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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 26TH INFANTRY (1ST INFANTRY DIVISION)
IN THE BATTLE OF THE HARZ MOUNTAINS, 13-22 APRIL 1945
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of Assistant Regimental S-3)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY REGIMENT
ATTACKING IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 26TH INFANTRY (1ST INFANTRY DIVISION)
IN THE BATTLE OF THE HARZ MOUNTAINS, 13-22 APRIL 1945
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experiences of Assistant Regimental S-3)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, in the Battle of the Harz Mountains, Germany, 13-22 April 1945, during the Central European Campaign of World War II.

The Harz comprises the northernmost chain of mountains in Germany, extending for a length of 58 miles and an average width of approximately 18 miles. There is a sharp contrast between the mountains, which are covered primarily with coniferous trees and numerous small streams trickling down as many ravines, and the surrounding plains of well laid-out, fertile farmland. The mean annual temperature is 41 degrees Fahrenheit. Brocken, the highest peak in central Germany, rising 3745 feet above sea level, dominates the entire chain of mountains and surrounding plains. Near the summit of this peak vegetation becomes rather scanty, disappearing approximately 100 feet from the top. (1)

At this point, it is necessary to orient the reader on the major developments before the 1st Division reached the Harz Mountains.

On 7 March 1945, Germany's last major natural obstacle to the Allied onslaught was breached when a small spearhead of the 9th Armored Division seized the Ludendorff bridge across the Rhine River at Remagen. Within one week after this crossing, the allied spearheads were racing eastward, isolating corps and divisions and cutting off one army from another. (2)

The Allied forces completed the largest double envelopment in history when the Ninth and First Armies met at Lippstadt on 1 April, closing the Ruhr or "Rose" pocket. This pocket comprised about 5,000 square miles,

(1) A-1, pp 312, 331; (2) A-2, pp 91, 103.

including some of the most highly developed industrial areas of Germany. Inside the pocket were the whole of the German Army Group B and two corps of Army Group H, totaling 21 divisions or more than 325,000 men and enormous quantities of supplies. (3) (See Map A)

Let us consider the enemy situation for a moment. With the loss of the Ruhr, the only two possible barriers between the Allies and Berlin were the Weser and Elbe Rivers. Neither of these would halt our forces for any great length of time, but there was one possible stronghold which could be fortified - the Harz Mountains, "an area as difficult and forbidding militarily as it was scenic in peace-time. There he might hope to reassemble whatever forces he still had on hand to stage a reverse Eastogons. The mountains would take time to reduce for no other reason than the terrain, and when defended by even the low-calibre troops at hand the area might possibly hold out successfully enough to throttle down the high-g geared drive into the vitals of the Reich." (4)

The encirclement of the Ruhr, isolating the industrial heart of Germany, set the stage for the accomplishment of the final objective assigned the Supreme Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, by the combined Chiefs of Staff - the complete destruction of the German armed forces. (5)

As soon as the Ruhr was sufficiently secure so as not to present any major threats to our advances to the east, the Supreme Commander considered three possible plans to accomplish his mission. Any one or all of these plans would produce the required results. The allied armies were so disposed that a minimum of regrouping would be necessary to follow any of these plans. These plans were: (See Map A)

1. A drive south down the Danube Valley with the objective of isolating the "National Redoubt", in southern Bavaria and Austria, reportedly being built up as a final stronghold for the Nazi Government, and a junction with the Soviets in Austria.

(3) A-2, p. 104; A-5, p. 64; (4) A-10, p. 77; (5) A-4, p. 56

2. A central advance on the Kassel-Leipzig axis to split Germany in half and moving the Soviet main effort, and to capture the last German industrial area (Leipzig-Chemnitz).

3. An advance across the north German plains to secure the German ports and cut off Holland, Denmark and Norway from Germany. (6)

After consideration of the three plans above the Supreme Commander decided that one main effort, the central drive, would shorten the war and reinforcement divisions could best be brought into play as they were released from action in the Ruhr. This plan would also afford more flexibility as the situation developed in either the south or north. (7)

The 12th Army Group, commanded by General Omar N. Bradley, was ordered to destroy the enemy in the Ruhr pocket and to launch the main attack on the Axis Kassel-Leipzig and be prepared to carry out operations east of the Elbe River if the opportunity presented itself. The 21st Army Group in the north and the 6th Army Group in the south were instructed to launch limited attacks to support the main effort. (8)

On 6 April, the 12th Army Group launched its attack with the First Army in the center, the Ninth Army on the north and Third Army on the south.

This found the First Army fighting on two fronts - the V and VII Corps attacking eastward and the III Corps and XVIII Airborne Corps fighting westward into the Ruhr. (9)

The VII Corps, on the left flank of the First Army zone, comprised of the 1st and 104th Infantry Divisions and the 3rd Armored Division was ordered to advance rapidly along the line Einbeck-Northeim-Duderstadt and be prepared on army order to continue to the Elbe River. It was directed to by-pass but contain any resistance in the Harz Mountains. The V Corps was ordered to advance rapidly in its zone to seize the line Duderstadt-

(6) A-4, pp. 96, 97; (7) A-2, p. 106; A-4, p. 97; (8) A-2, p. 106; A-4, p. 96; (9) A-3, p. 37.

Schlotheim. Both the V and VII Corps were given the authority to exploit any opportunity to seize a bridgehead across the Elbe River and to be prepared to make contact with the Soviet forces. (10) (See Map 4)

On 12 April, First Army, in carrying out instructions from Commanding General, 12th Army Group, issued orders to V and VII Corps that the advance within the Army Zone would be limited to securing a general line between Leipzig and Magdeburg, including a bridgehead over the Elbe River in the vicinity of Dessau. With the exception of this bridgehead, any advance beyond the line of the Mulde River would be made only on orders from First Army headquarters. (11) (See Map 4)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

By 11 April, elements of VII Corps, 3rd Armored Division, were in the vicinity of Nordhausen. The 104th Infantry Division was closely behind the 3rd Armored Division and blocking the southern approaches of the Harz Mountains. The First Infantry Division with the 4th Cavalry Group attached had entered the western edge of the Harz Mountains by clearing Osterode and Bad Grund against increasingly heavy resistance in the form of road blocks, tanks, anti-tank guns, small arms and bazooka fire, and blown bridges. (See Map B) Bad Grund produced a prisoner, a General Major Goerbig, commander of a battle group under the 6th (German) Corps, who testified in the prisoner-of-war cage that over-all command of the Harz Mountains had been invested in the 11th Panzer Army, a unit whose antecedents were not very clear. Evidently, it was only a headquarters transferred from the eastern front responsible to no one but Marshal Kesselring. There was no organized army involved. The 83rd Infantry Division, Ninth US Army, was moving through the northern edge of the Harz in an effort to meet the thrust of the 3rd Armored Division, First Army, which was moving on the

(10) A-3, p. 62; A-3, p. 381; (11) A-3, p. 62.

southern edge of the mountains. This link-up east of the Harz would seal off all men and equipment which the Germans had been able to reassemble there. To the south of VII Corps, V Corps was making rapid advances to the east. (12)

THE DIVISION SITUATION

On 13 April 1945, the mission of the 1st Infantry Division "was to eliminate all enemy resistance within its zone of responsibility in the Harz Mountains and to maintain contact with the 83rd Infantry Division on the north and the 104th Infantry Division on the south." (13) (See Map B)

The terrain in the Division's zone of responsibility was about as forbidding to an attacker as could be found anywhere. It was rougher than the Hurtgen Forest in that the woods were thicker and there were many more draws, ravines and hills. It favored the enemy more than the Ardennes because the road net was more limited. The roads which could withstand heavy traffic were easy to block. Large trees lined these roads, and the number of road-blocks which could be thrown across critical points were limited only by the amount of explosives on hand and the number of men available to handle saws. Many of these critical points - hairpin turns in the roads - were taken where the bordering trees had explosives strapped to them but whose defenders had been unable to set them off. These winding roads could also be cratered on a moment's notice. (14)

As the 1st Division entered the Harz, it knew of only one German Corps in its path, the 6th (Wehrkreis) Corps. As the fighting progressed, however, it became apparent from the variety of units encountered, both divisional and non-divisional, that the Harz mountains were defended by four Corps and not one - the 6th and 9th Corps, both converted Wehrkreis units; the 66th and 67th Corps, both old line units which had been moved up from

(12) A-7, p. 290; A-6, p. 329; A-10, p. 61; A-9, p. 587; A-3, p. 61;
(13) A-9, p. 389; (14) A-9, p. 395; A-10, p. 90; Personal knowledge.

The regiment had attached to it for this operation Company C, 1st Engineer (C) Battalion; Company C, 745th Tank Battalion; and Company C, 634th TD Battalion. The first, second and third platoons of the tank and TD battalions were further subdivided into 2nd, 3rd and 7th Battalions respectively.

The regimental plan of attack for 13 April called for the 2nd Battalion, minus Company I, to follow the 1st Battalion with the mission of protecting the left flank of the regiment. Company I was to remain in Clausthal-Zellerfeld and patrol the twin cities, thereby protecting the regimental combat trains. This was necessary because the enemy situation was obscure, at this time. Units of the regiment were continually flushing out prisoners in the rear areas, some armed and some not, some in uniform and some in civilian clothes. The 1st Battalion was given the mission of clearing out the edges of the twin-cities. (19) (See Map C)

Enemy forces facing the regiment at this time comprised the remnants of the German VI Corps. Identified units of this corps included the 9th Panzer Division; elements of the 116th Panzer Division; and the Westphalia Brigade, an SS Panzer unit which had been delaying our progress for quite a few days. In addition there were numerous small battle groups of unknown origin which had drifted in from the Ruhr and other sectors. (20)

THE ATTACK OUT OF CLAUSTHAL-ZELLERFELD

The attack jumped off at 0600 hours 13 April with the 2nd Battalion moving through positions held by the 1st Battalion. The 3rd Battalion followed the 2nd on orders from the Regimental Commander. (21)

The 2nd Battalion encountered only scattered resistance until about 1630 hours when Company P, leading the attack, hit a strong point at 1

(19) Personal knowledge; A-14; (20) A-10, p. 81; (21) Personal knowledge;

composed of a roadblock of large trees felled across the road defended by dug-in infantry and three tanks. One of these tanks an American M-24, was knocked out by the attached tank platoon and the other two withdrew. At this time more tracked vehicles were heard around the bend of the road near Altenau, so the Battalion Commander ordered Company G to attack directly east over hill 537 with the mission of cutting the road just north of town, thereby preventing reinforcements from coming to counterattack the remainder of the Battalion. Due to the terrain no tanks could accompany Company G on this mission, but as they reached the road at about 1800 hours they knocked out two enemy tanks with bezelkas and captured approximately 15 Germans. Meanwhile the remainder of the Battalion was clearing the road to link up with Company G. This created a problem due to the composition of the battalion column on the road. Each company had its organic transportation with the tanks, TDs and Engineers interspersed in the column. When the leading elements hit a road block, they immediately called for the tanks or Engineers. Due to the narrow width of the road these units had difficulty in getting up to where they were needed rapidly. This situation was remedied by placing all vehicles under battalion control and keeping them in rear of the tanks and engineer vehicles. Our tankers knocked out another enemy tank, a Mark IV, in the vicinity of RJ2. The link-up was made just after dark and the battalion continued through town, leaving Company F with two M-10 TDs in the vicinity of RJ2 to protect the rear of the Battalion. As soon as Companies E and G got through the town, they were hit immediately by a counterattack of some 100 infantry supported by tanks. This enemy attack was beaten off and the 2nd Battalion settled down for the night. (22)

The 3rd Battalion had been following the 2nd Battalion and set up for the night along hill 537. During the day G Troop, 4th Cavalry Group felt (22) Statement of Major Thomas J. Gannon, then S-3, 2nd Bu, 26th Infantry.

out the enemy positions east and south of Clausthal-Zellerfeld. (23) (See Map 3)

The attack continued on 14 April with the 1st Battalion attacking at 0600 hours out of Clausthal-Zellerfeld astride the main ridge road with the mission of seizing Braunlage. The 2nd Battalion was ordered to jump off at 1400 hours with the road junction in Torfhaus as an objective. Progress of the 1st Battalion was slow as it ran into numerous roadblocks defended by dug-in infantry and self-propelled guns.

At noon, Brigadier General George A. Taylor, Assistant Division Commander, emphasized that the main mission of the 26th Infantry was to clear the main ridge road from Clausthal-Zellerfeld to Braunlage. (24)

At 1400 hours the 2nd Battalion jumped off for Torfhaus. The formation was a column of companies with Company E leading, followed by Companies G, H, Headquarters and F. At the same hour, the 1st Battalion reported that Company A was held up at RJ5 by heavy enemy tank and anti-tank fire. The enemy was making very skilled use of tanks and self-propelled guns in an effort to check our drive upon Braunlage. (25)

At 1900 hours, the 1st Battalion hit a strong roadblock at 4, destroying one tank and disabling another. Two prisoners were captured who stated that all along the road trees were set to blow, thus forming roadblocks. They also stated that there were about 2,000 SS troops and 14 tanks in Braunlage. Company A gained about 400 yards more before the Battalion halted for the night at 2400 hours. (26)

All was not going so well with the 2nd Battalion in their effort to take Torfhaus. Very little active resistance was met until Company E got to within about 800 yards of the RJ in Torfhaus. Here a very strongly organized position was met - the most determined defense yet encountered in the Harz Mountains. After two unsuccessful attempts to gain the RJ, Colonel

(23) Personal knowledge; A-12; Statement of Captain Walter H. Stevens, 1st Bn, 26th Inf; (24) A-12; (25) A-13, Statement of Major Thomas J. Conroy, 1st Bn, 26th Inf; (26) A-13.

Daniel called it quits for the night, consolidated his position and prepared to make certain that come morning his attempt would be successful.

The morning of 15 April at 0800 hours found Company E in possession of ~~the road, but this was a very important link between one of the few good~~ roads the Germans had which they could use in moving armor laterally across the front and they weren't going to give it up that easy. Shortly after ~~the road was captured~~ the Germans counterattacked with a force estimated to be one company of infantry supported by tanks and self-propelled guns. A very sharp battle ensued for the next two hours with German tanks running up and down the street in front of Colonel Daniel's forward CP. When the dust cleared around the little village Company E was still in possession of the RJ and six enemy tanks and two SPs had been destroyed, an estimated 100 enemy had been killed and more than 200 prisoners had been taken. At the same time Company E attacked the RJ, Company G which was following, was ordered cross-country with the mission of cutting the road south of Torfhaus. At 0900 hours, Company G reported that they had reached the road 1000 yards south of town. Shortly after this, communications, which consisted only of the SCR 300 radio, went out between 2nd Battalion and Company G. The Battalion S-3 sent out a patrol in an attempt to locate Company G but the patrol returned with one man who had gotten lost from his platoon.

Contact was established with elements of the 530th Infantry, 83rd Infantry Division, just north of town at 1100 hours.

At 1300 hours, Colonel Daniel attacked south from Torfhaus with the remainder of his battalion in an effort to link-up with Company G. It was necessary to leave the platoon of tanks that was attached to the battalion in Torfhaus for maintenance which was vital if they were to stay in the fight. The platoon of M-10 TDs, which consisted of four guns, were used as

tanks in the street south of town. Contact was made with Company G and the attack continued toward RJ7. Two roadblocks were encountered north of the RJ - neither one was defended, but one was mined. As the head of the battalion neared the RJ, noise of tracked vehicles was heard in the vicinity of and east of the junction, but as the advance continued the enemy vehicles withdrew and no fire was received. As the leading elements passed the junction, machine gun and AT fire was received from the woods to the east and one of our M-10 TD was knocked out. Artillery fire was called for and after a heavy concentration was delivered in the woods all fire ceased. The battalion proceeded to consolidate positions around the RJ for the night and here it was found that the artillery had knocked out three 80mm guns and two machine guns with that one concentration. (27)

The 1st Battalion jumped off in a column of companies at 0600 hours, making very slow progress throughout the morning in its attack on hill 892. In the afternoon Company G was committed north of the road and Company E south of the hill in an effort to break through the enemy resistance. All three companies reported receiving heavy self-propelled, mortar and small arms fire. Just before dark the 1st Battalion reported gaining hill 802 and RJ5. The battalion consolidated around this RJ and immediately began preparing for the next day's operations. Casualties for the day - 9 enlisted men wounded. (28)

The 3rd Battalion, less Company I, had remained in the vicinity of Altessu with Company K patrolling to the south maintaining contact with the 1st Battalion. (29)

(27) Personal knowledge; A-10, p. 82; A-12; Statement of Major Thomas J. Gendron then S-3, 2nd Bn, 26th Infantry; (28) Personal knowledge; A-12; (29) Personal knowledge; A-13.

THE ATTACK ON SCHIEBKE AND BRAUNLAGE

The regimental attack plan for 16 April directed the 1st Battalion to continue the attack along the main ridge road toward Braunlage, the 2nd Battalion to pass through 2nd Battalion positions at RJ7 and seize hill 926 and RJ9 in conjunction with the 1st Battalion and continue to Braunlage, and the 3rd Battalion to attack eastward from RJ7 toward Schiebke. (30) (See Map D)

The 1st Battalion plan called for Company C, commanded by Captain Donald Lister, to lead the attack by passing through Company A. Following would be Company B, GP group, Company A, Battalion Headquarters Company and Company D. (31)

The 2nd Battalion plan called for a column of companies, Company F leading, as they jumped off from their position in the vicinity of RJ7. (32)

The 3rd Battalion plan called for a column of companies, Company K leading until RJ10 was cleared, then Company I would take the east fork to hill 926. The remainder of the battalion would follow Company K down the main road to Braunlage. (33)

As can be seen, all units were confining themselves very closely to the road net that wound through the hills. This was necessary due to the inability of tanks, and in most instances wheeled vehicles, to negotiate the marshy, hilly and thickly-wooded terrain which prevailed in this situation. The line of departure for each day's operation was the position of that unit as of the hour of the attack or the front line of a friendly unit in the cases where there was a pass through.

The 1st Battalion crossed the LD at 0600 hours, meeting little resistance until they reached 6, where they found a small bridge which had been blown. After clearing the enemy out, it was found that the bridge could

(30) A-12; (31) A-13; (32) Statement of Major Thomas J. Gendron, then S-3 2nd Bn, 25th Infantry; (33) A-14; A-15.

not be by-passed and it would take an hour to effect a crossing. The Battalion Commander ordered Companies C and B to proceed without tank and TD support toward B and informed them that as soon as was possible their supporting weapons would be sent to rejoin them. As Company C approached checkpoint B it was met by small arms fire and small area fire coming from across the open field east of Oder Lake. Here Company C deployed south of the dam in the wooded area and a fierce fight raged for approximately one hour. The enemy continued to resist doggedly as Company C pushed on toward RJ9. At 0904 hours the 1st Battalion reported that Company C was meeting intense resistance as it approached the RJ. At 0914 hours the Regimental Commander informed the 1st Battalion that it would button up after securing RJs 9 and 11 and hill 926. At 1200 hours 1st Battalion reported Company C had secured RJ9 after repelling two counterattacks from the south. (34)

The 3rd Battalion after being joined by Company I who had been in Clausthal-Zellerfeld since 12 April passed through 2nd Battalion positions at 0815 hours. Little happened until the leading elements of Company K approached RJ10 where they received heavy enemy mortar and artillery fire. A brisk fire fight followed as the enemy unsuccessfully tried to hold the RJ. Known enemy casualties in this skirmish were 21 killed and 7 captured. By 1115 hours the RJ was clear and Company I, reinforced by two tanks, two TDs, and one platoon of heavy machine guns, attacked hill 926 while the remainder of the battalion proceeded toward RJ9. Due to the heavy fighting 1st Battalion had been engaged in, the Regimental Commander had relieved them of the mission of taking hill 926 and ordered them to proceed to Braunlage. He ordered the 3rd Battalion to secure this high ground in an effort to relieve the pressure around RJ9. As Company K neared the RJ, they joined the fight that the 1st Battalion had been in since reaching that point. The (34) A-12; A-13.

enemy was continuing to counterattack with force in an attempt to dislodge our units there. Resistance around the RJ broke about 1730 hours and Company C moved out rapidly on orders from the Battalion Commander and by 1845 hours had reached a point approximately 700 yards SE of hill 926. The 1st Battalion was ordered to hold up and was informed that the 3rd Battalion would pass through them very shortly. Meanwhile Company I had been fighting during morning hours and became a CP on the way to Hill 926, but by 1900 hours hill 926 was secure. At about 1930 hours the Regimental Commander ordered the 1st Battalion to relieve Company I on hill 926 with one company. The remainder of the 3rd Battalion, attacking down the main road, followed Company C, passed through them and secured RJ12 where they buttoned up for the night.

Company B relieved Company I on hill 926 at 2200 hours, thereby giving the 3rd Battalion all its companies for the attack on Braunlage the next morning. After the 3rd Battalion had gotten settled down for a good night's rest, an enemy 75mm CP, which had been overlooked in the pitch dark of the night, opened fire on the Battalion CP from about 200 yards north of RJ12. No great damage was done before it was destroyed, but confusion was paramount until it was silenced by a bazooka team from Headquarters Company. Casualties for the 3rd Battalion for the day totalled 6 killed, 5 missing in action, two battle injuries, and 16 wounded. Personnel captured were returned to our control in Elend.

The end of the day's fighting found Company C about 700 yards SE of RJ11, Company B on hill 926, Company A around RJ8, and Company D and Headquarters just east of the Sder Lake dam. (See Map D)

Casualties for the battalion during the day totalled 8 killed and 21 wounded seriously enough for evacuation. (35)

The 2nd Battalion had another day of slugging it out with dug-in enemy (26) A-12; A-13; A-14; A-15; Personal knowledge; Statement of Captain Walter D. Stevens, then B-3, 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry.

and tanks disposed around roadblocks. They captured a heavily defended roadblock at 13, were driven back by a counterattack but recaptured it just before dark where they closed in and set up a perimeter defense until

At about 1430 hours 16 April, Brocken, the high bald hill overlooking the entire mountains, received a blow from the air when it was attacked by F-47 fighter-bombers. Although at the time of the attack it looked as if some destruction was done, it was found later that the mission was not effective.

Elements of the 4th Cavalry Group which had been operating on the right flank of the regiment and maintaining contact with the 18th Infantry were relieved from attachment to the Division and the Regimental I&R platoon was given this mission.

When the attack began from Clausthal-Zellerfeld the Regimental Command Group followed the route of the 2nd Battalion, but since the 3rd Battalion had been shifted to the south the Command Group also shifted, thereby staying on the axis of the bulk of the regiment.

The regimental plan for 17 April directed the 2nd Battalion to continue the attack on Schierke, the 3rd Battalion to seize Braunlage, and when the 1st Battalion to push through the 3rd and seize Elend. Due to the late hour which the units fought on the 16th, the time for the attack was set at 0900 hours. (37)

The 2nd Battalion crossed the LD as planned and made considerably better progress, still fighting and clearing roadblocks. Enemy artillery and SP fire was received in increased intensity as they moved forward. Five defended roadblocks were encountered between 14 and 15 with four of these along the hairpin turns just east of 14. The Battalion Commander, not knowing that Schierke was a hospital town, called for an air mission (28) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major Thomas J. Candron, then S-3, 2nd Co, 26th Infantry; (37) Personal knowledge; A-12.

on the town hoping to knock out some of the high-angle weapons which were firing on elements of his battalion. The Battalion advanced slowly the rest of the day and by dark had reached 16 where an all-around defense was set up for the night. (38)

The 3rd Battalion crossed the LD at 0900 hours, with Company K leading. By 1130 hours, the Battalion had reached Braunlage and had begun the detailed cleaning up with Company K clearing the southern sector, Company L the northern sector, and Company I pushing out to secure the eastern edge of town. The heaviest artillery received in the Harz Mountains fell during the day on the road leading into town. Braunlage proved to be a hospital town with many small wards in private homes. Prisoners captured by the 3rd Battalion consisted of 6 men who were in the fight, 1000 bed patients and 350 walking patients. Casualties for the 3rd Battalion totaled 3 killed and 2 battle injuries. Five Americans were returned to our control here. (39)

The 1st Battalion attacked through the positions of Company I at 1500 hours, with the mission of taking Erend. Again Colonel Dulligan decided on a column of companies as the best formation because of the inability to get his vehicles cross-country. Company B lead the attack, followed by A, the Battalion Command Group, C and then D, with Headquarters Company moving on order of the Battalion Commander. The attack moved rather slowly against dug-in infantry supported by tanks and automatic weapons. Attached tanks knocked out one medium tank and one half-track in the vicinity of a blown bridge at 17. Company B commanded by Captain Felder L. Fair, bypassing the blown bridge, encountered a roadblock defended by tanks and SPs at 18. He was ordered to hold up until the tanks and TDs could get across the stream. This was accomplished by 1830 hours, and the attack continued, meeting scattered resistance and two additional roadblocks. By

(38) Statement of Major Thomas J. Gannon, Stan S-3, 2nd Bn, 28th Infantry;
(39) A-12; A-14; Personal knowledge.

2400 hours 1st Battalion reported that Elend was in their hands. Casualties for the battalion were 7 men wounded. (40)

its positions around Elend. The 2nd Battalion continued its attack on Schierke against bitter resistance. An air mission was requested and a flight of P-47 fighter-bombers came over and bombed and strafed enemy gun positions in and around the town. After this the enemy high angle fire decreased appreciably and by 1630 hours, Schierke had fallen. A great number of prisoners were taken, largely hospital patients. The battalion set up a defense around the edge of town, mostly in buildings as it could be seen that the collapse of the entire area was at last in sight. (41)

The 3rd Battalion remained in Braunlage, ate three hot meals, and patrolled the woods north and northeast of the town which netted many prisoners who had been by-passed.

At about 0700 hours, a train consisting of three cars loaded with German soldiers rolled into Elend. A 57mm AT gun of the battalion AT platoon knocked out the train and all occupants were either killed or captured. A patrol from Company B located five 120mm house-drawn cannon east of town. These were destroyed by the battalion AT platoon.

At 1538 hours, 1st and 2nd Battalion were ordered to send out patrols to contact each other. The one from the 1st Battalion ran into a road-block at 19 defended by infantry and two tanks. This was cleared, but due to darkness, contact was not established with 2nd Battalion. The patrol from the 2nd Battalion was unsuccessful in contacting the 1st Battalion. (42)

Contact between the 1st and 2nd Battalion was firmly established early the morning of 19 April. Patrols continued to sweep the woods to the north and east bringing in numerous prisoners.

(40) A-12; A-13; Statement of Captain Felder L. Fair then commanding officer, Co. B, 26th Infantry; (41) A-12; Personal knowledge; Statement of Major Thomas J. Gondron, then S-3, 2nd Bn, 26th Infantry; (42) A-12; A-13; Personal knowledge.

To the 3rd Battalion fell the unpleasant job of taking Brocken, the highest peak in Central Germany. At 0915 hours, Company K moved out of Braunlage retracing their route through 12, 11 and 9, turning east at 177 and proceeding to 15 where they fanned out to the northeast to clear and protect an assembly area for the remainder of the battalion. At 1300 hours, the rest of the battalion, with the exception of the rear GP, moved out, followed the route taken by Company K and closed in an assembly area approximately 500 yards northeast of 15. Company L was given the mission of clearing hill 1023, which it accomplished by 1520 hours, Company I secured hill 1044 without incident. Immediately Company L proceeded to take Brocken, a bare knoll on top of which stood a seven-story, reinforced concrete structure housing a weather bureau and a radio station. As the assault across the barren area near the summit began, the enemy opened fire point blank with bazookas, anti-aircraft guns and automatic weapons of all types. After two unsuccessful attempts to reach the crest from the south, Major Nation ordered Company L around to the northern side to assault from there while Company I contained the enemy from positions on hill 1044. By 1700 hours, Company L was 100 yards north of the objective so the Battalion Commander ordered Company I, less one platoon, to proceed back to the vicinity of Schierke where they would entruck for Braunlage. Company L was unable to make any further progress against the intense machine gun, anti-aircraft, and panzerfaust fire which they met again. By 2300 hours, the road up to Company L had been cleared and the platoon from Company I escorted two tanks up to their position. Even with the tanks firing point blank at the concrete building, Company I was unable to over-run the position and for security reasons was forced to withdraw to the edge of the woods for the remainder of the night. On the morning of 20 April, Company L seized Brocken and remained atop this barren

week until 22 April. The remainder of the battalion returned to Braunlage. (43)

During 20-21 April, all units continued patrolling throughout the regimental zone, still capturing large numbers of prisoners. Company C alone captured approximately 400 prisoners 20 April. (44) By the end of 21 April, the entire regimental zone had been swept clear of the enemy.

RELIEF OF THE 26TH INFANTRY

On 21 April the regiment was notified that the 8th Armored Division would take over our sector in the Herz Mountains and the 26th Infantry would be given a new mission. During 22 April Commanders and Staff Officers were busy orienting the advanced detail of the 8th Armored Division and readying their units for the move. At 230630 April leading units of the regiment crossed the IP at Braunlage on the way to a new area and a different task. I venture to say there was not one man present who regretted seeing the last of this beautiful mountain retreat in Central Germany. (45)

SUMMARY

During the period covered by this Monograph the 26th Infantry slugged it out with the enemy over better than fifteen miles of the most rugged terrain since Sicily. Even with the high state of confusion prevalent throughout the ranks of the defenders, the small battle-groups fought to the bitter end. It is still not clear where so many tanks came from that showed up in the Herz. When the stronghold was finally blotted out the 1st Division had knocked out more than 52 tanks and SPs. Nearly 1500 vehicles were either knocked out or over-run; seventy-five artillery pieces were taken; and whole trailloads of airplane fuselages, machine gun mounts,

(43) Personal knowledge; A-14; Statement of Captain Walter D. Stevens, then S-3, 3rd Bn, 26th Infantry; (44) A-12; A-13; Personal knowledge; (45) Personal knowledge; A-12; A-13.

truck parts, and signal equipment were captured.

The 1st Division took 30,343 prisoners during the reduction of the Harz Mountains. This number, when added to the haul of adjacent units totalled 73,499, a number far beyond any original estimate of the strength in this vast rat's nest in Central Germany. (46)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation, it is felt by the author that the reduction of the Harz Mountains could have been a far greater task if the enemy had been given more time to organize his troops and lay out his defense. Had he had this time, a closer resemblance to a reverse Bastogne would have been realized. Even with the lack of communications and organization, the weapons at his disposal were very skillfully utilized. This was demonstrated time and time again when our forward elements approached the ever-present roadblocks of felled trees. Due to the restricted road net and the inability to get vehicles cross country, the terrain favored the defender very heavily.

At the beginning of the operation all estimates of the enemy strength in the Harz were far less than was later realized. As the regiment progressed further into the mountains, it became evident that every soldier, whether officer or enlisted man, who became lost from his unit took refuge in these mountains.

Considering the mission of the regiment - to clear the main ridge road from Olansthal-Zellerfeld to Braunlage - and the restricted road net capable of carrying heavy vehicles, our attack was very much canalized. The enemy knew this and made the utmost of the situation by continually blocking our advance with defended and undefended roadblocks. He knew where we were at all times. But the end of the war was now in sight and many of the men and officers in the regiment had been in the fight since 8 November 1942 and were anxious to see it through. The morale of all concerned was at an all time

When a unit finds itself in a situation as obscure as that which existed on 13 April, it is imperative that all possible protection be given the trains supporting the operation. It is felt that the mission given Company I was good insurance for continuous support from these trains.

The advance on 13 April was hampered considerably because the companies of the assault battalion had their transportation with them. The tanks, TDs and engineers were dispersed throughout the column. Due to the nature of the terrain practically all vehicles were road bound which created a problem as soon as the tanks, TDs or engineers were needed up with the leading elements of the battalion. Company transportation was placed under battalion control and kept in rear of the combat vehicles and engineers. This proved to be very satisfactory and was used throughout the remainder of the operation.

The close support of Combat Engineers played a major role in this operation. The task of clearing the many roadblocks, repairing bridges, and removing mines was not a small one. This support was necessary to enable our attacking echelons to advance with the maximum support from attached tanks and TDs.

The enemy employed the great bulk of his forces around roadblocks and critical road junctions. These forces consisted mainly of tanks, self-propelled guns, and infantry equipped with automatic weapons. The close mutual support between our infantry and tanks was vital indeed.

Our attached tanks and TDs were employed to knock out enemy automatic weapons while our infantrymen protected the tanks and TDs by warding off panzerfaust teams and locating enemy tanks and anti-tank weapons.

Most of the towns in the Herz Mountains were found to be hospital or recuperation centers, a fact which was unknown to us prior to taking the towns. Even though the enemy employed his defensive tactics within the

towns, had this fact been known it is felt that these towns would have been spared more than they were.

The task of seizing the high, bald peak of Brocken should have been undertaken by an entire battalion in a coordinated attack, and not a reinforced company. With the weapons which the enemy had atop this peak, it was an easy matter to concentrate these weapons on an attack from one direction. Had an attack been made from two directions at once it is felt that the mission would have been accomplished in much less time and with considerably fewer casualties.

At the end of a day's operation, it was imperative that all units set up with all around protection. Many enemy were by-passed during the attacks astride the roads and with the confusion that already existed among the enemy forces, it was necessary to hunker up close at night and increase local security. Especially, it was imperative to pull the tanks and TDE inside the perimeter and guard them against enemy tank hunter teams.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized in this operation are:

1. When the enemy situation is obscure, it is often necessary to assign combat troops the mission of protecting combat trains supporting an operation.
2. It is often necessary to place company transportation under battalion control when the road net is restricted. This practice gives the Battalion Commander more control of movement over the available roads in his zone.
3. Control in mountain operations takes on increased importance. The means of control available should be used to the maximum. Often SCR 300 radios are inadequate since the range is decreased in this type of terrain. Wire should supplement radio in the attack.

4. Maintenance of tracked vehicles cannot be neglected regardless of the tactical situation. It is better to pull them out of the attack for this service, thereby losing their support for a short time, than to keep them up front until they are lost for the remainder of the operation.

5. A Commander must be alert to capitalize on the success of one unit, and by the same token he should adjust his plans when one unit meets unforeseen resistance. Timely revisions in plans pay dividends when one subordinate unit can relieve the pressure being placed on another.

6. Close support by fighter-bomber aircraft aids materially in neutralizing enemy artillery.

7. Even with little organization and communications, an effective defense can be established in mountainous terrain.

8. Combat Engineer support is vital in clearing routes of advance in mountains.

9. In close terrain it is necessary for all units to tie-in closely at night.

10. Attacking infantry units should endeavor to destroy all the enemy in its zone as they move forward. This will greatly reduce the probability of being hit from the rear after nightfall.