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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 47TH INFANTRY,
(9TH INFANTRY DIVISION), AT BOVENBURG FARM, NORTH
OF HAMICH, GERMANY, 16-24 NOVEMBER 1944
(Personal Experience of a Heavy Weapons Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION
ATTACKING IN A DENSE FOREST

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE THIRD BATTALION, 47TH INFANTRY
REGIMENT, (NINTH U.S. INFANTRY DIVISION),
AT BOVENBURG FARM, NORTH OF HAMICH, GERMANY,
16- 24 NOVEMBER 1944, (RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry Regiment, 9th U.S. Infantry Division, in the First U.S. Army Winter Offensive, during the period 16- 24 November 1944.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to review briefly the actions of the allied forces in Western Europe during 1944 that lead to the events to be described.

On 6 June 1944, the allies assaulted Germany's "Fortress Europe" over the Atlantic beaches of Normandy, France and quickly established a bridgehead. (1) On 25 July 1944, these forces broke out of their bridgehead, and armored columns exploiting this success quickly liberated all but the northeasterly provinces of France, and were on the Dutch frontier, by mid-September. (2)

While withdrawing before the allied columns, the enemy created a supply problem for the allies by leaving behind large garrisons to deny them port facilities on the Atlantic coast. (3) (4)

As a result, in the first weeks of September, the racing columns which were pursuing a thoroughly beaten enemy, outran their supply lines and ground to a halt before the German border system of fortifications, the Siegfried Line. (5) (See Map A)

The German Army, in spite of its defeats in France, managed to make an orderly withdrawal, and the slow-up of

(1) A-1, p. 185, (2) A-1, p. 191, (3) A-2, p. 129, (4) A-3, p. 233, (5) A-2, p. 131.

the allied drive gave it the opportunity needed to regroup and to occupy the fortifications on the frontier.

(6) In addition, a drastic sweep of the German manpower barrel had produced sufficient material for new formations. These were hastily trained, integrated with seasoned troops, and thrown in to occupy pillboxes and bunkers on the line under the direction of divisional staffs back from France. (7)

In the van of the allied advance, the First U.S. Army had come to rest in a sector along the German border from a point about five miles north of the city of Aachen to the eastern corner of Luxembourg. With limited supplies, it pushed on during the month of October and captured Aachen, an important keystone in the Siegfried Line. (8) (See Map A)

Meanwhile, the German high command ordered the evacuation of the civil populace in the path of the First Army. All able-bodied males were retained and under the supervision of military engineers they began construction of an extensive system of field fortifications to bolster the Siegfried Line which was being ruptured in the Aachen area. Villages and hamlets were turned into strongpoints, fields of fire were cleared in the cities and forests, and all high ground was deeply and expertly entrenched. (9)

So, even though the Siegfried Line itself was cleanly broken in the Aachen sector by First Army's October advances, the enemy found troops to shift to the new positions described above, and First Army found itself with-

(6) A-4, p.55 (7) A-5, p. 57 (8) A-4, p. 47-50 (9)
A-4, p.56

out the means to continue the advance. (10)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

With the clearance of the enemy from around the port of Antwerp on 9 November, the supply crisis was alleviated and a general winter offensive by the allies became possible. First U.S. Army was instructed to attack to the east with the Rhine River between the cities of Cologne and Bonn as its objective. (11) (See Map A)

The VII Corps of the First Army was assigned to make the main thrust. (12) In support of this operation there was planned the most ambitious air support program of the war to that date. This program, dubbed "Operation Q", involved the participation of over 5000 aircraft, dropping twenty million pounds of bombs on the fortified cities, villages and hamlets laying in the zone of advance. To prevent a repetition of the July 25th St Lo tragedy, where large numbers of friendly troops had been hit in the air preparation, an intricate system of front line identification was devised. (13)

For its attack, VII Corps had assigned to it the 1st, 4th, and 104th Infantry Divisions, the 3rd Armored Division, the 47th Regimental Combat Team, Combat Command "R" of the 5th Armored Division, and the 4th Cavalry Group, plus a strong allotment of heavy artillery. (14) The front line of the corps on the eve of the attack ran from near Wurselen, on the northern army boundary, to a point east of Zweifall, Germany. From north to south on this line were the 104th Infantry Division to Stolberg, (10) A-4, p. 58, (11) A-4, p. 65, (12) A-4, p. 67, (13) A-6, p. 261, (14) A-4, p. 71.

the 3rd Armored Division to Gressenicher Woods, and the 47th R.C.T. to near Zweifall. (15) (See Map B)

The 47th R.C.T., a part of the 9th Infantry Division, had been in its positions since 16 September following a penetration of the Siegfried Line. (16) The balance of the division, which had been operating to the south in the Hurtgen Forest, had become "bloody and bent" attempting similar penetrations. On 24 October, the 9th Division was relieved, but the 47th R.C.T. was left in the line. For the VII Corps operation, the combat team was attached to the 1st Infantry Division on 10 November. (17)

In its defensive positions, the combat team employed its three infantry battalions on line--- the 1st, 3rd, and 2nd from left to right. The 3rd Battalion occupied the town of Schevenhutte and the high ground around it. (18) It was planned to send the main thrust of the coming offensive through these positions. (See Map B)

The Corps order for the attack designated the 1st Infantry Division, with the 47th R.C.T. attached, to make the main effort. The initial objective was to be the fortified village of Gressenich, which was about 1500 yards west of Schevenhutte, and then the Nothberg-Hamich Ridge. The 104th Infantry Division was to attack simultaneously from its positions north of the Inde River. The 47th R.C.T. was to attack to the north and seize the Nothberg- Hucheln area. On order the 3rd Armored Division

(15) A-4, p. 65 (16) Personal knowledge (17) A-6, p. 162
(18) Personal knowledge

*ON POSITION 704
shown*

would attack from Stolberg and seize the Hastenrath-Werth- Kottenich area. All of these actions would squeeze the enemy into the city of Eschweiler and protect the left flank of the main effort. The 1st Division, following capture of the Nothberg- Hamich Ridge, would continue the attack to the northeast, cross the Roer River and capture Cologne. The 4th Infantry Division was to attack abreast and south of the 1st Division through the Hurtgen Forest. (19) (See Map B)

In addition to the air support of "Operation Q", massive artillery preparations were planned for an hour prior to H-hour on the initial objectives and for twenty minutes thereafter on "deep-in" targets. (20)

The date for the attack was set for sometime between 11 November and 16 November, the exact date being dependent on flying weather. (21)

The commander of the 1st Infantry Division planned to attack with three regiments abreast. The 47th R.C.T., on the left, was to attack Gressenich at H-hour. Following capture of the town, it was to seize the Nothberg-Hamich Ridge and from there, move to its assigned mission in the Nothberg- Hucheln area. The 16th Infantry was to attack through the positions of the 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry, and seize the town of Hamich. From there it was to continue to the northeast along the high ground. The 26th Infantry was to attack northeast from Schevenhutte, through the wooded hills on the right of the Wehe Valley, and maintain contact with the 4th Infantry Division. The 18th Infantry, initially in reserve, (19) A-4, p. 72, (20) A-4, p. 73, (21) A-4, p. 74.

was to make the main effort of the division up the Wehe Valley to Langerwehe and beyond. (22) (See Map B)

Not shown - Regts 22nd 51st

The commander of the 47th R.C.T. planned to accomplish his mission by assaulting Gressenich with his 1st Battalion. Also on D-day, Company K of the 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry, was to follow on the left of the 16th Infantry, and cut the Gressenich-Hamich Road. The rest of the 3rd Battalion would support the attack of the 16th Infantry by fire from its positions in and around Schevenhutte. Following the capture of Gressenich, the 1st and 3rd Battalions would assault the Nothberg-Hamich Ridge. (23) (See Map B)

Planned assault on Gressenich

THE BATTALION SITUATION

When the 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry, received notice of the forthcoming attack on about 7 November, the morale of the personnel was high although the men were extremely tired of the daily enemy shelling and sniping. Casualties had been low during the battalion's stay in Schevenhutte due to the excellence of the defensive positions held, but nerves were on edge after two months in the same positions. All professed to welcome a resumption of the attack, particularly when it became known that another unit was to make the initial assault. (24)

When the battalion had taken up its positions in Schevenhutte, the way before it to Duren and Cologne seemed void of enemy. However in the following two months a steady build-up of enemy strength had been re-

(22) A-7, p. 288 (23) Statement of Colonel (Brig. Gen.) George W. Smythe, CO, 47th R.C.T., during this period (24) Personal knowledge

ported by daily patrols to the front. By the time of the attack, patrolling was usually limited to a few hundred yards to the front and any daylight movement along the lines brought in hostile fire. (25)

The town of Schevenhutte consisted of about sixty houses. A resort town at the edge of the Hurtgen Forest, it lay in the Wehe Valley surrounded by heavily wooded hill masses that rose to 250 meters. Exits from the town led northeast along the Wehe River to Langerwehe, east through the Hurtgen, southwest along the Wehe to Zweifall, and west over the hills to Gressenich. The nearest town was Hamich, about 1000 yards north, however, there was no direct road from this town to Schevenhutte. On arrival, the 3rd Battalion had found Schevenhutte untouched by the war, but in the next two months, enemy artillery and mortars had destroyed or damaged every building in town.

The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Donald C. Clayman, had his forces disposed as follows: Company L was in the woods on the high ground northeast and east of the town, Company K was in the north and northwest outskirts of town, covering the approaches from Gressenich and Langerwehe, and Company I was west of the town covering the left flank of the battalion. Company M had its machine guns in position on the M L R and the mortar platoon occupied positions along the Zweifall road approximately an half mile from town. The battalion had attached a platoon of medium tanks from Company A of the 746th Tank Battalion and a platoon

(25) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Donald Clayman, 3rd Battalion Commander during this period.

of tank-destroyers from Company C of the 899th Tank-Destroyer Battalion, which occupied positions covering approaches to the town. A platoon of 4.2" chemical mortars of Company D, 87th Chemical Battalion, and the 1st Platoon of the regimental cannon company, were also attached to the 3rd Battalion and in position along the Zweifall Road in rear of the 81mm mortar platoon. (26)
(See Map C)

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK

Since occupying the Schevenhutte positions, Colonel Clayman and his staff had contemplated resuming the attack. They felt that an attack would most likely be through the positions of Company K, to the north between the towns of Gressenich and Hamich. With this in mind, much patrolling had been conducted by Company K and a route forward to the D-day objective of this unit was intimately known by the company officers. The one critical point along this route lay at a point where it crossed the Schevenhutte-Gressenich Road. Here was located a large concrete pillbox. Because of its vulnerability to fire from both the friendly and enemy lines, this position was not occupied by either side during daylight but was visited by both sides at night. Attempts had been made to destroy this position but sufficient explosive materials had not been available. As it blocked the route of Company K in the accomplishment of its D-day mission, Colonel Clayman ordered that the pillbox and its approaches be thoroughly booby-trapped, and that Company K set up a strongpoint around the pillbox each night until the attack to insure its being in friendly hands on D-day. (27)

(26) Personal knowledge, (27) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman.

As supporting fires could not be delivered from the front-line positions of Company M's machine guns, the 1st Platoon was withdrawn and placed in position on high ground south of Schevenhutte. Here the platoon could place indirect fire on defiladed areas in the enemy's rear. (28) (See Map C)

The effectiveness of this fire was demonstrated by an incident which took place one night shortly before the attack. An outpost of Company L had noted the regular nightly visit of a horse drawn ration vehicle to the opposite enemy positions. When 1st Lieutenant Louis M. Schneider, 1st Platoon, Company M, heard of this, he spent an evening at the outpost and learned from the sound of the vehicle that just before it halted and began dispensing rations to the messkit banging enemy, it passed over a wooden bridge. An examination of the map disclosed this bridge and Lieutenant Schneider figured the data for the guns to hit the bridge. A sound-power line was laid from the outpost to the gun positions, and the next night when the horses started over the word was passed to the guns and they opened fire. Judging from the screams of the animals and the sounds of their hurried departure, it is doubtful if the enemy in that sector had any rations that night. (29)

During the month of October, mortar ammunition had become a critical item of supply. To control its expenditure, all of the 60mm and 81mm mortars in the

(28) Indirect firing with heavy machine guns utilizes fire control instruments and artillery methods. It is described in full in "The Machine Gunner's Handbook", (Coates), The Infantry Journal Book Service, however, its employment is contrary to current doctrine, (29) Personal knowledge.

battalion had been tied into an improvised fire direction center under the control of 1st Lieutenant Ira Rosenfeld, the 81mm mortar platoon leader. For the accomplishment of the fire support mission of the battalion in the forthcoming attack, Lieutenant Rosenfeld recommended that this system be used again, adding the fires of the attached 4.2" chemical mortars and 105mm howitzers. The battalion commander approved this plan and communications were laid connecting all gun positions and observation posts to the fire direction center in the command post of Company M. On a map of the area, the enemy held portion was gridded into 200 yard squares. Each square was then numbered and the fire data to hit each square was figured for the base gun in each position. By this means, firing could be controlled along the entire battalion front to the extent of massing a rough time-on-target concentration of all guns on a single target area. (30)

To give additional weight to the supporting fire to be delivered, Colonel Clayman ordered the battalion anti-tank platoon and the attached tank and tank-destroyer platoons out of their defensive positions and into positions on the high ground west and south of Schevenhutte from which they could support the attack with high explosive fire. Tables for indirect firing with the 57mm anti-tank gun were available at the division ordnance company. (31) (See Map C)

Two days prior to the arrival of the 1st Infantry Division troops in the area, the 3rd Battalion began taking deceptive measure to cover the activities which were about to take place. The tanks were moved about at

(30) Statement of 1st Lt. (Capt.) William H. Horan, executive officer, Company M, during this period. (31) Personal knowledge.

night, and patrolling and mortar firing were intensified. Since it would be impossible to disguise completely the impending attack, it was intended that these measures would take the edge off the enemy's alertness. When the assault elements of the 1st Division closed into the area Colonel Clayman and his staff spent much time orienting the leaders on the terrain and enemy to their front. (32)

The enemy opposite the 3rd Battalion had been identified as elements of the German 12th Division. (33) Prisoners taken complained bitterly of their lack of reinforcements, the steady attrition of American mortar and artillery fire, and the inadequacy of their supplies. There were rumors of relief by another unit at any time. (34)

If these reports indicated low morale in the enemy infantry, the increased volume and accuracy of their fire indicated somewhat different conditions existing among enemy artillery and mortar crew. It was estimated that the enemy had over 300 pieces of artillery alone capable of firing into the area. (35) The increasing and undisguised traffic over the narrow road to the rear from Schevenhutte brought intense shelling from north, east and west as troops of the 1st and 4th Divisions assembled for the attack. The concentration of strength went on from 6 November to 10 November. By then each company of the 3rd Battalion had an assault battalion in its area. These crowded conditions provided fine targets for enemy observers. It was a rare shell that fell and did not take some toll in men or material. The weather

(32) Statement of Lt. Col Clayman (33) A-8, p. 90

(34) Personal knowledge (35) A-8, p. 90

during the period of waiting for the attack was bitterly cold and a steady rain flooded the foxholes of the infantry. Because of this weather, the attack was cancelled daily from 11 November to 15 November.

In their more permanent and improved positions, troops of the 3rd Battalion shared their improvised stoves and shelter with the less fortunate newly-arrived, and all troop leaders moved among their men inspecting the conduct of foot message exercises and and daily sock changing prescribed to minimize the danger of trenchfoot.

After five days of these strained conditions, the weather began to break on the morning of 16 November. High above and to the front colored bursts of anti-aircraft shells began to punctuate the patchy blue sky, marking the bomb-safe line. Cerise panels were broken out and prominently displayed at each installation and on every vehicle.

At about 1145 hours, the first flights of R.A.F. Lancasters passed over Schevenhutte on their way to their targets and at about the same time, the supporting artillery opened with a roar that paled the best efforts of the enemy. The next hour brought an ear-splitting spectacle of the might of the allied arms. Following the heavy and medium bombing deep in the enemy's rear, screaming P-47 "Thunderbolts" dived in to drop their destruction on Gressenich and Hamich, and other towns up the Wehe Valley. It was noted at this time that many of the dive-bombers, deceived by the smoke and dust of earlier bombings, were dropping their loads too far to the enemy's rear to be of the best ground support. The single tactical air control party in the

vicinity of Schevenhutte was incapable of correcting this to any great extent. (36)

THE SUPPORTING ROLE OF THE BATTALION

The fire support of the 3rd Battalion commenced at 1235, H-10. The Company M machine gun platoon fired on the objective of Company K, along the Gressencih-Hamich Road. The anti-tank platoon fired along the narrow-gage railroad from Gressenich to Hamich, and the massed mortars and cannon under the battalion fire direction center began dropping shells on that portion of the enemy's main line in the 26th Infantry's zone of advance. The tanks and tank-destroyers blasted away at the town of Hamich.

Exactly at 1245 hours, H-hour, infantry of the 1st Division rose and crossed the lines of the 3rd Battalion.

The battalion's mortars and cannon did their firing under the control of observation posts in and around Schevenhutte as there were no direct communications with the assaulting echelons. A pyrotechnic signal was pre-arranged for the lifting of these fires in the separate zones of advance of the 26th Infantry, so fire support was continuous until the attacking infantry was ready to make its initial assault. Thereafter, fires were shifted to deep-in targets unless specific concentrations were called for through normal means of communication. (37)

The supporting fires proved effective in covering the advance of the infantry to the first positions of the enemy. However, as the advance continued to the towns of Gressenich and Hamich, enemy resistance stiffened and the attack slowed. By 1600 hours, the 1st Battalion, (36), (37) Personal knowledge.

47th Infantry, was held up in the outskirts of Gressenich and the advance elements of the 16th Infantry were still outside of Hamich. Company K was then ordered forward on the left of the 16th Infantry to cut the road connecting these two towns. (38) (See Map C)

Quickly the riflemen and attached machine gunners from the 2nd Platoon, Company M, crossed the open ground and the road and entered the woods. Within an hour they reported that they had established road block in their objective and had met no resistance. Wire was laid forward to their positions and as darkness fell, the 3rd Battalion was waiting for orders for its employment in the fight. (39)

The fighting for the towns of Gressenich and Hamich continued through the night and the following morning. At about 1030 hours, 17 November, the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, cleared Gressenich of enemy, and that afternoon, after making no progress against Hamich, the 16th Infantry swung north of the town and captured Hill 232. (40) (41)

Not known
On 18 November, the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, began assaulting Hill 187 on the Nothberg-Hamich ridge, (42) while the 16th Infantry defended its gains against enemy counter-attacks. (43)

EMPLOYMENT OF THE THIRD BATTALION

By late afternoon on 19 November, the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, had captured Hill 187, and the 16th Infantry had all of the town of Hamich under control. (44)

(38) A-8, p. 91, (39) Personal knowledge (40) (42) A-6, p. 264, (41) (43) A-8, p. 92, (44) A-8, p. 94.

Plans were made for a continuation of the attack the next day which included the employment of the 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry. The regimental commander, Colonel George W. Smythe, planned to continue to the north along the ridge to Hill 167 with his 1st Battalion. As the 16th Infantry was to drive northeast from Hamich, a gap would develop between that unit and the 1st Battalion. Colonel Smythe decided to send his 3rd Battalion through this gap in an effort to flank the strong enemy position known to exist on Hill 167. In the gap was a large woods named the Bovenburgerwald. The near end of this woods lay along the Hamich-Northberg Road. It extended east for about 1300 yards and turned north for about 700 yards. At the head of the woods was a group of buildings known as the Bovenburg Farm. In rear of the farm buildings were the Aachen-Duren railroad, and the town of Hucheln. (See Map D)

Colonel Smythe had Colonel Clayman meet him at the regimental observation post and there issued orders for the battalion to move to Hill 232 at once. At 0800, 20 November, the 3rd Battalion, in conjunction with the 1st Battalion on its left and the 16th Infantry on its right would attack and clear the Bovenburgerwald of enemy. It would then be prepared to continue the attack to the regimental objective.

The 4.2" mortar, tank-destroyer, and cannon platoons reverted to their parent organizations at this time. (45)

Colonel Clayman immediately ordered Company K to move to Hill 232 and set up a defensive position, and (45) Statement of Col. (Brig. Gen.) Smythe.

returned to Schevenhutte to move the rest of his battalion. By 1800 hours, the battalion had occupied the hill, and during the last minutes of daylight, company commanders were able to make a visual reconnaissance of the ground over which they would attack the next morning. (46)

After studying the situation, Colonel Clayman decided to attack in the morning with Company K on the left and Company L on the right. Company K was given the mission of clearing the northern half of the woods and Company L was ordered to clear the southern half. Company I would be in battalion reserve and follow Company L. A machine gun platoon was attached to each of the two leading rifle companies, and the 81mm mortar platoon was directed to cover the attack from positions on the west side of Hill 232. As soon after 0800 as the road from Hamich to the Bovenburgerwald was cleared of mines, the attached tank platoon was to move to the woods and await further instructions. The battalion commander's party would follow Company K initially, and the battalion command post and the aid station were established in the narrow-gage railroad station at the edge of Hamich. The crest of Hill 232 was designated as the line of departure. (47) (See Map D)

During the night of 19- 20 November, patrols from the battalion intelligence section and Company L crossed the open northeast slope of Hill 232 and reconnoitered the forward edge of the woods. Troops of the 2nd Battalion of the 16th Infantry were located along the south edge of the woods, and contact was made with elements of

(46) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman (47) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman

the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry at the northeast corner of the woods. No contact was made with the enemy.

(48)

THE THIRD BATTALION ATTACKS

*Battalion 47th Infantry
Company K
19 November 1944*

At 0800, 20 November, scouts of the leading platoons of Companies K and L started down the open eastern slopes of Hill 232. This area was crossed without incident and by 0845, both lead companies had closed within the woods and were pressing on. Once inside the woods, the formations closed up and scouts were only a few yards in front of their companies. Under the thick canopy of trees, little daylight seeped through and visibility was limited to a few feet. Progress was slowed considerably. (49)

By 1000 hours, Company K had penetrated about 400 yards into the woods. 1st Lieutenant Hubert A. Urban, commanding Company K and at the head of his company, was kneeling over his SCR 300 radio giving an hourly position report to the battalion commander when, glancing up, he saw a group of German soldiers standing a few feet away. Lieutenant Urban dropped his hand set, grabbed his carbine and began firing. Immediately a sharp fire fight developed on all sides. The enemy seemed completely surprised by the appearance of Company K and their lack of organization was readily apparent. Pressing this advantage, the riflemen surged forward and the enemy disappeared into the underbrush. Lieutenant Urban noted the profusion of enemy equipment and the half construct-

(48) A-13, 19 November (49) Personal knowledge.

ed foxholes about him and correctly surmised that he had slipped past any security elements the enemy may have had posted, and that he had caught them while they were digging in a position. Sensing that some sort of covering fire would be coming down to cover the enemy's withdrawal, he ordered his men forward on the double. A few minutes later, an extremely heavy barrage fell on the vacated enemy position.

With the heavy shell fire falling at its heels, Company K crashed forward through the underbrush. In a few minutes, the company covered approximately 600 yards and came to an unimproved road that ran through the woods. Lieutenant Urban decided to halt, at this point, and regain contact with Company L on the right. The company had just organized a position when down the road from their rear came marching an enemy foot column. A light machine gun in position on the road went into action and sprayed the column. After a short fire fight, over 100 enemy were captured. Interrogation of these prisoners revealed that they were from the same unit as the one previously contacted by Company K. After withdrawing, they had reorganized on the road near Buschof Farm, (see Map E), and proceeded to the rear only to be intercepted by the fast moving Company K. (50)

Just before the fighting began, Colonel Clayman and his command group had stopped at the command post of the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, which was located in a house at the northwest corner of the woods. When firing was heard, the radio operator attempted to contact (50) Statement of 1st Lt. (Capt.) William L. McWaters, executive officer of Company K during this period.

the companies. Company K could not be reached, but Company L reported that they had run into the enemy and had taken a few prisoners. At about 1130 hours, 1st Lieutenant William L. McWaters, the executive officer of Company K, arrived with that unit's prisoners and reported the company situation to Colonel Clayman. The colonel decided to have Company K remain where it was until Company L also reached the road. By this time, the enemy had begun sporadic mortar fire on the woods. (51)

Company L, led by 1st Lieutenant Vestal R. Lester, was having difficulty catching up with Company K. In their zone of advance, a small but tenacious group of enemy forced Company L to deploy and call for supporting fire before pushing on. The enemy would then withdraw a few hundred yards and again offer resistance. Final elimination of this enemy took some time. Also, because of the shape of the woods and the direction of the road, Company L had further to go to reach the road than did Company K. (See Map E) It was about 1545 before this was accomplished. (52)

By this time, it was beginning to get dark in the forest. Colonel Clayman decided to request permission to stop in place for the night, rather than continue to the northern tip of the woods in darkness. The regimental commander granted this request, and steps were taken to get the tanks, hot food and the individual rolls forward to the positions. Contact patrols were organized between all companies and to the 1st Battalion, 47th (51) Personal knowledge (52) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman.

Infantry, on the left. Another patrol was dispatched from Company L to cross the open ground to Heilstern and contact elements of the 16th Infantry reportedly holding this town. This patrol was driven back by tanks, or self-propelled guns, in position around Heilstern, and no contact was made. At this time enemy activity was observed from Company L's right flank along the wooded ridge leading north from Heilstern. (53)

The battalion ammunition and pioneer platoon swept the road to the positions for mines. To save time, the mines that were discovered were covered with messkits. These messkits could be seen in the dark, and by driving around them the vehicles got forward by 2000 hours. Wire was laid forward to the battalion along the road, and by an alternate route through the woods. While laying this wire, the battalion communications officer and several linesmen became casualties when caught in one of the enemy mortar concentrations that fell in the area during the night. The loss of these men, and the persistent rain, seriously affected the efficiency of communication throughout the rest of this operation. (54)

The 81mm mortar platoon moved in to new positions south of the woods, and battalion command group spent the night in the command post of the 1st Battalion.

(55)

Throughout the night, isolated enemy of the formation that Company K had wrecked drifted about in the area, but offered little opposition to the battalion's

(53) (54) (55) Personal knowledge

activities. These troops were identified as part of the 47th Volksgrenadier Division. This unit had been in the act of moving in to relieve troops on the front line in the Schevenhutte sector when the air and artillery bombardment commenced on 16 November. In spite of this disruption, they were able to reinforce the troops around Hamich, because they had avoided the towns upon which most of the bombardment had been placed. The company which had been overrun by Company K had been constructing a reserve line for the Hamich defenders to fall back on. They had had no idea of the proximity of the Americans. (56)

At 2130 hours, 20 November, Colonel Clayman received orders from the regimental commander that at 0800 on the following morning the battalion was to attack to the north and seize the town of Hucheln. The 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, would continue to attack Hill 167 on the 3rd Battalion's left, and the 16th Infantry, from its positions in Heistern, would attack north along the ridge east of the 3rd Battalion's positions. From the results of Company L's patrol action toward Heistern at 1600 hours, Colonel Clayman doubted the report of the capture of this town and requested artillery fires on the known enemy positions in that area as preparation for the morning's attack. However, these fires, and also fires on the ridge east of the battalion's positions were refused by the 1st Division Artillery Headquarters as being too close to the reported positions of the 16th (56) Personal knowledge, A-8, p. 93-94.

Infantry. (57)

Because of the battalion's exposed flanks, and as the woods were now hardly wide enough to deploy more than a company, the battalion commander decided to attack the next morning in a column of companies. Company L would lead off and seize the Bovenburg Farm buildings. This accomplished, Company I, following Company L, would pass beyond and assault Hucheln. Company K would be in reserve and follow Company I. The attached tank platoon would approach the objective of Company L by following the road that ran along the east side of the woods. A twenty minute artillery and mortar preparation was planned on the farm buildings and the southwestern edge of Hucheln. The only artillery forward observer with the battalion, and an observer from the 81mm mortar platoon would accompany Company L. One machine gun platoon was attached to Company L and another to Company I. Orders for the attack were issued at 2200 hours and then the battalion settled down for sleep under a steady drizzle of rain. (58) (See Map E)

*No Bovenburg shown
ON map
S.W.C.*

order

CONTINUATION OF THE ATTACK AND A REVERSAL

At 0600 the following morning, Company L sent patrols forward to seek the enemy prior to the jump-off. These patrols proceeded about 200 yards forward and detected German voices and sounds of movement. They were not detected by the enemy and returned with their information. Colonel Clayman included this area in the (57) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman (58) Personal knowledge.

*where is Co. L?
did patrol go?*

preparatory fires for the attack. (59)

A battalion observation post was established in a dugout along side the road, which had sheltered the command post of Company L during the night. At 0740 hours, the mortar and artillery preparations commenced. At this time, similar fires could be heard in the vicinity of Hill 167, but all was quiet on the right flank.

At 0800 hours, the leading platoons of Company L rose from their holes and moved forward on the heels of the lifting preparatory fires. In a matter of minutes, Company L began meeting resistance but this was quickly overcome. Apparently the fires had caught the Germans completely by surprise. About 200 prisoners were rounded up and sent to the rear, then Company L quickly reorganized and continued towards their objective with Company I close behind. (60) At about 0930, scattered firing was heard to the front, followed by the chatter of heavy machine guns. Shortly thereafter, the first enemy shell fire of the morning came in with a crash. (61)

The leading platoon of Company L, led by Staff Sergeant Raymond W. King, came to the far edge of the woods at about 0930 hours. Before them lay an open meadow extending for about 300 yards to the buildings of the farm. Most of the buildings were enclosed by a stone wall about eight feet high. A two and an half story house of stone was the main structure within the wall. A few yards to the right of the house were a barn and

(59) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman (60) (61) Personal knowledge.

*Co I not shown
on Map E.*

other out buildings. The meadow was broken up by a shallow stream bed running from the woods to the buildings. About a hundred yards from the edge of the woods was a wire fence covered with brush which extended across the front. Beyond the farm was the twenty foot embankment of the Aachen-Duren railroad. This was pierced by underpasses for two roads leading to Hucheln, the rooftops of which could be seen beyond the embankment.

As Sergeant King signalled his men forward, all was quiet except for distant firing to the west and the grunting of tanks moving back in the woods. No movement was observed to the front. (See Map FO- Sketch)

As the platoon moved out, a few shots rang out from the fence line. The platoon dropped to the ground and returned the fire. (62)

The 1st Platoon, Company M, which had been attached to Company L for the attack, had found positions at about 0900, along the west edge of the woods. From here the farm buildings and the railroad embankment could be covered by the machine guns. The squads set up their weapons and the platoon leader watched for the movement of Company L. When Sergeant King's platoon left the woods and the enemy fired, all four machine guns retaliated with rapid fire on the buildings. Under the cover of this fire, the riflemen rushed the fence line and routed the estimated German squad entrenched there. At this instant, a shower of heavy mortar rounds fell on the positions of the machine gun platoon, silence-

(62) Statement of 1st Lt. Louis M. Schneider, platoon leader, 1st Plt., Co. M, during this period.

ing their guns. (63) The riflemen of Company L pushed on from the fence line but were beaten back by heavy small arms fire and grenades from the windows of the farm house. Some twenty men of this platoon were later found dead within ten yards of the wall around the buildings. The remainder of the platoon withdrew to the fence line and occupied the German positions there. (64)

In the meantime, Lieutenant Lester had arrived at the edge of the woods and as the enemy fire was falling on the machine gun platoon, more shells began falling near his position. Seeing the streambed to his right front, he dashed for that cover and the rest of Company L followed.

Lieutenant Lester then contacted the battalion commander by radio and explaining the situation, requested that the tanks be hurried to the scene. Colonel Clayman left the observation post and caught up with the tanks which were creeping down the road on the east edge of the woods. The tank platoon leader was concerned about possible mines in the road, and deep mud in the adjacent fields precluded deployment of the platoon. As the lead tank came to a point from which the buildings could be seen, the platoon came under fire from four or five enemy tanks firing from the edge of the woods north of Heistern. The two lead tanks were immediately knocked out, blocking the road, and the remainder spun about and scuttled back into the woods. (65)

While this action was taking place, it seemed to
(63) (64) Statements of Lt. Schneider (65) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman, personal knowledge.

the men in Companies L and I that the entire weight of the German Artillery Corps was massed on their small patch of Bovenburg Woods. At about 1000 hours, Captain Ralph E. Manuel, commander of Company I, concluded that to remain in the woods was suicidal for his company. Practically every round coming in was a tree burst from which there was no cover. But in the meadow to the front there seemed to be less fire, so he went forward with his orderly to see what Company L was doing about the situation.

When Captain Manuel found Lieutenant Lester in the streambed, he noted that little of the total enemy fire was coming from the buildings and he felt that an aggressive attack made quickly would take the buildings. He told Lieutenant Lester to move his company into the buildings. The lieutenant replied that he was trying to do just that but couldn't get his men moving. Captain Manuel then noticed that a lone of Company L, the survivors of the platoon of Sergeant King were firing their rifles. He yelled at these men to charge the buildings and ran forward to join them. At this time, the enemy in the buildings opened fire with a machine gun from the upstairs of the main buildings, enfilading the streambed and causing many casualties, including Lieutenant Lester.

Catching up with the riflemen, Captain Manuel decided to send half his force around each side of the wall, and assault the position from the rear. Back at the edge of the woods he saw a friendly tank and he yelled and signalled for this tank to fire on the building

but he got no response. This was one of the tanks which had already been knocked out. By now, enemy tanks, or anti-tank guns, were firing into the woods from all sides. Two tanks could be seen firing from the north side of Hill 167. Another was operating up and down in back of the railroad embankment, and a fourth was firing from under the Heistern-Hucheln Road underpass of the railroad. (See Map E) As Captain Manuel's group approached the buildings, they came under concentrated small arms fire and Sergeant King was wounded. The captain sent him back with a message to Colonel Clayman to send Company I up to join him, and to fire artillery at the embankment. Under the shelter of the wall, these men found that they were safe from small arms fire, but then the enemy began throwing grenades over the wall on top of them. The men dashed around to the rear of the buildings and met head on with a counter-attacking force led by a German captain. Sergeant Cleveland Dykes was first on the trigger of his automatic rifle and dispersed this group, but a moment later he was killed. Captain Manuel, followed by the remainder of his men, ran through a door in the wall and into the arms of a group of waiting enemy who took them prisoner. (66)

Back at the battalion observation post, which was also under heavy fire, Colonel Clayman requested artillery fire on the positions of the tanks located north of Heistern, but again this fire was refused by 1st Division Artillery as being too close to the 16th Infantry. The colonel also repeatedly radioed the companies for in-

(66) Statement of Captain (Major) Ralph E. Manuel, commanding Company I at this time.

formation. There was no response from Company L, but finally Company L's operator called in and reported that Captain Manuel had been killed or captured. He also stated that the executive officer had disappeared and that one of the platoon leaders had taken command. Company I was suffering heavy casualties and waiting for orders. (67)

At this time, approximately 1200 hours, down the railroad from Eschweiler came a self-propelled armored railroad gun. This formidable device halted at the edge of the woods east of the farm and, ignoring the hail of artillery fire being directed at it, began pumping 170mm shells into the positions of the battalion. This continued for about ten minutes and then the piece continued to the east. This novel close support weapon was blasted out of existence later in the afternoon by friendly planes. (68)

1st Lieutenant Gael M. Frazier, the executive officer of Company L, arrived at the observation post at about 1230 hours and reported that all of the officers in the company were casualties except himself and that he had less than forty men left. He requested that the tank platoon again make an attempt to get down to the farm and help his company seize the buildings. He had been unable to find the artillery forward observer and the mortar observer was dead. The tank platoon leader was sent for and when he entered the dugout he was completely shaken and incoherent. When Colonel Clayman (67) Personal knowledge (68) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman.

ordered him to take his tanks down to the farm again, the officer became hysterical. A few minutes later he was wounded. (69)

By this time the message from Captain Manuel arrived by messenger, and Colonel Clayman left the observation post with the mortar platoon leader to see what could be done with Company I. There were no communications by wire or radio left to the battalion commander, except for the more powerful set of the artillery liaison officer at regimental headquarters and through him the regimental commander. (70)

At Company I, the battalion commander found that this company was decimated. The shell fire was shredding the trees about it and blocking every exit from their position. Colonel Clayman returned to the observation post and over the artillery radio, explained the situation to regiment. Permission was immediately granted to disengage and runners went forward with orders for the companies to withdraw to their original positions. (71)

Shortly after this, the battalion executive officer, Major William L. Tanner, arrived with the armored half-track prime movers of the anti-tank platoon and a group of cooks and clerks. These men and vehicles went to work evacuating the wounded. Major Tanner took one of the half-tracks into the open field east of the woods and from this mobile observation post directed smoke con-

(69) Personal knowledge (70) Personal knowledge (71) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman.

centrations to cover the withdrawal of the battalion.

(72)

The heavy weapons company commander was dispatched to the right flank to find out why so much of the fire had been coming in from that direction. This officer found no one on the right flank. Dropping back, he found the command post of the adjacent battalion commander and learned from this officer that his unit had not been ordered to attack at 0800 hours that morning, but, instead, had been shifted south to reinforce the troops still fighting at Heilstern. (73)

As the smoke covered the farm area, the enemy fire slackened and the troops were able to move back. Each returning group was met by a member of the command group and guided to its original positions. There it was given orders to prepare to defend against an expected enemy counter-attack. To reinforce the line, Colonel Clayman sent for the intelligence section, the ammunition and pioneer platoon, and the anti-tank platoon. By 1600 hours, the battalion was manning a weak but organized defensive position. (74)

Patrols of medical aid men augmented by cooks and headquarters clerks went forward to pull out the wounded that had been left in the withdrawal. This work, under the direction of 1st Lieutenant William H. Horan, executive officer of Company M, continued throughout the night. The only enemy encountered were German litter bearers evacuating some of Company L's wounded. These

(72) Personal knowledge (73) Personal knowledge (74) Personal knowledge.

were relieved of their loads and sent on their way. (75)

The casualties for the day's operations totalled twenty officers and 335 enlisted men as killed, wounded or missing. This was more than the entire regiment had suffered in a single day in any of its campaigns. (76)

Throughout the night the battalion awaited the expected enemy counter-attack, but this did not materialize. On the following morning, the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, captured Hill 167, and the 2nd Battalion was moving on Hucheln from the west. The 3rd Battalion became the regimental reserve and remained in position.

On 22 November and 23 November, patrols from Company K probed the farm but reported no enemy activity. In the early morning of 24 November, Company K slipped down through the woods and after a ten minute preparation by the artillery and mortars, and a platoon of machine guns, successfully assaulted the farm and the railroad embankment against light resistance. The company, and the 2nd Platoon, Company M, were then attached to the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, for operations east of Hucheln. The 3rd Battalion remained in regimental reserve. (77)

The return of Captain Manuel to the battalion in April, 1945, after his recapture by the Russian Army, shed further light on the enemy situation at Bovenburg Farm on 21 November. The enemy occupied the farm proper with a paratroop company, reinforced with heavy

(75) Statement of 1st Lt. (Capt.) William H. Horan, executive officer, Co. M during this period, (76) A-9, p. 105, personal knowledge, (77) Personal knowledge.

machine guns, mortar, and a tank. The balance of a paratroop battalion occupied positions along the railroad embankment and in the woods east of the farm. An artillery observer was also installed in the farm house. The enemy apparently had no idea of the damage dealt the 3rd Battalion, and fearing stronger attacks, withdrew to Weisweiler on the night 21- 22 November. (78)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In studying this operation, with its prelude of massed air and artillery support, it is inevitable that it be compared unfavorably with that similar operation known popularly as "The St Lo Breakthrough". VII Corps, (with the 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry, participating), touched off both of these attacks, and while the effort at St Lo was a smashing success after only one day's slugging by the infantry, the 16 November attack was still inching ahead on 21 November, five days after the jump-off. One reason why a repetition of "The Breakthrough" did not occur was that the air assault failed to deal a devastating blow to the enemy infantry as it had in Normandy. This failure was the result of supercaution on the part of the high command. No chance was taken which might have resulted in the bombing of friendly forces. While it was necessary to handle such a lethal problem as "Operation "Q" with care, note that there was no heavy bombing within three miles of the well-marked friendly front lines. Dive bombers hit only the easily identified enemy held towns in rear of the enemy lines, (78) Statement of Capt. (Major) Ralph Manuel.

and much of this bombing went astray, still further to the rear. There was no bombing of the enemy's front line positions and this would have been possible if sufficient tactical air control parties had been made available, to talk the pilots down on their exact targets. If a thorough saturation had been given Gressenich, Hamich, and the surrounding woods and hills, it is doubtful if the enemy would have been able to dig himself out of the ruins to man his defenses as well and as quickly as he did.

As for the battalion's operations, Company K's action on 20 November is certainly worthy of praise. The company commander's ready realization of the impending enemy reaction to his penetration, and his prompt decision to move forward quickly, undoubtedly saved his unit many casualties. The company reacted promptly, and with tactical unity, rushed forward to cut off the withdrawing enemy. These acts exemplify the highest type of leadership and troop discipline.

The attack of the 3rd Battalion on Bovenburg Farm on 21 November failed primarily because of a lack of coordination of effort between the 1st Infantry Division and its attached 47th R.C.T. For the attack on this date, the combat team commander was informed that all battalions would jump off from their current positions at 0800 hours. Thereafter, plans for the employment of the left flank battalion of the 16th Infantry, (on the 3rd Battalion's right), were changed and this unit did not move forward as originally scheduled. The 47th R.C.T. was not informed of this change. (79)

(79) Statement of Col (Brig. Gen.) Smythe.

Heistern was reported as having been taken by the 1st Division on 20 November. Actually this town was not cleared until 22 November. (80) On 21 November, much of the fire that decimated the 3rd Battalion was directed from Heistern and the high ground around this town.

The formation adopted by the 3rd Battalion on 21 November might be criticized as not employing the principle of mass, however, the column formation in the attack is accepted as proper when flanks are exposed. If it becomes impossible to maintain contact with adjacent units, it is safe to assume that your flanks are exposed. Due to the density of Bovenburgerwald, it was impossible for the 3rd Battalion to maintain contact with its adjacent units.

The attached tank platoon was operating with the 3rd Battalion for the first time. Consequently, little mutual confidence was displayed by either tanker or infantryman. Standard attachments should be the rule if complete mutual confidence and co-operation are to be enjoyed. Recent changes in the table of organization for the infantry regiment should go far to correct this deficiency, which was a common one in World War II. The main advantages of tanks as weapons rest in their shock action, fire power and mobility. The tank platoon working with 3rd Battalion on 21 November exhibited none of these characteristics in its movement to the farm. Had the tanks moved in fast, they would not have

(80) A-14, 20- 22 November, 1944.

been such easy targets for the enemy gunners. Roadbound as they were while rounding the eastern side of the woods, the tanks were at a distinct disadvantage. However, the situation was critical and it is believed that their employment was justified.

While their efforts were futile in the face of overwhelming enemy resistance, the action involving Captain Manuel and Sergeant King's platoon serves as an excellent example of the inspired reaction of soldiers to courageous leadership.

Much credit is due the battalion's small unit leaders and the individual men for their self-control in the face of seeming disaster. At no time was there any sign of a rout, or any mass hysteria. When orders were issued, response was prompt. The withdrawal was made in an orderly manner. A typical example was the return of the machine gun platoon that supported the initial assault on the farm. When the order came to withdraw, the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and four men were all that remained of a full platoon. These men hand-carried back to their original positions three complete heavy machine guns, with accessories and ammunition. The fourth gun had taken a direct hit and was abandoned.

The terrific beating taken by the 3rd Battalion was not entirely in vain. The enemy was disconcerted by his numerous casualties, and the appearance of the battalion in the Bovenburg Woods. The salient thus created was one reason the enemy withdrew from Hill 167 and Heistern to a new line further east. (81)

(81) Statement of Lt. Col. Clayman.

LESSONS

Lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. Tactical air support must be brought in close enough to allow the attacking infantry time to assault the target before the enemy can recuperate.

2. When an enemy position is broken, the advantage must be exploited quickly and vigorously for maximum success.

3. When coming under shell fire, attacking infantry must press on to their objective as rapidly as possible. Artillery and mortar fire cannot be adjusted as fast as disciplined and well-led infantry can advance.

4. Vigorous patrolling by a halted attacking force must be a regular procedure if contact with the enemy is to be maintained.

5. A unit may attack in column if its flanks are exposed. This formation offers the commander good control when operating under conditions of restricted visibility, however, the punch of the unit is weakened by its use.

6. Radios alone should not be depended upon when operating in dense woods, or in extremely wet weather. Under these conditions, wire lines must parallel radio nets.

7. Supporting weapons should be in position to cover the advance of infantry whenever and wherever possible.

8. Attached units should be given the same

assistance and guidance as organic units if co-ordination of operations is to be effective.

9. When their employment is justified, tanks should move in to battle exploiting their characteristic shock action, fire power and mobility to the utmost.

10. Tanks and infantry should habitually train and operate as ~~part of the same team~~ in order to develop mutual confidence.

11. Shelling troops in wooded areas can be as effective as air bursts over troops in the open.

12. It must be expected that troop leaders and other key personnel will become casualties in an infantry attack. Replacements must be designated and trained before combat is initiated.

13. Great care must be taken that control is maintained during a withdrawal.