

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

· ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D PLATOON, "D" COMPANY
415 INFANTRY, (104TH DIVISION) AT MEDEBACH
GERMANY, 30 MARCH - 3 APRIL 1945
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: MACHINE GUN PLATOON OF
THE INFANTRY BATTALION IN DEFENSE

1st Lieutenant John F. Powers, Jr., Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	3
General Situation	4
Battalion Situation	6
The Defense of Medebach	8
Analysis and Criticism	13
Lessons Learned	14
MAP A - First Army Advance 24 March - 1 April 1945	
MAP B - Dispositions 415th Infantry	
MAP C - Defense at Medebach	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 Report by The Supreme Commander to The Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force (6 June 1944 - 8 May 1945) (TIS Library)
- A-2 First United States Army Report of Operations (23 February - 8 May 1945) (TIS Library)
- A-3 Timberwolf Tracks, The History of the 104th Infantry Division (1942 - 1945), By Leo A. Hoegh and Howard J. Doyle, July 1946 (TIS Library)
- A-4 History of the 415th Infantry (Personal possession of author)
- A-5 Headquarters First Battalion 415th Infantry
Defiance Red Combat Diary
(Personal possession of author)
- A-6 Spearhead in the West, The Third Armored Division, 1945 (TIS Library)
- A-7 Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 19, 1942 (TIS Library)
- A-8 Report of the General Board United States Forces European Theater, Strategy of the Campaign in Western Europe (1944 - 1945) (TIS Library)

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D PLATOON, "D" COMPANY
415TH INFANTRY, (104TH DIVISION) AT MEDEBACH
GERMANY, 30 MARCH - 3 APRIL 1945
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

INTRODUCTION

In Western Europe during the first week of March 1945 the general advance of the Allied Armies was to the Rhine River. The III Corps, First United States Army, was successful in establishing a bridgehead east of the Rhine as the result of the capture of the Ludendorf Bridge near Remagen, Germany, on 7 March 1945. (1)

The essentials of plans for the action east of the Rhine, as planned in January 1945 based on considerations developed even prior to the landing on the continent, had included the crossing of the Rhine north of the Ruhr River and the advance eastward to Kassel coordinated with an effort from Frankfurt northeast to Kassel to complete the envelopment of the Ruhr district. (2) However, the seizure of Ludendorf Bridge and the establishment of the Remagen bridgehead offered an area from which the encirclement of the Ruhr could be more rapidly accomplished than by the original plans of the thrust from Frankfurt. (3)

In compliance with the original directives, the First United States Army was to have directed its forces in the crossing north of the Ruhr River, termed "the main effort," by the crossing of "not less than ten divisions." (4) These orders were modified in that the First Army was directed to regroup forces, exploit the Remagen bridgehead and advance to the east. The First Army grouped the VII Corps on the north flank of the bridgehead, the III Corps in the center sector, and the V Corps on the southern sector. (5)

The plans for the crossing north of the Ruhr were directed to the Ninth United States Army and the Second British Army. These forces

(1) A-2, p. 19-24, p. 29-30; (2) A-8, p. 91, A-1, p. 95-96; (3) A-1, p. 97, A-8, p. 91; (4) A-8, p. 91, A-2, p. 37; (5) A-2, p. 36-38.

crossed on the night 23 - 24 March 1945 at Wesel and drove eastward to Paderborn to establish the northern penetration and to effect the northern force of the Ruhr envelopment. (6)

The Ruhr district, considered for isolation on strategic level, may be described geographically as the basin of the Ruhr River. The Ruhr River is a right bank tributary of the Rhine which flows from the east westward through the important coal field area and joins the Rhine at Duisberg. This area includes about forty thousand square kilometers and has the population of approximately four million people. The importance of the Ruhr district is economic; heavy industry production facilities are located in the area based on the natural resource of the coal deposits. These heavy industry facilities were developed and expanded after World War I under French occupation; after French evacuation in 1925, international steel syndicates continued the expansion until the capacity of the Ruhr was integrated into German economy to provide a war potential. (7) (See Map A)

The reasoning for the envelopment of the Ruhr was to isolate the productive capacity from the armies of Germany and, by accomplishing this move, to effect a gap in the center of the front through which Allied Armies might advance to central Germany. (8)

GENERAL SITUATION

On the 25 March 1945, First United States Army advanced with three corps, the VII, III, and V from the Remagen bridgehead to the east. Each corps was led by an armored division to effect a striking force. The general mission was to exploit the breakout of the Remagen area and advance eastward, change direction of the advance to the north on order, and link with the Ninth Army in the Paderborn-Kassel area. (9) The mission of the VII Corps on the north flank, at this phase made up of the 1st, 8th, 78th, 104th Infantry Divisions and the 3d Armored Division, (6) A-1, p. 97-98, A-8, p. 91; (7) A-7, p. 629; (8) A-1, p. 104; (9) A-2, p. 43.

was "to launch a coordinated attack south of the Sieg River in an easterly direction, to capture the high ground west of the Dill River, and to resume the attack on Army order to the northeast." (10) The VII Corps drove eastward to the Siegen-Herborn line, and on the 28 March advanced to the northeast to contact armor of the Ninth Army at Lippstadt, on 1 April, to complete the envelopment. (11) (See Map A)

The Operations of the 2d Platoon, D Company, 415th Infantry of the 104th Division at Medebach, Germany, 30 March - 3 April 1945, is a report of an incident of the VII Corps' advance from the Siegen-Herborn line to the Paderborn area.

As the advance progressed from the bridgehead eastward the 78th Division was assigned the Hamm-Wissen sector along the Lahn River, the 8th Division held from Wissen to the vicinity of Siegen, and the 1st Division held from Siegen to the Dill Recht area. These dispositions were in effect on 30 March. (12) The mission of the divisions was to contain the enemy along the north flank of the Army advance.

The dispositions of the regiments of the 104th Division on 30 March were: the 414th Infantry attached to the Third Armored Division now approaching Paderborn; the 413th Infantry was securing the right flank of the armored advance and as the situation developed was employed along the Hardenhausen Forest from Meerhof to Wrexen; the 415th Infantry, protecting a sector of the left flank of the corps advance, was disposed northwest of Haiger to the vicinity of Laasphe. (13) (See Map A)

During the period 28 - 29 March, it was established that the 130th Panzer Lehr ^{Division with 64 tanks??} with a force of sixty tanks was assembled in Winterberg. The mission of this enemy force was determined to be the seizure of Hallenberg or Medebach, and to strike eastward and to the northeast to cut off the advance elements of the sweep, and to open an escape route to the southeast. (14) The 415th Infantry was ordered to counter this threat. The 3d Battalion of the 415th remained in contact in the

(10) A-2, p. 37; (11) A-1, p. 104; (12) A-2, p. 49-51, A-2, Situation Map 2 Cologne-Paderborn; (13) A-2, p. 49, A-3, p. 300-301, A-4, p. 69; (14) A-4, p. 70.

Haiger-Laasphe area, the 2d Battalion was ordered to Hallenberg, and the 1st Battalion moved to Medebach. (15) (See Map B)

BATTALION SITUATION

The First Battalion, 415th Infantry arrived in Medebach 302230 March 1945. (16) The movement had been completed by motor and as the troops arrived in the town the companies were directed general defensive areas. The overall defensive plan was a perimeter defense. Information to the battalion commander had indicated that an attack in the Medebach area was expected within a matter of hours. (17)

Before the troops had accomplished the organization of positions, Company A, reinforced by the 1st Platoon of D Company, one section of 81-mm mortars from D Company, and the battalion 57-mm antitank platoon, was directed as attachment to a task force in Usseln to the north; Company A remained as attached to the Second Battalion, 415th Infantry upon the Second Battalion's relief from Hallenberg on 1 April by the 39th Regimental Combat Team of the 9th Infantry Division. (18)

The reinforcements to the First Battalion (minus) consisted of a platoon of 57-mm guns of the Regimental Antitank Company and the Antitank Company Mine Platoon, one platoon of medium tanks from the 750th Tank Battalion, and a platoon of the 817th Tank Destroyer Battalion which was attached but had not yet joined the Battalion. (19)

After the detachment of A Company, the defensive areas were re-assigned. Company C assumed responsibility for the area northeast through north to the west, an extended frontage of 3,000 yards. Company B extended from the southwest through the south to the southeast. Headquarters Company personnel, personnel of the Company Headquarters of D and other available personnel were organized to hold the sector southeast through east to C Company. The 81-mm mortar Platoon, D Company,

(15) A-4, p. 70, A-3, p. 101; (16) A-5, p. 4; (17) Statement of Clark Libbee, Battalion S-2; (18) A-4, p. 71, Personal knowledge; (19) A-4, p. 71, Personal knowledge.

minus one section was in general support of the battalion, and the 2d Platoon, D Company was in direct support of Baker and Charlie. ^{what?} The Regimental Antitank 57-mm gun platoon organized the antitank defense to cover tank approaches into the town from the north and west. The Regimental Antitank Mine Platoon supplemented this plan by laying antitank mines on the probable approaches of enemy armor. The 750th Tank Battalion platoon organized within the town to give depth to the defensive plan. Local security was established and by daylight the battalion had effected general defensive positions. (20)

At daylight, the accurate terrain analysis showed that the battalion held the road net control by occupying Medebach, and that the control of the town was dependent on holding the approaches and the high ground in the B Company sector on the southeast. Approaches to this high ground were from the north through the town by road; approaches from the west were across open terrain and under good observation and fire of the defender. The terrain to the northwest and north of the town was graded and slightly rolling to a ridge line three hundred yards to six hundred from the outlying buildings and northern limit of town. Through this area were two road approaches from the north, and one road approach from the west. This area was under close enemy observation, and it was possible for the enemy to move into defiladed positions to within three hundred yards of ^{the} position, for movement beyond the ridge line could not be observed by the defender. This area offered the greater advantage to the attacker and was considered to be the most likely approach. It was necessary to organize this area and hold the road approaches through the town to the high ground. (21) The terrain to the east offered little advantage to the enemy. The enemy was familiar with the countryside and by utilizing covered approaches ^{used} planned his attacks on surprise and infiltrating tactics. (22)

(20) Personal knowledge; (21) Personal knowledge, A-3, p. 306; (22) Personal knowledge, A-3, p. 306.

During early daylight hours on 31 March, officers and platoon sergeants directed modification of positions to organize the critical terrain. The machine gun platoon employed its guns by splitting sections. The first section was assigned sectors of fire and the final protective mission to the north and southwest in the C Company area; the second section was located with B Company on the forward and west slope of the hill to fire sectors to the west and final protective fires to the northwest and southwest. Machine guns of the rifle companies' weapons platoons and automatic-rifle fire supplemented the machine gun protective fire. (23) The 60-mm mortars and the 81-mm mortars were planned in the final protective fires. The fire plan of the battalion, despite the detachment of A Company, was accomplished as the defensive plan to hold Medebach. (See Map C)

On the 31 March, liaison personnel between the First and Second Battalions found the towns of Medelon and Liesen in enemy control. (24) Second Battalion was directed to take Liesen; First Battalion^{will} directed to take and hold Medelon. (25) The First Battalion directed one rifle platoon and the weapons platoon of B Company, one section of 81-mm mortars from D Company and two tanks to Medelon. (26) The effect was a reduction of the battalion strength at Medebach leaving only one section of 81-mm mortars, one machine gun platoon, one rifle company plus the two rifle platoons of B and the reinforcements of one section of medium tanks to control the town and road net. (27) These deletions from the strength at Medebach were keenly felt by the men on the line. Cannon Company and artillery were not positioned to support the battalion and were not included in the assigned defensive fire plan of the battalion. (28) (See Map C)

THE DEFENSE OF MEDEBACH

During the afternoon 31 March, enemy artillery was directed on the (23) Personal knowledge; (24) A-4, p. 71; (25) A-4, p. 71; (26) Personal knowledge; (27) Personal knowledge, A-4, p. 71; (28) Personal knowledge.

town and continued from 1600 to 1630 hours. (29) Direct fire was received on the positions of C Company from an enemy tank firing from the ridge to the front of the western defensive sector. The fire was accurate and directed on automatic weapons positions. The platoon leader of the machine gun platoon called for counter fire. However, no retaliatory fire was delivered. Supporting cannon and artillery ^{units were} was not yet positioned, and the mortars were not fired as the attachments of two mortar sections had resulted in a division of the mortar ^{OK why?} ammunition. The battalion anticipated a temporary ammunition shortage as resupply was dependent on the supply route and the security of the MSR was indefinite. (30).

Because of extended frontages, local security of the small units could not be adequately organized, and the insecurity was sensed by the men. The failure of obtaining supporting fire and the insecurity of small units were principal factors in influencing the men that the defensive plan was not strong, and, as a consequence, there was a loss of confidence that the positions could be held. (31)

Constant movement of tracked vehicles was detected during the hours 2100 to 0100 during the night 31 March - 1 April to the front of C Company on the western sector. After ascertaining that the movement was heavy in contrast to former activity in the area, the battalion was notified and mortar fire by the 81-mm section ordered. The D Company Commander, the mortar platoon leader, and the machine gun platoon leader determined the plot of the requested fire. The machine gun platoon leader returned to the line and upon return called for the arranged fire. Thirty-seven rounds were delivered on the area with good effect from a destructive standpoint, and from a morale standpoint as this was the first supporting fire of any volume to the companies. Shortly after this fire was delivered, artillery ^{fire} was directed on the same general area firing (29), (30), (31), Personal knowledge.

intense concentrations. This indication that artillery was positioned and capable of support greatly rebuilt the confidence of the men. (32)

During the early morning hours, before daylight, the platoon of the 817th Tank Destroyer Battalion which had been attached arrived in Medebach to further increase the defensive strength.

The attack on Medebach by the enemy hit at 010630 April 1945. The initial assault consisted of approximately three hundred infantry and five Mark V Panzer Jaegers. This assault was supported by heavy artillery and by fire from self-propelled 88-mm guns. (33) One force of the enemy with tanks approached on the road from the north, the other body, enemy infantry, attacked from the northeast generally along the road leading into town from that direction. (34) Close defensive fires and final protective fires were delivered on the approaching forces. The enemy infantry was contained by this fire. The tanks were successful in penetrating the line on this initial assault principally because of the shock power of the armor. The tanks continued through the line, directed fire on automatic weapons positions, destroyed three tanks of the supporting tank platoon, and advanced toward the center of town. A 57-mm antitank gun knocked out the lead tank by a flank strike at close range as the tank advanced within fifty yards of the gun. This gun position had not been detected by enemy observation, as had the tank positions and machine gun positions, prior to the attack. The crew members had positioned their gun skillfully and had strictly regulated their own traffic and movement to assure that the gun position was not detected. Immediately after the first enemy tank had been destroyed a self-propelled 88-mm gun advancing into the town was destroyed by infantry action. The platoon from the 817th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which had arrived during the night, engaged the remainder of the enemy armor and succeeded in driving the enemy from within the position. (35)

(32) Personal knowledge; (33) A-4, p. 71, A-3, p. 304, Personal knowledge; (34) Statement of Clark Libbee, Battalion S-2, Personal knowledge; (35) A-3, p. 309, A-4, p. 71, Personal knowledge.

During the period after the armored penetration, the enemy infantry attempted to follow the advance of the tanks but final protective fire stopped their advance, and a fire fight developed along the entire northern and northwestern sector of the line. Heavy concentrations were directed on the enemy by cannon company, the 386th Field Artillery Battalion, and the 929th Field Artillery Battalion. These fires had been built up during the attack, and as the enemy advance was stopped the support of the artillery gave the defender the advantage of a greater fire power than could be directed by the enemy. The heavy supporting fires (artillery) were the determining strength that forced the enemy to withdraw. The enemy began withdrawing forces about 0745 hours and by 0830 hours the first action of the day was over. (36)

Casualties resulting from this action, on battalion level were not severe. However, the 1st Section of the 2d Platoon, D, ^{Co.} suffered one man killed and two severely wounded. No serious loss of strength was suffered in consideration of the intensity of attack in either C Company or B Company. The important loss in equipment was the destruction of three M4A3 tanks of the attached tank platoon. (37)

Later during the day, 1 April, two additional attempts by the enemy to take the town were attempted by foot elements of the 130th Panzer Lehr and Third Panzer Grenadier Division. Artillery concentrations and long range machine gun defensive fires defeated these attempts before the attacking troops could reach an assault position. (38)

While this action was taking place, the Third Battalion had been relieved from positions in the vicinity of Haiger and was directed as the regimental reserve to the Braunshausen area. Company I was attached to the 1st Battalion and moved into positions on the east and northeast of town. By 011400 April the battalion had been "built up" by the attachments of infantry and tank destroyer units, had gained artillery support (36) A-4, p. 73); (37) Personal knowledge; (38) A-4, p. 71; Personal knowledge;

and now was confidently prepared to hold against further attempts by the Germans to take the town. (39)

Administrative, logistical, and operational adjustments were accomplished during the early afternoon hours. Replacement personnel were assigned the companies and allocated to the platoons. Three men were sent to 2d Platoon, D Company and these men were taken on line to prepare a gun position. Enemy mortar fire swept the sector of the line in which these new men were working. The platoon leader was in the immediate vicinity and took cover in the partially prepared position with these new men. The presence of the platoon leader with these men and the few words that were exchanged gave the men a confidence in the platoon and in the battalion to which they had been assigned. At the same time, the reactions of the men to the fire gave the platoon leader a strong indication of the dependability of these men and the degree to which they had 'combat adapted' themselves. (40)

Prisoners, taken during the morning attacks, were interrogated by Battalion S-2 personnel during the day. Information relevant to the situation was that repeated attacks had been ordered by the German command to take Medebach and to effect the forcing of a breakout along the axial route, Medebach-Korbach-Kassel. (41) (See Maps A and B)

During the night 1 - 2 April 1945, German troops infiltrated into the town. At daylight, this force of about one hundred and fifty men put small arms fire on CP locations, disrupted wire communications and attempted to locate and neutralize antitank defensive positions. Simultaneously, self-propelled guns put fire on the western defensive sector. The raiding force worked toward the MLR on the west, as enemy armor advanced on the western defensive sector. This attempt to gap the line from within was defeated by the troops on the perimeter by directing fire into the town while artillery concentrations were laid on the advancing force from the west. The personnel who had infiltrated were captured, (39) A-4, p. 72, Personal knowledge; (40) Personal knowledge; (41) Statement of Clark Libbee, Battalion S-2, p. 309.

killed, or wounded and this attempt by the enemy had failed. (42)
Pressure directed on Winterberg, and other areas of assembled enemy strength, by divisions of III Corps reduced the enemy attacking capabilities and forced him to holding action. (43)

During the action of the period 30 March - 2 April, the III Corps, on the right of the VII Corps had attained the limit of its advance. The units of III Corps were directed to VII Corps and employed to reduce the pocket and to relieve the units holding the line. On the 3 April 1945, the 1st Battalion, 415th Infantry was relieved from Medebach by elements of the 7th Armored Division and began the move to Usseln to assemble with the elements of the regiment and to continue the advance. (44)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1180 The advance of the 1st Battalion, 415th Infantry from 25 March in the bridgehead area to 30 March at Medebach, the distance of one hundred and thirty miles, and a consideration that during the advance contact with the enemy had been continuous describes the rapidly changing and fluid situation that is to be expected in the "exploit operation." Characteristic of the exploitation is the extended frontages and wide dispositions of the units holding and securing the flanks. The analysis of the operation described illustrates the development of enemy strength and the threat of enemy counter-action may force the commitment of units to operate separately, and without normal artillery support for the time-period of artillery displacement. The critical part organic support assumes under this condition may be evaluated, in part, by the action of the machine gun platoon directly supporting the rifle elements, and the 81-mm mortar section in general support of the battalion.

The operation at Medebach shows the need for heavy support during the complete phase of the defense. Were the enemy to have attacked Medebach with armor twelve hours before the attack actually materialized the inability to hold the area with the battalion minus, without artillery (42) A-3, p. 309, A-4, p. 72, Personal knowledge; (43) A-4, p. 71; (44) A-2, p. 53.

support, would have been evident by the loss of the town and loss of control of the Medebach section the vital road net.

In another respect, however, the analysis of the operations at Medebach illustrates well the command's ability to build up a threatened area by movement to gain concentration of mass. The situation demanded rapid movement, and only by anticipatory planning were the moves accomplished and troop dispositions capable of containing the enemy forces effected.

The point of a break in the confidence in the battalion defensive plan during the 31 March at Medebach might have been eliminated by the notification to company and platoon commanders and to the troops of the attachments and support and their expected time of arrival or positioning.

Security was inadequate in Medebach as evidenced by the German forces' ability to infiltrate one hundred and fifty men into the town on the night 1 - 2 April 1945.

There was no restriction of movement in the town during daylight hours. The town was under close observation by the enemy and, by their observation of movement, tank positions and automatic weapons positions were located by the enemy prior to his attacks. The death of one man and severe injuries of two men of the machine gun platoon, and the destruction of the three M4A3 tanks were part of the results of this carelessness.

During the operation no attempt to locate enemy dispositions by reconnaissance or combat patrol activity was made. Under the conditions of limited observation and particularly during the period of expected attack to fail to try to learn enemy intentions was in error.

LESSONS LEARNED

This action illustrates that:

- n. 100
200
- (1) The officers and men on the line are in the position to observe

and report any detected or suspected movement, activity, or unusual disposition of the enemy and it is ^{the} ~~their~~ responsibility to transmit ^{it} ~~the~~ information to higher ^{of the enemy} command for interpretation and action.

(2) Information to the troops of the situation, disposition, the missions, and available support, as the circumstances permit, strengthens the confidence of the individual soldier.

(3) Adequate artillery support is essential to all phases of the defense.

(4) The presence of platoon commanders with newly assigned men during some part of their first hours in the line assists in their adjustment to combat conditions.

(5) Movement and activity under conditions of good observation must be restricted to prevent disclosure of defensive positions prior to the attack.

(6) Heavy machine gun fires, mutually supported, will impede the advance of attacking infantry.

(7) When antitank defense is inadequate, additional rocket launcher teams must be located on the main line of resistance to cover armor approaches.

(8) Continual reconnaissance by patrol action must be maintained to fix enemy positions and to determine enemy movement.