from anti-tank mines, and within a very few minutes the other two tanks were knocked out by a self-propelled 88 which fired direct fire from the high ground along Bastogne road 600 yards to the west. The S-2 asked the platoon leader if he could fire any of the guns on the damaged tanks from their present position, but the platoon leader refused to order the guns to be put to use. When the Battalion Commander learned what had happened to his only tank support he said that he had not really expected any in the first place.

The Battalion Commander and the artillery liaison officer went up to the objective as soon as the enemy tanks had been forced to withdraw. Soon the Battalion Commander returned to the Flamizoulle Road, but the liaison officer decided to stay on the high ground until the battalion continued the attack, planned for 1130 hours, or sooner if bazooka ammunition could be secured before that time. The S-2 was directed to get bazooka ammunition.

All communications with the Battalion Command Post at this time were out of order, so the artillery liaison officer's jeep was borrowed to take a member of the Intelligence Section back to the command post with the request for ammunition. Starting out, the jeep passed near the wrecked tanks and was blown up by an antitank mine. Both the intelligence man and his driver were seriously wounded.

No sooner had this accident occurred than two jeeps with trailers arrived with sufficient ammunition to continue the attack. The medical section which had been evacuating the wounded had already notified the Battalion S-4 about the shortage of bazooka ammunition.

The Battalion Intelligence Section now had three men remaining; one at the battalion command post and one with each assault company. In addition to the one put out of action in the jeep accident, another, the one who had accompanied Company H's patrol, had been lost shortly after 0900 hours, when the 193d Glider Infantry had been over-run by enemy tanks and infantry was forced back to St. Mandé Etienne after suffering heavy casualties. They were forced to give up most of the ground that had been gained on the three previous days by the 2d Battalion, 513th Parachute Infantry, whom they had relieved on the night 6-7 January.

Shortly after 1100 hours the 3d Battalion was ready to continue the attack. Two 81mm mortars had displaced forward with the reserve company and was now in position ready to support the battalion. All communications were now in working order. There was only one support team missing, the 57mm antitank guns. Their new platoon leader, a sergeant, refused to displace from the initial position.

The plan was to attack on a narrow front in a column of companies, to overrun any tanks that might intervene, and to seize their original assigned sectors in Flamierge. The formation was to be Company H, less one platoon, leading; then Companies G and I. The one platoon from Company H was to remain near Flamizouille Road in Battalion reserve. (One squad from this platoon had been cut off from the battalion while acting as contact patrol with the 193d Glider Infantry). All companies were warned to keep dispersed, because shell fire continued to fall in this area.

The battalion was ready to move out at 1130 hours, when they underwent another heavy shelling of mortar and artillery fire and the high ground,

initial objective of Company G's sector, was hit by a counterattack, composed of a platoon of infantry following eight tanks and two self-propelled 88's. The two self-propelled guns moved to the high ground near Bastogne Road and shelled east along the road, and also covered Flamizouille road with fire. The tanks moved in from the Bastogne road and were met by fire from Company G's bazooka teams. Artillery fire was called for and adjusted by the artillery liaison officer and the enemy infantry immediately withdrew. The artillery fire was then shifted to the tanks, but failed to stop them until the tanks had nearly overrun the bazooka teams and the artillery officer in their shell holes. The artillery liaison officer, faced with a choice of being crushed by the enemy tanks or fired upon by his own artillery, chose the latter and called fire down on himself. At the critical moment the artillery fire forced back the tanks, killing some of the enemy infantry and also, unfortunately, some of the men on the bazookas, but neither the liaison officer nor his radio operator who had shared his shell hole was injured, though they were badly shaken up. The liaison officer ceased the artillery fire and reported to his battalion that the infantry was ready to move out to capture Flamierge. Soon after this message was sent the radio was knocked out by shell fragments, and its operator was sent to the rear with instructions to bring another radio to Flamierge.

Eight bazooka teams were able to hold the initial objective alone against three attacks by tanks, and assisted by artillery were able to repulse the fourth counterattack of tanks with infantry. They sustained many casualties but the morale was high and there was always someone ready to take over whenever a man was lost. Two of the eight bazookas were damaged beyond repair.

The battalion moved out as soon as the last counterattack had been repulsed, shortly after 1130 hours. All communications were again out of order because of the heavy shell fire during the tank attack. Casualties were heavy during the initial bombardment, but subsequent shellings caused

fewer casualties as the men became better disciplined.

The companies moved rapidly across the initial objective, despite the deep snow. The Battalion Commander was up front just behind the lead scouts of Company H. As the lead company cleared the crest of the high ground, the battalion was taken under accurate heavy mortar fire and tank fire, both direct and indirect. The mortar fire came from the direction of Flamierge and was adjusted by tanks that were visible through the fog only when firing from a position within 200 yards to the flank of the column.

The tank fire did very little damage because the troops were dispersed and exposed for only a very short time while crossing the hill into a shallow draw. The mortar fire covered at least a 400 yard area of the draw, but the troops were soon able to follow the ladder pattern of the mortar fire and hit the snow only when the fire got near them. The casualties were few in comparison to the amount of shell fire.

The battalion kept moving on Flamierge until halted 200 yards short of the village because artillery fire had begun to fall on the village. At first it was thought that the artillery was enemy fire, but as the amount of fire rapidly increased there could be no doubt but that it was our own. It had to be Corps artillery, because there were battalions of it, and hundreds of rounds fell for more than ten minutes.

The S-2, who had been at the head of Company G with the Company Commander, went forward to contact the battalion commander as soon as the artillery fire began to fall on Flamierge. The Battalion Commander ordered him to recross the initial objective and get everyone left behind, since every man was needed for the attack. So by the time the artillery fire ceased the S-2 was on his way back to the Bastogne and Flamizoulle road junction, and the companies had moved into position for the assault of their objective. The artillery fire ceased as abruptly as it had begun. Immediately the battalion moved to the objective, even though there was no assurance that the artillery would not repeat itself.

The village of Flamierge was taken, and the battalion was organized well enough to meet a counterattack by 1300 hours. In taking the objective the battalion had killed about thirty Germans and had knocked out one Mark IV and one Mark V tank. The Mark IV burned after being hit by several rounds of small arms fire, and the Mark V tank was surprised unbuttoned and was burned with white phosphorous grenades. Two 8 CM mortars were found in firing position with several hundred rounds of ammunition near by, and there were also small arms weapons and small arms ammunition found in the village. It was apparent that several troops and vehicles had left the village hurriedly just prior to, or in the early stages of, the artillery fire.

The S-2, returning to the rear, dodged scattered mortar fire still falling where the battalion had been hit by the last heavy mortar fire concentration. A few soldiers had been left behind there to give first aid to the wounded. The white snow, at one place, was almost completely blackened by mortar fire for more than 100 square yards.

Three stragglers from the Battalion Observation Post group were found in shell holes on top of the initial objective. One of them was the battalion operations sergeant and the other two were a wireman and a messenger from Headquarters Company. The platoon in battalion reserve was the next group located, and they were notified to move on into Flamierge. As the S-2 with his three stragglers approached the road junction at Bastogne and Flamizouille roads, he observed troops moving west along the south side of Bastogne road, and he soon recognized them as the 2d Battalion, 513th Parachute Infantry. The S-2 located their Battalion Commander to find out what was going on. He learned that the 2d Battalion had been given the 1st Battalion's original mission of capturing the high ground in the vicinity of road junction Bastogne and Flamierge roads, and were ordered to tie in with the 1st and 3d Battalions in a defensive position. The S-2 was directed to have the 3d Battalion tie in with the 2d Battalion on Bastogne road 300 yards west of the road junction Bastogne and Flamierge roads during the night. Even after the S-2 notified the Battalion Commander of the known

eight enemy tanks and the two self-propelled 88's and the unknown number of enemy infantry in that particular vicinity, the Battalion Commander still insisted that the two battalions should tie in at the originally chosen position.

The 2d Battalion had reached the position on Bastogne Road, where they were first observed by the S-2, shortly before 1300 hours. They had started marching as soon as the Regimental Commander ordered the 3d Battalion to continue its attack and capture Flamierge. Meanwhile the 1st Battalion had been forced to reoccupy its original defensive position after being hit by a counterattack of eight tanks with infantry shortly after jumping off at 0900 hours. Because the crews on the antitank guns refused to leave their foxholes, the Battalion Commander with infantry had manned the 57mm anti-tank guns and assisted the bazookas and small arms weapons in repulsing this counterattack. The attack continued until one Mark IV and one Mark V tank had been knocked out and the rest withdrew. The 1st Battalion thereafter remained on the defensive. (23)

After he could find no more stragglers, the S-2 sent a message to the 3d Battalion command post giving the latest information. This message was carried by the battalion medics, who were still evacuating the wounded.

At 1400 hours the S-2, with the three stragglers, started back to Flamierge, moving west along the Bastogne Road through the 2d Battalion. They were told that the 2d Battalion had already taken the road junction at Bastogne and Flamierge roads, so they proceeded west about 600 yards, only to discover that the front line stopped there, 400 yards short of the road junction and on line with the initial objective of the 3d Battalion. They decided to move to the north east from Bastogne Road and then approach Flamierge by the original route of their battalion. The party was about fifty yards from the road when visibility suddenly lifted from 200 yards to

(23) Statement, Lt. Col. Alton R. Raylor, Bn. Comdr., 1st Bn., March, 1947

over 1000 yards, which left them exposed to the enemy strong point less than 400 yards to the west at the road junction. The four still had 100 yards to go to get to the cover of the shallow draw previously used by the battalion, and that was the only covered route to Flamierge. No sooner had visibility extended than the party was taken under fire by two machine guns from the road junction. It took the four men about an hour to run and crawl the 100 yards between bursts fired by the machine guns, but they made it with no injuries to anyone of the group. They reached Flamierge about 1500 hours, some time after the reserve platoon arrived, and the S-2 immediately reported to the Battalion Commander the latest information about the 1st and 2d Battalions. Realizing that he could not count on support from the other two battalions, the Battalion Commander set about organizing his battalion well enough to hold the village without help. The village was organized in an all-around defensive position, with Company G responsible for the sector to the south and west, Company I at the sector east and south, and Company H at the northern sector. The battalion reserve consisted of walking wounded and messengers located centrally. Aid stations were set up in two separate basements. The battalion at this time had only two medics to care for the wounded.

The S-2 was directed to check the organization of the defensive position. He found that the men were mixed in all companies and that the exchange of men would take place after dark. Meanwhile, all the men were digging foxholes in whatever company area they happened to be.

While the S-2 was in Company I's sector he learned that another of his intelligence men had been injured by mortar fire before reaching the objective, and he located the one remaining intelligence man operating an observation post observing to the east and northeast.

There were three directions from which the battalion was most likely to be attacked by tanks. Company I established a road block on the road leading from Flamizouille, and Company G established road blocks on the two roads that lead into the village from the west and south.

During the afternoon the battalion was not counterattacked as they had expected to be, although the village was shelled frequently by tanks from the road junction Bastogne and Flamierge roads only 700 yards away. There were twelve tanks and two self-propelled 88's seen at the road junction, and tanks were also heard to the east in the vicinity of Flamizoulle. An enemy outpost was located by Company I 500 yards east of Flamierge-Flamizoulle Road.

Two vehicles were captured shortly before dark, one an ambulance with a medical aid man and two German soldiers, the other a Ford V-8 station wagon carrying two non-commissioned officers. The ambulance was carrying several rounds of tank and small arms ammunition. In the station wagon was found a hot meal for the 100 men who had been in the Flamierge area before the 3d Battalion's occupation. The non-commissioned officers who brought in the food from the 15th Panzer Division had not learned about the entry of American troops. The food was boiled cabbage with a few cubes of pork in it. This was distributed to the wounded men, and the German medical aid man was put to work caring for them.

At no time during the afternoon did the enemy attempt to enter the village in any force. The enemy was on all three sides of the village and considerable enemy vehicular movement could be heard after dark in all sectors. One three-man German patrol was captured by Company G about midnight in their sector. From these prisoners the battalion was able to learn that the Germans planned to counterattack the village from the north and east early next morning with 25 tanks plus Panzer Grenadiers and other reinforcements. This information merely emphasized a foregone conclusion that the increased enemy activity in the area was in preparation for a counterattack.

The 3d Battalion's Commander received a message from the Regimental Commander that evening which asked if he could hold the town, and the answer was in the affirmative.

Each company kept half of its men on the line at all times on two-hour shifts, while the other half of the company was in basements.

During the night a party of twenty men from the S-4 section hand-carried K rations to Flamierge, and the Battalion S-3 and Battalion Surgeon came in with them, arriving at 2400 hours. At 0300 hours the S-4 brought in two 2½ ton trucks loaded with ammunition and more K rations. He stated that he had run the enemy strongpoint at road junction Bastogne and Flamierge roads without being challenged, probably because the enemy assumed the trucks to be German. He also reported that the 2d Battalion was dug in near the 3d Battalion's initial objective, and that he had seen two German tanks and one half-track at the road junction.

The Battalion Surgeon, Captain Arthur F. Young, gave blood plasma to the seriously wounded, and after redressing some of the injuries of the walking wounded he utilized the seven prisoners in helping the walking wounded to return to the rear at 0400 hours.

Shortly thereafter the S-4, First Lieutenant Paul M. McGuire, sent to the rear his two trucks and the two captured vehicles loaded with wounded. The four ill-assorted vehicles entered the enemy strong point at the road junction unchallenged as before. But after the last vehicle had cleared the road junction by 100 yards all the vehicles were fired on by tank and machine gun fire and though they were successful in reaching the rear, one of the wounded was killed by the machine gun fire.

Because of the lack of transportation it had been impossible to bring in the overcoats and bedding that the troops entering Flamierge had been obliged to leave behind, and the men suffered considerably that night from the severe cold weather and a heavy snow which fell throughout the night added to their discomfort.

FLAMIERGE, BATTALION IN DEFENSE AND WITHDRAWAL

By daylight on the morning of 8 January everything was quiet and evidences of the previous day's fighting had been obliterated by the

heavy blanket of new snow. But at 0850 hours the peaceful scene was abruptly destroyed when the enemy counterattacked in force. Eighteen tanks with infantry and two self-propelled 88's came from the northwest, then down Bastogne Road to the road junction south of Flamierge and shelled and machine gunned the 3d Battalion area for at least twenty minutes, and then shifted their fire onto the 2d Battalion. Two of the tanks were Mark VI's, Royal Tigers. Meanwhile Company H reported foot infantry attacking them from the north, and Company I reported four tanks which had approached from Flamizoulle firing into their sector.

Company H, commanded by First Lieutenant Charles H. Martin, was able to repulse the first attack with the two captured 8 cm mortars without revealing their front line position on the high ground north of Flamierge.

By 0910 hours the 2d Battalion, just coming under fire from the tanks at the road junction, was also hit on the right flank by four tanks from the direction of Flamizoulle. These attacks made the 2d Battalion's position untenable, and they withdrew as rapidly as possible to the vicinity of the Regimental command post in Bois de Fragotte, thus withdrawing their support from the now surrounded 3d Battalion in Flamierge.

The enemy tanks along Bastogne Road, less than 700 yards from Flamierge, again turned their fire to the 3d Battalion and shelled this area throughout the morning. Company I forced the tanks in their sector to withdraw by the use of mortar and small arms fire.

Company H received a second attack by foot infantry shortly after the first attack was repulsed. This time the lead squad of the enemy, dressed in American uniforms without helmets, got to within fifty yards of the company before they were recognized as enemy but as soon as the ruse was discovered they were killed by small arms fire. Then a group of enemy in company strength attempted to make a frontal attack against Company H but this attack was stopped by mortar and rifle fire. There was no more enemy activity in strength in this sector until early afternoon.

At 1400 hours the Germans counterattacked again, covering the entire battalion area with mortar, tank, and machine-gun fire. Then foot infantry again attacked Company H, eight tanks with infantry hit Company I's sector from the east and southeast, four tanks with infantry converged on Company G from the northwest, and fourteen tanks and two self-propelled 88's to the south along Bastogne Road moved up and down the north side of the road, shelling and machine-gunning the entire sector.

Company H was able to stop the enemy infantry with their two German mortars and with small arms fire. Company I forced the enemy infantry to withdraw with their one 81mm mortar firing German mortar ammunition, and six of the eight tanks also withdrew. Two broke through to the center of the village where one was knocked out by a bazooka and the other was caused to burn after being hit with a heavy concentration of small arms fire. Company G was able to kill several enemy infantry with rifle fire and to disable one Mark V tank by bazooka fire, but the gun crew on the disabled tank knocked out two bazooka teams and then managed to hook up their wrecked tank to its companion tank which dragged it out of the area. The other two tanks had previously been forced to withdraw.

This heavy counterattack by twenty-six tanks and two self-propelled 88's and about 150 infantry lasted for more than an hour. All the enemy infantry not killed and all the tanks except the two knocked out withdrew. The tanks along Bastogne Road, however, continued sporadic fire until dark. The 3d Battalion suffered heavy casualties. Most of the bazooka teams were killed and all but four of the original twenty bazookas had been made unusable. The continued defense had been made possible only by the use of captured enemy arms and ammunition. The battalion had started out with four 81mm mortars but three of these had been put out of action at the road junction Bastogne and Flamizouille Roads by enemy counterbattery fire before the battalion got to Flamierge.

Three patrols, one from the 507th and two from 513th Parachute Infantry, attempted to reach the 3d Battalion after the attack but were unable to

penetrate the German lines. (24)

Shortly after dark the Battalion S-4 with three men went back through enemy lines to the Regimental Command Post and reported that the 3d Battalion still held, and that a SCR-300 radio had been repaired. The battalion soon received several messages in code, and as soon as he recognized the sender the battalion radio operator explained that no signal operation instructions was available. Soon another message was received in the jargon of the American cowboy, included as part of a casual conversation. The message was approximately thus: "Return all doggies to the old corral. Leave one sawbones and one ram rod with the ailing herd." There was no way to authenticate the message, but the Battalion Commander rightly recognized it to be an order from the Regimental Commander for the battalion to withdraw to the regimental area, leaving a medic and an officer with the seriously wounded.

Accordingly, at 0100 hours the withdrawal began. The battalion withdrew in eighteen groups of 15 to 20 men each, with five minutes time elapsing between the departures of each group. The 18th group consisted of the command group, lead by the S-2. None of the groups met with any enemy opposition, which was fortunate because the men were barely in condition to walk the two miles through knee-deep soft snow, weakened as they were from exposure, lack of sleep, and shock from shell fire.

It might have been possible to have carried out the seriously wounded, but few would have survived the extreme cold. Of the 19 seriously wounded left behind there were four officers and fifteen enlisted men. In addition there were two uninjured battalion medics and one German medic to look after them, and a less seriously wounded officer was left in charge to surrender the wounded.

The remnants of the 3d Battalion had closed in the Regimental area by daylight on 9 January. Of the 780 of them who had left this position

(24) Statement - Sergeant Gidley, Regimental S-2 Section, 9 January 1945

in Bois de Fragotte five days previously, there were now approximately 350. The 3d Battalion had paid a heavy price, but it had won all its battles against a superior force.

NOTE: The 3d Battalion reoccupied Flamierge two days later without enemy opposition, and continued to fight in the Battle of the Bulge until 29 January. The battalion killed and captured over 300 Germans. It lost over 500 men, either wounded, captured or killed.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of the report of this operation the reader will see that the 17th Airborne Division was given a most difficult assignment for its first time in combat.

Airborne forces, when committed in the attack against an equal or superior enemy, are normally reinforced. It must be assumed that the Army and Corps Commanders were cognizant of the employment, capabilities, and TO/TE of Airborne troops. Therefore, it is certain that the 17th Airborne Division would not have been given this mission, which was foreseeably beyond its normal capabilities, unless such employment of the division contributed to the overall plan for the final defeat of Germany. This was a Command decision, and applied the principle of economy of force.

The 17th was given the mission of relieving an Armored division that had been in the line for only five days, but was so severely subjected to strong armored counterattacks and suffered such heavy casualties that it had become badly disorganized and needed relief out of the line for reorganization. (25)

The operation of the 17th Airborne Division in the Bastogne area was considered a success. General Troy Middleton, VIII Corps Commander, on 22 January 1945, told Lieutenant General Lewis H. Brereton that the

(25) A-1, p. 246

17th Airborne Division had saved the day at Bastogne. On 30 January 1945 General Parks told General Brereton that he had heard General Patton quoted as saying that his decision to employ the 17th Airborne in the attack was "the best decision he had made in the war. He felt that if the 17th had not held, the German Panzers might have gotten in behind him as he attacked on the flank." (26)

From the viewpoint of the regiment, several things could be brought out which would have made this operation more successful:

(1) The initial orders to the 513th Parachute Infantry would have been more complete if they had included a complete Intelligence annex, which could have easily been obtained because the information was available at the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne.

(2) The initial phase of the attack would probably have been less costly if the regiment had been permitted to use delaying action in its opening phase to gain time for planning, reconnaissance, and coordination.

(3) Many of the difficulties encountered in the initial phase could have been overcome in the subsequent action if two principles of war -- Mass, and Economy of Force -- had been adhered to. The regiment, with its wide frontage, failed to increase its striking power by employing its force in a main effort and a secondary effort.

(4) The Regimental S-3 can be severely criticised for not remaining at the regimental command post to assist his commander during the crucial phase of the battle instead of becoming involved in an encounter not part of his assigned duties.

There are several factors which contributed to the 3d Battalion's successful accomplishment of every mission assigned to it in the Battle of the Bulge:

(26) A-5, p. 394

(1) Much of the success can be attributed to the training, will-power, self-confidence, initiative, and disregard of self by both officers and men.

(2) Their having remained in regimental reserve in their offensive-defensive position in the opening phase of the attack gave them an opportunity to become indoctrinated to battle.

(3) A contributing factor in the accomplishment of their missions was the excellent leadership of the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Morris Anderson, after he assumed command. He was able to carry his troops with him regardless of the many obstacles that confronted them.

Here it should be mentioned that the original Battalion Commander, Major Edward Kent, can not be adversely criticised for the loss of the command group at the vantage point on the eve of battle, because in all his previous training, both at schools and on maneuvers, he was taught that the issuance of orders was supposed to occur at a vantage point.

(4) The manner in which the Battalion S-2 was used in this situation was advantageous. He was of more value up with the attacking troops assisting the commander against an already known superior force than he could ever have been back at the command post.

The outstanding adverse criticism that can be made of the 3d Battalion concerns their radio communication. The radio personnel was not trained sufficiently to keep their radios operating under conditions of extreme cold and in deep snow. Much of the trouble, however, could have been avoided if the higher command had provided liquid waterproofing for the radios. On the credit side, it may be said that the radio men did well in repairing radios that were hit by shell fragments.

Wire communications were impossible to keep because of the large amount of shell fire and the great number of enemy tracked vehicles encircling the objective.

The antitank personnel, in refusing to displace forward with the attacking battalion, showed that those men had not been adequately trained for total war, and that the enlisted men had not been taught to assume command whenever their leaders were lost in combat.

The platoon leader of the platoon of five tanks from the 11th Armored Division, who deliberately ran his tanks over mines to avoid engaging the enemy, was either poorly trained or an example of combat fatigue.

The Battalion S-2 was at fault in failing to send all information available to higher command, but, on the other hand, the battalion never did receive any information from higher headquarters.

It will be easily seen that speed was the greatest weapon in this action. The airborne troops normally accomplish their mission by making the greatest possible use of speed and surprise, because both their training and equipment are inadequate for a prolonged operation.

The Germans can be adversely criticised for not making a more determined effort to find out the strength and composition of the 3d Battalion. The lack of aggressiveness and courage in their counterattacks, and their lack of alertness at their strong point at the road junction all contributed to their failure to overrun the 3d Battalion's position in Flamierge.

The reader should carefully analyze all first battle actions and give them a great deal of consideration, inasmuch as the next battle for which we must prepare, will, if it comes, be the first battle of a new war.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

(1) In an attack there are three vital prerequisites: reconnaissance, coordination, and communication.

(2) Pertinent information should never be withheld from subordinate units.

(3) Aggressive leadership of small units determines the outcome of the operation, once the attack has been launched.

(4) Green troops are mentally better prepared for combat if they have had some battle indoctrination.

(5) Small arms fire can be effectively employed against tanks when no antitank weapons are available.

(6) All troops must be trained to take over the next highest job whenever a leader is lost in combat.

(7) It is inadvisable for a battalion commander to assemble his subordinates at a vantage point to receive orders; issuance of orders can best be accomplished at the command post, supplemented later by individual reconnaissance.

(8) Unit commanders must not lose sight of their primary mission.

(9) A commander must have available more than one means of communication.

(10) Commanders at all levels should know the capabilities and limitations of all units under their command.

(11) Severe weather conditions handicap movement and require special technical, tactical, and logistical measures.

(12) Weather and terrain, correctly evaluated, can be effectively employed as a weapon against the enemy.

(13) The power of a well-disciplined, well-trained individual against overwhelming odds should never be underestimated.