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OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST BATTALION, 39TH INFANTRY
(9TH INFANTRY DIVISION) NORTH OF ST. JACQUES-DE-NEHOU,
COTENTIN PENINSULA, 18 JUNE 1944.
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION IN THE
DEFENSE OF A BIVOUAC AREA

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry, 9th U.S. Infantry Division in the defense of a bivouac area from a surprise German attack. This attack was launched during the NORMANDY campaign on the COTENTIN PENINSULA, more commonly referred to as the CHERBOURG PENINSULA.

To bring the reader abreast of the situation we will briefly discuss the major events which led to this action.

On the 6th of June 1944 the long awaited invasion of EUROPE had become a reality. The 21st Army Group, commanded by General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, had established a beachhead on the continent and was heavily engaged with the enemy.

(1) (See Map A)

The First American Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, consisting of V Corps and VII Corps had secured beachheads on the east coast of the COTENTIN PENINSULA. (2) (See Map A)

The primary mission and principal objective of the First Army was the capture of the city of CHERBOURG. (3) With the capture of this objective the Western Allies would have a deep water port from which to supply the tremendous logistical requirements of future operations. (See Map A)

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- (1) A-9, p. 14
(2) A-8, p. 12
(3) A-2, p. 56

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The VII Corps, commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins, constituted the right flank of the 21st Army Group.

(4) As herein before stated the first mission of the invasion forces following the consolidation of the beachhead was the capture of CHERBOURG. This mission was assigned to VII Corps. (5) "The great importance of this seaport to the establishment of a firm well supplied beachhead cannot be over emphasized." (6) One of the most difficult problems confronting the Allies in the invasion of EUROPE was the task of providing vast quantities of supplies necessary to maintain a huge army in the field. Initially this great tonnage of supplies would have to be brought in over the open beaches, and for that reason were subject to variable weather. (7)

Following the landing on UTAH BEACH the VII Corps had steadily pushed outward, extending the depth of the beachhead and gradually securing much needed elbow room and space in which to maneuver. (8) By the 16th of June the Corps occupied a general line extending from the beach north of QUINEVILLE to MONTEBOURG, LE HAM, NEHOU, ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE west of PONT L ABBE, BAUPTE, LES FEVRES, south of CARENTAN where junction was made with V Corps. The extreme western limit of the Corps line included two important bridgeheads across the DOUVE RIVER. One bridgehead was captured and held by the 9th Infantry Division at STE. COLOMBE and the other had been secured by the 82d Airborne Division at ST.

SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE.

- (4) A-1, p. 1
- (5) A-1, p. 150
- (6) A-2, p. 3
- (7) A-8, p. 14
- (8) A-1, p. 119

The DOUVE RIVER, which runs generally north and south through the peninsula, had been a major obstacle in the path of the VII Corps attack to the sea. (See Map B)

The main effort of VII Corps now was to breakthrough to the west coast of the COTENTIN PENINSULA and thus isolate CHERBOURG. (9) With the accomplishment of this breakthrough, all main supply and evacuation routes into and out of the peninsula would be sealed off. It would be virtually impossible for the enemy to reinforce troops defending CHERBOURG, nor would he be capable of evacuating the troops already contained in the peninsula in any appreciable number. His supplies and equipment would be limited to those on hand within his present positions.

The Corps plan of attack directed that the 4th and 90th Infantry Divisions attack and exert increased pressure in the direction of CHERBOURG, this would prevent the enemy from redeploying his troops to oppose the push across the peninsula. (10) The 9th Infantry Division would continue to drive to the west with the mission of cutting the peninsula in the vicinity of BARNEVILLE-SUR-MER. The southern flank of the Corps would be held by the 82d Airborne Division. (11) (See Map B)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS, 9TH DIVISION, 17-18 JUNE (See Map C)

The Division lost little time in exploiting the bridgehead across the DOUVE RIVER. (12) A coordinated attack was launched on the 16th of June with two Regimental Combat Teams attacking in two columns, following generally the two east-west

(9) A-8, p. 27
(10) A-8, p. 27
(11) A-8, p. 27
(12) A-1, p. 141

highways crossing the peninsula in the Corps sector. (13)
The 47th Infantry operating on the left flank of the Division zone moved south along the route leading into ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE. At this town the regiment passed through elements of the 82d Airborne Division bridgehead and pressed the attack southwest along the axis of the ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE, ST. LO-D-OURVILLE HIGHWAY. The mission of this column was to prevent the enemy from escaping through the corridor between the sea and the PRAIRIES MARE^CJAGEUSES. (14)
On the right flank of the Division the 60th Infantry pushed westward astride the highway leading through BLANDAMOUR, ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU to BARNEVILLE SUR MER. This attack was to be pushed forward rapidly and aggressively to the objective which was the high ground west of ST. PIERRE D' ARTHEGLISE dominating the highways leading from the north into BARNEVILLE SUR MER and the town itself. (15)

Meanwhile the 39th Infantry, a regiment of the division, was engaged in a less spectacular, but none the less important engagement. This Regimental Combat Team was to attack and clear the town of ORGLANDES and then turn and protect the open north rear flank of the Division. (16) (17) (See MapB)

Both the 47th and the 60th Regimental Combat Teams made rapid progress in the attack and by 0500 hours on the 18th of June had fought to the western coast of the peninsula and occupied BARNEVILLE SUR MER and ST. LO D' OURVILLE. The 82d Airborne Division operating on the south flank of the Corps had succeeded in capturing and holding the causeway over the

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- (13) A-8, p. 27
(14) A-1, p. 141
(15) A-1, p. 141
(16) A-1, p. 141
(17) Personal knowledge

PRAIRIES MAREGAGEUSES. (18) The mission of cutting the COTENTIN PENINSULA was accomplished and another phase in VII Corps operations was ended. (19)

THE ENEMY SITUATION

Opposing the drive across the peninsula were elements of four German Divisions. "The 9th U.S. Division had identified elements of the 920th and the 921st Regiments of the 243d Division and the 1049th and 1050th Regiments of the 77th Division." (20) Several of these units had been in constant action since "D" day and had suffered heavy casualties.

By the 13th of June it was clear to the enemy that our forces were attempting to cut the peninsula. Field Marshal Rommel ordered the 77th Division to go into position west of ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE and block the advance west. Before this move could be undertaken the rapid drive of the 82d Airborne Division on the town of ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE made it impossible for the German 77th Division to prevent the establishment of a bridgehead by American forces across the DOUVE RIVER. (21)

From the German Military Staff point of view every effort would have to be made to prevent the Americans from cutting the peninsula but if the breakthrough should occur then the 77th Division must not be trapped north of the breakthrough.

(22) The general plan of the Germans was to delay the Americans to the maximum and to evacuate some of his best troops from the peninsula. To accomplish this mission the German

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- (18) A-1, p. 143
 - (19) A-1, p. 149
 - (20) A-1, p. 151
 - (21) A-1, p. 147
 - (22) A-1, p. 145

*See map
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German
Group*

forces were now organized into two Kampfgruppen. One Kampfgruppe consisting of what was left of the 709th Division and the 243d Division was organized and commanded by General-leutnant Karl Wilhelm von Schlieben, this group was to defend CHERBOURG if the peninsula was cut. The other Kampfgruppe organized with troops of the 77th and 91st Division was commanded by Generalleutnant Heinz Hellmich. This Kampfgruppe had the mission of withdrawing out of the peninsula to ST. LO D' OURVILLE and to prevent any further expansion of the Americans south of that point. (23)

Hitler had made the defense of CHERBOURG his personal concern and for that reason no major redistribution or withdrawals of troops could be undertaken without his express approval. The German Seventh Army's planned redistribution of forces was countermanded by Hitler and he ordered that the present line be held at all cost.

On the 17th of June, when it became apparent that the Americans had been successful in the bid to cut the peninsula, authority was granted by Hitler to implement the original German Seventh Army plan of withdrawal. This authority to carry out the plan had come too late for its execution to meet with anything but limited success. (24)

THE BATTALION SITUATION (See Map C)

During the late afternoon of June 16th, the battalion attacked the town of ORGLANDES and after advancing well into the town had been forced to withdraw in the face of heavy machine gun fire. The following morning the attack on ORGLANDES was resumed following a heavy artillery barrage

(23) A-1, p. 147

(24) A-1, p. 147

and the town was retaken. (25) From the 10th of June to the 17th of June the battalion had been in close, continuous contact with the enemy, a considerable number of casualties had been sustained with few replacements being received. Nightfall on the 17th found all companies of the battalion far under strength.

The terrain over which the battalion operated was particularly difficult. It consisted, for the most part of fields varying in size from one hundred to a thousand yards across and of various shapes. Some were orchards, others were cultivated or used as pastures but with few exceptions all were surrounded by thick, high hedgerows. This terrain greatly favored the defender who made excellent use of the hedgerows as auto-matic weapon emplacements, from which the intervening fields could be covered with cross fire. The roads, most of which were not surfaced, ran between these high hedgerows making it possible for wheeled and track laying vehicles to move about with little danger of being detected. (26)

The weather at this time of year was cool, damp and often foggy, after sun down it would grow very cold, adding to the discomfort of the soldier. Daylight, during the battle of NORMANDY, commenced at about 0545 and did not end until 2300 hours because of British double summertime, which set the clock ahead two hours.

At about 1200 hours on the 17th of June, following the attack on ORGLANDES, the 1st Battalion of the 39th Infantry (less Company C) was attached to the 60th Regimental Combat Team. (27) The battalion loaded on vehicles at 1430 hours

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- (25) A-1, p. 141
(26) Personal knowledge
(27) A-5, p. 6

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and moved by motor to the vicinity of STE. COLOMBE where it detrucked and followed the advance of the 60th Regimental Combat Team on foot. Company "C", detached from the battalion, was left to guard the bridge over the DOUVE RIVER. (28) To support Company "C" on this mission, the organic 57 mm anti-tank guns of the battalion were attached to the company. (29)

From the detrucking point the battalion proceeded on foot in company column westward through BLANDAMOUR to the vicinity of ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU. The Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Henry P. Tucker, and his S-3, left the battalion to go forward, contact the Regimental Commander and receive his order. A short time later the Battalion Commander rejoined the battalion, which was then on the march and halted it in the vicinity of ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU. The battalion "had not received any definite mission other than to follow the 60th Infantry, presumably to aid in protecting the division's lengthening northern flank." (30) The companies remained in march column at the halt however, with the exceptions of designated security groups, they were permitted to lie down on either side of the road and catch up on some much needed rest. At this time authority was granted to consume one "C" ration, per man, which would be the evening meal. With no more information known of the enemy situation, or the probable employment of the battalion than that which had been received a hot meal, was out of the question. The morale of the men at this time was not high, nor could it be called particularly low, they had fought a long way since landing on UTAH BEACH and many of them had fought in SICILY and AFRICA. To them

(28) A-10, Item 951
(29) Personal knowledge
(30) A-1, p. 144

war was a deadly game. You ate when you could and slept whenever you were not fighting or eating. The end of one situation usually meant the beginning of another. Right now they were in reserve, and that often meant no fighting.

NARRATION

THE BIVOUAC AND GERMAN ATTACK (See Map D)

At 0200 hours the battalion went into position astride a road leading from the north into ST. JACQUES DE NEHOV. (31) This road was designated as the boundary between companies. Company "A" was on the left, Company "B" on the right, the front faced north - the open flank of the division, and most likely enemy avenue of approach. Company "D" and the Battalion Headquarters Company took up bivouac positions about four hundred yards to the rear of the front line units. The positions were those that would be normally taken up where it was known contact with the enemy was not imminent and a covering force was to the front. The Battalion Command Post was located in a small farm tool shed on the left of the road running through the position and approximately four hundred yards in the rear of the front lines. The Battalion Commander directed that the companies post local security posts well out in front, and to the flanks of the bivouac position. He also directed that rocket launcher teams be so located as to bring fire on any vehicle attempting to enter the position down the secondary road leading into it. This was done as one team from Company "B", positioned on the right and a second team from Company "A" on the left, both covering the designated approach. (32) The rifle companies went into position

(31) A-1, p.144

(32) Personal knowledge

with two platoons generally abreast and the third platoon bent well around to the flank. The positions covered the draw to the front, but the flanks were open. Company commanders and platoon leaders made every effort to see that the men took up positions from which fire could be delivered on an attacking enemy. Under the conditions of darkness, that had to be coped with, and the numerous hedgerows within and surrounding the position, plus the fact that the enemy situation was obscure, this was made an extremely difficult task. Listening posts of two men per squad were established and each man required to dig in. The light machine guns of the weapons platoons were sited to obtain the best fields of fire and cover the draw to the front of the position. These preparations were supervised by the Battalion Commander, who was keenly aware of the danger of our isolation. (33)

During these defensive preparations by the front line platoons, the weapons platoon leaders had set up the 60 mm mortars in well protected fields, three hundred yards more or less, to the rear of the main line of resistance. What was considered to be ample ammunition was dumped on position, however, range cards were not prepared, or were defensive fires adjusted.

Communication between the platoons and the company command post was established and maintained by a listening watch on SCR 536 radios. Wire lines had been laid and were in between Battalion and Companies. All vehicles in the Battalion were pooled under the command of the battalion motor officer. With the completion of these preparations, the battalion settled down for the night.

(33) Personal knowledge

At about 0400 hours, the center platoon of Company "B" reported movement could be heard to the front. This report was immediately flashed to battalion. Before any action could be taken, or orders issued, firing broke out in the vicinity of the road blocks established earlier in the evening. Immediately this fire was taken up by the front line platoons and increased in density until the entire battalion front seemed to be covered. It is doubtful that over one man in twenty saw a target, but nevertheless, almost to a man they poured rifle fire and machine gun fire forward of the position. Through the crackle of rifle and machine gun fire could be heard the distinct rip of German automatic weapons. By now occasional high explosives would drop within and to the rear of the position. This was either German Panzerfaust fires or light mortars, more likely the former since the fire was neither grouped or heavy in volume. To add to the confusion, cattle, probably driven by the enemy movement wandered into the position. These either through mistaken identity or by design were taken under fire and either scattered or were killed, at any rate they ceased to mask our fire. At the road block between "A" and "B" Companies, where the enemy had poured his heaviest fire a small group of enemy armed with machine pistols and grenades, managed to penetrate the position. In the dense darkness which preceded dawn, identification was near impossible except by the distinct characteristic sound of weapons. This gap between the companies was quickly closed by fire and the enemy, who had infiltrated into the position, found themselves in an extremely precarious position. Isolated from their unit and completely confused by the dark and

dispositions of our troops, they soon ran into rear elements of the battalion and were shot dead at point blank range. They did, however, manage to kill a few members of the battalion, and wound others before being eliminated. (34)

Meanwhile orders were quickly being issued by the Battalion Commander and his staff. With the first report of enemy movement, 81 mm mortars and heavy machine guns were rapidly unloaded from vehicles and placed in firing positions. (35) The heavy machine guns were rushed into the line and almost immediately went into action. The 81 mm mortars were ordered to fire across the creek to our front, and into the small unnamed village. In surprisingly short time the 81 mm mortars went into action and commenced to pound the assigned sector. This fire, although conducted from map data, was extremely accurate. Simultaneously the reassuring cough of the company's 60 mm mortars could be heard as they raked the enemy area with light, but highly effective, fire. Data had been placed on the guns by the simple expedient of covering the weapon with a blanket and using a flashlight to level and read the sights.

At the outset of the action, communication with higher headquarters had gone out, the battalion communication officer and his wire section, were busy attempting to locate the division wire line which was known to run along the highway through ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU.

Reports were now flowing into battalion from both line companies to the effect that armored vehicles could be heard in the front of the position. The right platoon of Company "B"

(34) Personal knowledge

(35) A-1, p. 144

immediately following the report of armor, sent a message stating that low whistles were heard well on the right flank. These whistles were known enemy means of maintaining control and contact at night. (36) It was obvious that the Germans were attempting to outflank the position. Since no reserve had been constituted and all elements of the battalion were engaged, in one way or another, no further disposition of troops could be made to protect the threatened flank. During this period reports from Company "A" were received concerning the activity of enemy patrols on that flank.

The battalion had no antitank weapons with the exception of organic rocket launchers, had no artillery support, and was out of communication, with dawn close at hand and with enemy armor to the front the present position would soon become untenable. (37)

The Battalion Commander personally contacted the Company Commanders and ordered an organized withdrawal to a position along the east-west road running into ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU. From this position advantage could be taken of higher ground, and the battalion flanks would be less vulnerable. (38) These orders were relayed to platoon leaders and non-commissioned officers. Order of withdrawal would commence with the center platoon, followed by the open flank platoon, and then the platoon adjacent to the boundary road. This order of withdrawal would be conducted simultaneously, and in the same order, by both line companies. The light machine guns would go out of action with the last platoon to disengage, the heavies would displace with the center platoon. The 81 mm and 60 mm mortars would continue to harass the enemy from

(36) Personal knowledge

(37) A-1, p. 145

(38) A-1, p. 145

present locations. The withdrawal was conducted as directed, little change was apparent in the volume of fire delivered on the enemy and it is doubtful that he knew a withdrawal was taking place. Just prior to the withdrawal of the last platoon, the mortars went out of action by section and took up a position in the rear of the new line. This was necessitated by the fact that the new main line of resistance was to the rear of the mortar positions. (39) Prior to ordering the withdrawal, all battalion vehicles were sent under the control of the motor officer to BLANDAMOUR. They could serve no useful purpose in the present situation and might be overrun or knocked out. Exceptions to this order were the aid and communication jeeps.

The communications platoon had by now, located the division wire line and the battalion situation was quickly outlined to that headquarters and the 60th Regimental Combat Team. General Eddy, the Commanding General of the 9th Division, ordered that the new lines be held and promised Division Artillery support.

The 60th Field Artillery Battalion, in direct support of the 60th Infantry, was in a position about one thousand yards west of ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU. This artillery battalion withdrew to a new position, one thousand yards further west of ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU, because from its present location effective fire could not be delivered in support of the 1st Battalion. A small group of enemy that had infiltrated around the infantry position discovered the artillery location. "Groups of artillerymen engaged and delayed the enemy with small arms fire, covering the batteries as they moved out."

(39) Personal knowledge

Shortly after displacing, the 60th Field Artillery went into action, slamming one concentration after another on the enemy position through the use of previously obtained map data.

THE BATTALION COUNTERATTACK (See Map E)

General Eddy arrived at the Battalion Command Post shortly after his order to hold. His presence and extreme calmness in the face of great danger did much to calm and quiet the highly keyed officers and enlisted men of the battalion. His belief that the enemy had been stopped, praise of the Battalion's actions and confidences in the effect of the artillery concentrations which shortly would be fired, raised the morale of men and officers alike. (40)

Prior to the General's arrival, plans had been formulated to counterattack, with the supporting artillery. At 0900, a Zombie fired by the Division Artillery rocked the area occupied by the attacking enemy. The 81 mm mortars added to the density of this concentration, by firing an entire basic load.

The line of departure was the line now held. Company "A" was to attack north with the right boundary of the company the road up which the enemy had attempted to penetrate. Company "B" would attack in the same direction, with its left boundary the same road. Both companies moved out with two platoons forward and one in support. The initial battalion objective was the small village north of the present position. Light machine guns were attached to the forward platoons. The mortars were to support the attack from present locations, observers with the assault platoons would direct and control

(40) Personal knowledge

fires by radio. Normal radio communication would be used between Company and Battalion. All platoons were in communication with company by SCR 536 radio.

Immediately following the artillery concentration the battalion jumped off. Needless to say, jumping off consisted of the lead scouts cautiously pushing forward through the hedgerows and finding they drew no fire, signaling the platoons to follow. These men had crossed many a line of departure and placed a very liberal interpretation on the phrase "jump off". As the platoons advanced from one hedgerow to the next, it became increasingly apparent to the individual soldier and to the officers and non-com's urging them forward, that the artillery and mortar concentrations had completely neutralized or destroyed the enemy. The troops became more aggressive and the attack gained momentum. Shortly after jumping off, all ground lost during the withdrawal had been regained. The attack continued beyond the original line onto the objective. At this point, Company "B" attacking on the right moved east through the settlement along a road running east and west through the village. Company "A" continued north through the settlement, up an unimproved road, down which it was later learned the enemy had launched his attack. (41)

Other than the fires of the supporting artillery and mortars, delivered prior to crossing the line of departure, little fire had been exchanged between the assault echelons and the enemy. The intense supporting fires had taken the initiative from the enemy, sent him reeling back in complete disorganized confusion, and left many of his soldiers dead or wounded on the battle field.

(41) Personal knowledge

The enemy had been completely routed and had withdrawn back across the SEYE RIVER. Sixty German prisoners were taken, most of them wounded and over two hundred and fifty were found dead in front of the battalion position. Thirty six casualties had been suffered by the battalion during the enemy attack and in the counterattack which followed. (42)

Interrogation of prisoners revealed that the battalion had been attacked by the German 1049th Infantry Regiment of the 77th Division, which was attempting to break out of the peninsula. (43)

War Department, General Orders Number 10, dated 22 February 1945, cited the Battalion for extraordinary heroism in action on the morning of 18 June 1944, near ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU, FRANCE.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. MISSION

In analyzing this action we find much to criticize. The battalion, upon attachment, had not received any definite mission other than to follow the 60th Infantry, presumably to aid in protecting the divisions lengthening northern flank. (44) No definite objectives or intermediate objectives were assigned on which to base a tentative plan. Very little information had been received on the location of friendly units, other than that they were advancing very rapidly towards the final objectives, the west coast of the peninsula.

2. INTELLIGENCE

During the late afternoon hours of the 17th, the battalion

(42) A-1, p. 145

(43) A-4, p. 173

(44) A-1, p. 144

had arrived in the vicinity of the bivouac area. The halting of the battalion at the town of ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU had not been a coincidence as it appeared, but was part of the division defensive plan. The Division G-2 had received information during the course of interrogation of several German military police on the 17th, that an attempt might be made to break out of the peninsula in the vicinity of ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU. (45) General Eddy ordered that road blocks be established to prevent the enemy from crossing the SEYE RIVER in the division sector. This information never reached the battalion in anything near its original form. The assumption made at battalion was that the bridge to our north, clearly indicated on the map was defended by a friendly force.

3. PATROL ACTION

This assumption should have been proven by sending a reconnaissance patrol out with the mission of contacting the road block, determining their strength and exact location, and exchanging information as to the battalion plan and disposition. Failure to do this resulted in a bridge, leading into the sector, being left wide open thus affording the enemy a perfect avenue of approach over which an attack could be launched with armor. Moreover, with the knowledge that the river crossing was not blocked, the battalion would never have bivouaced but instead would have prepared a defensive position on commanding terrain with road blocks and out posts established.

4. ANTI TANK WEAPONS

Prior to attachment to the 60th Regimental Combat Team, Company "C", together with the 57 mm platoon and guns of the

(45) A-4, p. 173

Battalion Headquarters Company had been detached. This left the battalion with no anti tank weapons, and far understrength. During the conduct of the defense and in the counterattack which followed, the only means of stopping enemy armor with a direct fire weapon, available to the battalion, was 2.36 inch rocket launchers. While this weapon cannot be sold short, and it does have some capabilities as an anti tank weapon, its use as the sole means of knocking out Mark IV and V tanks is limited and extremely hazardous.

5. LIAISON

Throughout the period of the enemy attack, and the counterattack which followed, the fact that the battalion had no artillery liaison officer or forward observer was keenly felt. If one or the other of these people had been present, supporting artillery fire could have been called for immediately and direct. It would not have been necessary to relay the requests for fire and the artillery radio would have provided a supplementary means of communication when all other means, except messenger, had gone out.

The positions occupied by units of the battalion, after orders were finally received to bivouac, were not tactically sound. Advantage had not been taken of key terrain as evidenced by the later decision to withdraw. The position, however, cannot be too highly criticised, since time had not been available to reconnoiter, as it was occupied during the hours of darkness. The establishment of the road block between the frontline companies was effective, however, it is doubtful if an aggressive attack, supported by more than one tank, could have been stopped. A means readily available to

the battalion, effective in stopping armor, was the use of mines, these were not employed.

The decision to allow the heavy weapons to remain on carriers was completely unsound. The fact that the situation was obscure and that the battalion had no attached supporting weapons made the carefully planned employment of all weapons, organic, one of prime importance. These weapons should have gone into position, the mortars registered, and a detailed plan for employment completed.

Too high tribute cannot be paid the artillery for the role played in this engagement. Harassed by enemy small arms fire, and too close to effectively fire in support of the Infantry, they quickly displaced, and in surprisingly short time went into action. The artillery and mortar concentrations delivered in front of the battle position to repel the enemy attack, and the extremely accurate fire support prior to the counterattack, made the task of the Infantryman one of movement only "Later reconnaissance proved both the accuracy and the terrifying results of this coordinated concentration".(46)

6. ENEMY ACTION

We can analyze the enemy action with a critical eye. The success of the battalion in the defense of the position was due, in a large measure, to the failure of the enemy to take full advantage of the tactical surprise he had gained, and of his armor and numerical superiority. Instead of pressing a frontal attack, he chose to fritter away time and energy in probing the flanks. Had he exploited the penetration of the position by his small patrol with armor, the position of the defenders would have been hopeless. With the use of flares

(46) A-4, p. 172

or any other artificial illumination, his tanks could have routed our Infantry and overrun the mortars.

His second glaring error was to allow his forces to build up enmass directly in front of the battalion position to such an extent that when the artillery concentrations came in, the effect was so appalling, a complete rout of his troops resulted. He had permitted himself to be lulled into a feeling of false security by our initial lack of high angle fire.

Lastly, the fire discipline displayed by front line riflemen during the initial contact with the enemy stopped the attack and delayed the Germans long enough to bring high angle fire down on them.

LESSONS

1. The reserve battalion must be assigned a definite mission or plan of employment to insure that full use is made of available time for detailed planning and reconnaissance.
2. Information of the enemy must be disseminated down to, and including, front line squads. Intelligence Agencies must assure themselves that this information reaches the units concerned.
3. Constant patrol action is necessary, not only to obtain information of the enemy, but information and disposition of friendly troops as well.
4. In a defensive situation, where routes are available and the employment of armor is an enemy capability, direct fire anti tank weapons must be included in the defensive fires.
5. Regardless of the tentative plan of employment, the reserve battalion should have an artillery liaison officer

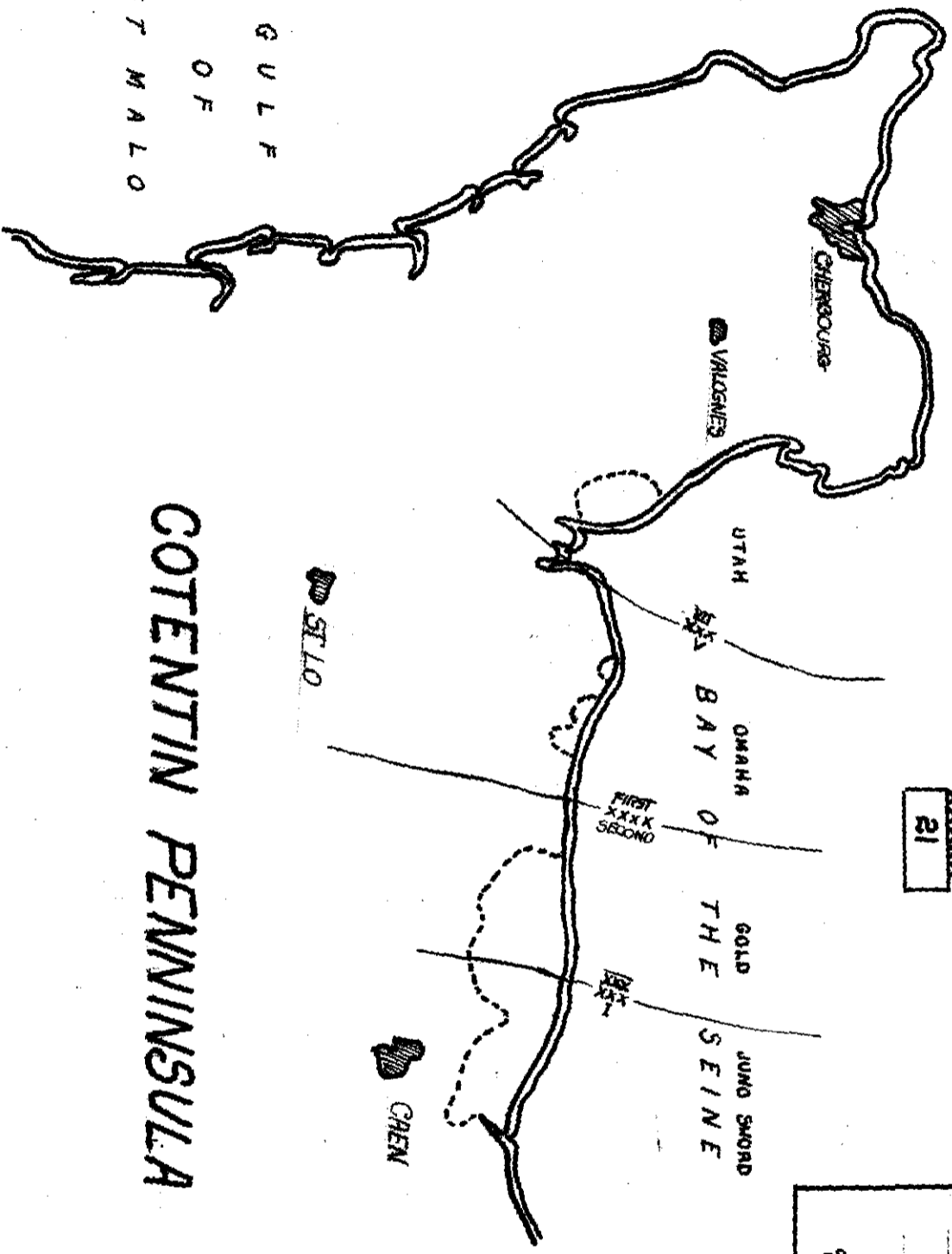
and forward observer attached, with an independent means of communication to artillery fire control center.

6. The use of armor to exploit the penetration of a position by infantry, should be rapid and aggressive.

7. Accurate artillery concentrations can be fired in support of units with the use of map data only

8. Rapid decisive action by front line riflemen, using his individual weapon, can effectively stop an enemy with zero visibility.

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OF
ST MALLO



COTENTIN PENINSULA

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THE INVASION OF
WESTERN EUROPE
MAP 'A'

0 5 10 15 20

