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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1949-1950

THE OPERATION OF THE 3D BATTALION, 137TH INFAN-
TRY, (35TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE VICINITY
OF ST. LO, FRANCE, 11 - 15 JULY 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION
IN THE ATTACK

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THE OPERATION OF THE 3D BATTALION, 137TH INFANTRY,
(35TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE VICINITY
OF ST. LO, FRANCE, 11 - 15 JULY 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3d Battalion, 137th Infantry, 35th Infantry Division, in its initial engagement in combat with the German Forces, and the breaching of the strongly held positions defending that famous stronghold of ST. LO, FRANCE, 11 - 15 July 1944, during the Normandy Campaign.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss very briefly the major events which led up to the arrival of the 35th Division in France and participation in this action.

On 27 May 1944, the 137th Infantry disembarked at AVONMOUTH, ENGLAND, from where they were transported by rail to BODMIN and NEWQUAY, ENGLAND. Regimental Headquarters, the special units, and the 3d Battalion were quartered in the famous barracks of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry Brigade. The 1st and 2d Battalions were stationed at NEWQUAY, ENGLAND, famous as a summer resort and as the home of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes. (1)

After a six week period of intensive specialized training, in waterproofing vehicles, communications, bomb reconnaissance, transportation and other allied subjects, the divi-

(1) A-3, p. 7

sion was alerted on 1 July 44, for the short overseas movement to FRANCE.

The division was to report in the staging areas of PLYMOUTH and FALMOUTH during the period 2 - 5 July 1944. The 137th Infantry arrived at OMAHA BEACH, in the vicinity of COOLEVILLE-SUR-MERE, 6 - 7 July 1944. (2)

Landing in FRANCE across the OMAHA BEACH, the division became a part of the XIX Corps, commanded by Major General Charles H. Corlett, a part of the U. S. First Army, under the leadership of Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley.

The First U. S. Army was engaged in the operation of gaining sufficient ground and elbow room from which to mount a powerful offensive, designed to breakout of the NORMANDY pocket from which the Army had been contained in for the past thirty-one (31) days of fighting. (3)

GENERAL SITUATION

During that period of time required for the VII Corps to effect the capture of the sea port of CHERBOURG, and clean up the COTENTIN PENINSULA, and further relieve an already overloaded supply situation by means of a deep water port. The Allied Line to the south consisting of the First U. S. Army and the British Second Army had remained relatively stable. This time had been spent by the First Army in continued build-up of forces and materiel. (4) (See Map A)

The attack which began on 3 July was to be a general Army effort directed at objectives extending from COUTANCES in the west, through ST. LO across the entire Army front. The great-

(2) A-3, p. 7

(3) A-2, p. 1

est advances were to be obtained on the right flank (west), and the smaller advances on the left flank (east), in short a pivot on the left flank. The VIII Corps was to initiate the attack at a specified time and the other Corps would attack in conjunction therewith on Army Order. (5)

This offensive had a limited objective and was a preliminary for a definite break-out from the NORMANDY BEACHHEAD pocket.

A careful study of a map of this area would reveal some of the considerations which dictated this attack. Key terrain, road nets, and elbow room for the tactical maneuver of the First U. S. Army, in preparation for the mounting grand-scale offensive in the near future.

The ground just south of the First Army lines was divided by the VIRE RIVER into two (2) relatively distinct areas. East of the VIRE was broken hilly country rising steadily toward the south, and featured by east-west ridges that ran across the Allied Axis of advance. West of the RIVER VIRE, the area in which the major effort was to come in the planned large scale offensive, would lead into terrain that would become increasingly favorable for the offensive. However, to obtain this favorable terrain and its approaches, the First U. S. Army would first have to overcome a belt of very unfavorable terrain which favored the defenders in every respect; cover-concealment, road net, terrain obstacles, etc. This belt of unfavorable terrain extended from 6 - 10 miles in depth, and any large scale offensive mounted prior to holding the key terrain and road nets conceivable might well bog down

(5) A-1, p. 84

against the German defenses before getting a rolling start and prevent the employment of the U. S. Armored strength.

The sluggish streams that converge on CARENTAN FLOW from south or southwest in wide marshy flood plains cut by drainage ditches and otherwise devoid of cover. Any attack from the CARENTAN area would have to debouch along two (2) relative narrow corridors between these water barriers. One along the axis of the CARENTAN-ST. JEAN-DE-DAYE-ST. LO HIGHWAY, the other along the CARENTAN - PERIERS ROAD. This limited and restricted maneuver and would present the German forces with every opportunity for concentrated defense, against frontal attack.

Further west, beyond extensive marshes, of the upper SEVES RIVER was a belt of hills which, combined with the large MONT-CASTRE FOREST controlled the important road junctions. Here the enemy had time to organize a very extensive line of resistance to protect his flank on the sea.

No where on the front west of the VIRE RIVER was the terrain suitable for an effort at rapid break-through, on for the full exploitation of the First U. S. Army's fast growing strength in numbers and materiel. (6)

It was for the purpose outlined above that the July offensive of the First U. S. Army was planned and put into effect, on 3 July 1944. At the opening of the attack the First U. S. Army had four Corps on the line, from left to right as follows: V Corps, XIX Corps, VII Corps and VIII Corps. (See Map A)

The XIX Corps was to be the main effort and would join

(6) A-2, p. 1-2

in the attack after the other three (3) Corps had begun their attacks, all on Army Order.

XIX CORPS GENERAL SITUATION

the map should correspond more directly

The XIX Corps had two divisions in line at the start of the offensive, 29th on the left, the 30th Infantry Division on the right, one division in reserve, the 3d Armored in vicinity of ISIGNY. The 35th Division was on its way to FRANCE from ENGLAND scheduled to reinforce the attack of the Corps on its arrival in FRANCE. (7) (See Map B)

XIX CORPS PLAN OF ATTACK

At the start of the attack the Corps held a position nearly fifteen (15) miles wide, astride the winding VIRE RIVER. For all tactical purposes splitting the attacking zone into two (2) sub zones, each presenting its own problem. (See Map B)

At the start of the attack the left wing of the Corps extended south in a considerable salient at varying distances. From the objective, and flanked by the VIRE RIVER. West of that water barrier the right wing of the Corps was on a general line some ten (10) miles farther from the Corps objective (ST. LO and the high ground in its vicinity).

The Corps Commander, Major General Charles H. Corlett aimed his first blow at the right of the VIRE to bring his right flank on line, to assist the VII Corps on his right, and also cover the flank of units along the VIRE RIVER.

The 30th Infantry Division supported by the 113th Cavalry

(7) A-2, p. 2, 3

Group made this effort.

The 29th Division on the left was to hold until the line had been straightened and attack on Corps Order. (8)

OBJECTIVE OF XIX CORPS

obj should be maintained by suggested

The objective of the XIX Corps was the high ground east and west of ST. LO. The city of ST. LO itself held small military value, but derived its military importance from the hub of the road net it commanded. The main arteries lead in every direction from the north came highways connecting it with CARENTAN and ISIGNY, eastward, roads suitable for heavy traffic lead toward CAUMONT and BAYEUX. To the west runs a road to PERIERS and LESSAY, southwest is the COUTANCES HIGHWAY. (9) (See Map B)

ENEMY SITUATION

Enemy forces in front of the XIX Corps belong to both the LXXXIV and II Parachute Corps: on the right of the Corps, west of the VIRE were elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, units of this division facing Corps was the 38th Armored Infantry, and Battle Group Heintz, consisting of four (4) battalions. On the left of the zone was the 352d Infantry Division. These units while not up to full strength were considered to be crack troops, and experienced. (10) (See Map B)

SUPPLY

Supply at this point constituted no outstanding problems. However, a restriction had been imposed on the firing of artill-

(8) A-2, p. 6

(9) A-6

(10) A-2, p. 7

lery, primarily in order to assist in the build-up for the coming offensive.

35TH DIVISION ENTRANCE

The 35th Infantry Division landed in FRANCE 5-7 July 1944, and moved from assembly areas in vicinity of COLLE-VILLE-SUR-MERE to assume their assigned sector in the line up of the attacking echelon of the XIX Corps 9-10 July 1944. On the night of 9 July Major General Baade issued Field Order #2 which directed the 137th and 320th Infantry Regiments to enter battle positions, relieving elements of the 29th and 30th Infantry Divisions in the vicinity of LA MEAUPPE, FRANCE. The line occupied by the 35th Infantry extended from the VIRES RIVER above LA MEAUPPE in a southeastwardly direction through LA RIVEIRE to LA NAGOLLORIE. The 137th Infantry on the right from the VIRES RIVER to the vicinity of LA CARRILLON. The 320th Infantry was deployed to the left, with the 134th Infantry held in Corps reserve, under command of Major General Charles H. Corlett. (11) (See Map C - 35th Inf Div dispositions)

DISPOSITION OF THE 137TH INFANTRY

During the night of 9 July the 137th relieved the 119th Infantry, 30th Infantry Division. The Order of Battle was, the 1st Battalion on the right, 2d Battalion on the left, the 3d Battalion was held in division reserve. (12) (See Map C)

LOCATIONS OF UNITS

It was at this stage of the engagement when most of us in

(11) A-3, Chap. 3

(12) A-4, p. 13

In view of the map proposed here should have been used.

the Regiment began to take stock of the surrounding terrain in front of and to all sides of us. "Hedgerows" and more hedgerows, and wondered just how in the hell we were going to mount a successful attack, from and through them. These hedgerows were something new and different, many and varied were the descriptions of them. A careful study of a tropical aerial photograph of an area would reveal about 3,900 hedged enclosures within an area of eight (8) square miles. These hedgerows ran along the sides of and separated the fields which would measure about 50 - 100 yards across, and were from five to thirty feet in height, depending on the amount and type of vegetation that covered it. The bases of these hedgerows were mounds of thickly packed rocks and earth, topped with all forms of growth from full thickets to age gnarled trees. The density of the bases and the vegetation thereon, provided a cover and concealment no man could have devised. But nature proved even more helpful in providing sunken roads, trails and paths between some of these hedgerows.

The enemy as we were to learn the hard way, had incorporated these hedgerows into his plan of sustained defense and applied all their characteristics to his advantage, in the cover and concealment provided fields of fires, movement of troops, supply and evacuation.

During our intensive training phase of preparations in ENGLAND no instructions or suggestions were issued on the tactical application of such weird type of terrain. This point will be further emphasized later in this study.

SITUATION AT 0600, 11 JULY 1944

At 0600 hours, 11 July the 1st and 2d Battalions jumped off in the attack, preceded by an artillery barrage of twenty (20) minutes duration. In the right sector of the Regimental zone the 1st Battalion attacked with B Company on the right, C Company on the left, with A Company in battalion reserve. In the left sector of the regimental zone the 2d Battalion attacked with F Company on the right, E Company on the left, and G Company in reserve. The 3d Battalion in Division Reserve was directed to complete plans for counterattack within the division zone, to establish liaison with Division Headquarters, 320th Regimental Headquarters and 137th Regimental Headquarters. To provide flank protection for the division along the VIRE RIVER and to be prepared to assist the 1st and 2d Battalions in the attack. (13) (See Map C)

3D BATTALION SITUATION

During the preparation phase of the attack, the 3d Battalion staff was busily engaged in making plans and reconnaissance to carry out its mission of division reserve. This was all done in the best of maneuver style planning to include written orders, overlay attached, reconnaissance reports, etc., which was delivered to Division G-3 as prescribed at 2400, 10 July 1944. This was the first and last written order of the battle until a confirming order was written on the last combat action engaged in on the ELBE RIVER in GERMANY, May 1945, some ten (10) months later.

On the morning of 11 July the battalion staff assumed

(13) A-4, p. 13; Personal knowledge

their duties of liaison with units of the division. The Battalion Executive Officer reported to the Division G-3, Battalion S-3 reported to the Regimental Commander 137th Infantry, the Heavy Weapons Commanders reported to the Commanding Officer 320th Infantry. Communications from these outfits had been established prior to the attack and the battalion was ready to move to accomplish any of its many assigned missions.

At 1430 hours the 3d Battalion reverted to the control of the parent organization, 137th Infantry which was then commanded by Brigadier General Sebree, the regimental commander having become a casualty in the first hour of the attack.

At 1830 hours, 11 July the battalion was ordered to attack ^{turn} through a gap between the two leading battalions with the mission of cutting the ST. LO - PONT HERBERT HIGHWAY. (14) (See Map D)

BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The battalion plan of attack was to attack in a column of companies. Primarily to avoid the observation and fire from the strong point of ST. GILES, which was holding up the 1st Battalion.

Company I, commanded by Captain Orren L. Biesterfeld, to make the initial attack, followed by K Company, commanded by Captain Hubert H. Stephens, L Company in reserve, commanded by Captain Douglas R. Thomas, to follow K Company by 500 yards, Heavy Weapons Company in close support. 1st Platoon

(14) A-4, p. 14

of Machine Guns to follow I Company, 2d Platoon of Machine Guns to follow K Company. 81 mm Mortar Platoon initially under battalion control to follow L Company. M Company to furnish Mortar Observers, to L and K Companies.

Realizing the difficulties of the anti-tank platoon in traversing such weird terrain and having no roads or trails available to him, initially the Battalion Commander, Lt Col Albert M. Butler decided to hold these guns in mobile reserve, under command of the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Paul N. Stansbury. The Anti-Tank Leader to accompany the Battalion Command Group. The Battalion Aid Station was to follow the reserve company. Here again the Battalion Commander exercised good judgement and prior planning in his instructions to the Battalion Surgeon, Captain Donald P. Trees: "Place your aid station behind the battalion in such a manner as to care for any and all casualties we may have." His trust in the Battalion Surgeon was not misplaced. Thereafter the Aid Station was always ready and in position to carry out its mission of supporting the Battalion.

The Battalion Commander divided his staff as follows: The Foreward Command Group consisted of the Battalion Commander, S-3, S-2 and his section and the Heavy Weapons Company Commander. The Rear Command Group or Command Post was commanded by the Battalion Executive Officer and consisted of Headquarters Company (minus). The battalion motor pool, and the supply sergeants w/assistants from all companies. Under this set up the Battalion Executive Officer was charged with the mission of administration and supply for the battalion. This resulted in relieving the Battalion Commander

and Company Commanders of all incidental worries and they could devote their minds and efforts toward fighting their commands. (15)

In short the commanders merely stated their needs over the Battalion Radio net, and the Rear Command Group made an all out effort to deliver it to the spot. At times it was necessary for the Battalion Executive Officer to personally conduct carrying parties forward to assure their arrival, this was just another additional duty.

The battalion kitchens reverted to regimental control and remained there for the following action.

The ammunition and pioneer platoon carried out its mission of ammunition supply and later was available for hand carrying rations and water.

Blanket rolls were stacked in the regimental reserve area, and were to be transported forward on company vehicles on call. This call was not made until the evening of 15 July. There being little need, or opportunity for bedrolls in the days to follow.

MOVEMENT TO LINE OF DEPARTURE

The battalion left the reserve assembly area in the vicinity of LA MEAUFFE, FRANCE, at 1630 hours, 11 July, in a column of companies I, K, and L. Company M, minus the machine gun platoons, following I and K Companies.

Headquarters Company and the Rear Command Group was to follow later.

The A & P Platoon proceeded the battalion to the final assembly area in rear of the 2d Battalion's position with

(15) A-6

the extra ammunition, which was to be issued there.

The Battalion Commander had selected the area during the course of preparing the regimental reserve plans, and all commanders were familiar with these plans, and their application on the ground.

However, on arrival at this location, the Battalion Commander at the head of the column found this entire area was under enemy fire due to a shift in the fighting within the past few hours. It became necessary for the A & P Platoon to issue the extra ammunition in chow-line fashion as the column passed along the road at a slow run.

The leading elements of the battalion came under enemy observation as they crossed in rear of the 2d Battalion's position, still a few hundred yards short of the Line of Departure assigned them. The enemy opened fire on elements of I and K Companies, however, through the leadership and strong efforts of the Company Commanders, and with the cover provided by the hedgerows, the battalion reached the Line of Departure with no physical contact with the enemy. The battalion experienced its first casualties here, three (3) men of I Company and one (1) of K Company suffered wounds from shell fragments.

About 1930 hours the Line of Departure was reached by I Company, and under the protection of hedgerows I and K Companies reorganized.

Contact was established with G Company on the left, but contact with the 1st Battalion on the right was impossible by reason of the enemy position around the church of ST. GILES.

The 3d Battalion was now in the line and ready to attack in conjunction with the 2d Battalion on Regimental Orders. (See Map D)

NARRATION

ATTACK THROUGH THE HEDGEROWS

Company I, under the aggressive leadership of Captain Biesterfeld, jumped-off in the attack at 0800 hours, 12 July with two (2) platoons abreast, following the general line of hedgerows. Little resistance was encountered as the company moved forward toward the high ground southeast of ST. GILES. Company I advanced some 300 to 500 yards when the leading elements received fire from their left front, which was quickly reduced and the company continued its advance, flushing out the security elements of the enemy as they advanced.

Should be indicated on map

Company K followed, echeloned to the right rear, this formation allowed the Battalion Commander to attack initially on a narrow front and avoid the enemy's strong position around ST. GILES. Further, this gave some small degree of protection to the right flank which was exposed to the uncovered area along the VIRE RIVER.

Companies I and K continued the advance and gained HIGHWAY 3 about 1000 yards southeast of ST. GILES by 1400 hours, where both companies were held up by strong enemy resistance, mine fields and booby traps.

Captain ^{COI} Biesterfeld reported by radio his position and requested help. The Battalion Commander directed the

S-3 to contact Captain Biesterfeld and find out what the situation was.

On reaching I Company O.P. the S-3 was oriented by Captain Biesterfeld with a visual reconnaissance of Company I's position. The S-3 then recommended that Captain Biesterfeld commit his support platoon around to his left, this was carried out and enabled I Company to gain the next hedgerow. Placing the front line two hedgerows beyond HIGHWAY 3.

K Company continued a slow advance against enemy outposts until reaching a general line with L Company, where they were held up by machine gun fire. Captain Stephens committed his support platoon with no gain in ground.

The machine gun platoons following Companies I and K were of little use in this initial action mainly because of their bulk and high silhouette when mounted atop the hedgerows. The Heavy Weapons Commander decided to abandon the heavy mounts and use the guns layed across the tops of the embankments or thrust through the hedge. This proved to be successful, but costly in crews, in that wherever a gun was pushed through the brush and fired, a well aimed burst came back, and in a very few minutes a barrage of 120 mortars would descend on the area. (16)

The 81 mm mortar platoon set up in a position about 350 yards behind HIGHWAY 3 ready for action, but again difficulties were experienced. The observers in the hedgerows became casualties in attempting to spot targets, further the second time the mortars fired, counterfire was placed

(16) Personal knowledge

on their position knocking out one gun, and causing several casualties among the crews. The Heavy Weapons Commander directed the Company Executive Officer to take over the mortars and fire area targets until more observers could be placed in the front line companies. During the first day little support was given by the 81 mm mortars.

However the artillery was coming into its own that first day. The Forward Observers with the front line companies performed great work in placing fires where they were needed.

During the first day frequent breaks in wire communications occurred due to enemy shelling. The SCR 300 and SCR 536 radios functioned well and contact was maintained throughout the action with all companies.

Company K gained two (2) more hedgerows (some 250 yards) about 1845 hours, in a short but heavy fire fight. This put the forward elements of K Company in a position from which they received flanking fires from both flanks.

About 2200 hours the Battalion Commander received orders from Regiment to hold up the attack until the following morning, and to secure his position for the night. (17)

Company L was not employed on the line the first day of action, but was in position on the right flank of the battalion which was exposed, there being several hedgerow fields between the right flank of the battalion and the VIRE RIVER. Company L had been subjected to several severe enemy mortar and artillery barrages during the afternoon and late evening. (See Map D)

(17) Personal knowledge

SECOND NIGHT IN ACTION

The Battalion Commander issued orders to the two (2) attacking rifle companies to halt the attack about 2215 hours and to provide security to the front. Company I was directed to secure the left flank to include the road. Company K was directed to secure the right flank to include the road. L Company was to provide security for the area of the battalion, limiting their patrols to a distance of about 500 yards northeast of the road. (18)

After a staff conference with the S-3, Artillery Liaison Officer and the Heavy Weapons Commander the Battalion Commander issued orders to K Company Commander to withdraw his forward elements back to a general line with I Company to provide a tighter security, and to relieve K Company of the increasingly heavy harassing mortar and artillery fire they were being subjected to. (19)

The following plan of action for the next days attack was completed, and delivered to the company commanders by the S-3.

Companies I and K were to continue the attack at 0800 hours, 13 July. L Company was to move up to position on the right of K Company a half hour prior to daybreak, and attack at 0800 hours.

The 219th Field Artillery was to fire a thirty minute preparation across the battalion front. H -5 minutes the concentration was planned to fall within 100 yards of the front line, at 0800 hours lift 100 yards at which time the battalion was to attack. Thereafter the fires were to lift 100 yards successively on call of the Battalion Commander.

(18) Personal knowledge
(19) A-7

Company Commanders were instructed to report by radio when they were in position and ready for the fires to be lifted.

Wire heads were to follow Companies L and I.

The Battalion Commander directed that the S-2, S-3 and the Heavy Weapons Company Commander would be with the Company Commanders to assist in controlling this rolling barrage.

The machine gun platoons remained with Companies I and K, mortar observers were replaced during the night and were to fire on the sunken road in front of I Company and the one between I and K. (20)

Little support could be given to L Company initially due to the heavily wooded area directly to their front.

During the night the enemy maintained concentrations of mortars and artillery within the battalion area, which ^{NS.} was amazingly accurate, resulting in a number of casualties throughout the night and a complete loss of rest for all. ^{Wave} During lulls in the firing the sound of well directed shovels could be heard improving and deepening foxholes along side and underneath the hedgerows, a trick that had been learned from the Germans during the day as we took over his fortified positions.

It was found that a resupply of rations and small arms ammunition was not required. All companies reporting sufficient rations for the next day. All reporting that the men had not eaten during the confusion and excitement of their first day in battle. The status of small arms ammunition was explained by reason of the men not firing until

(20) Personal knowledge

they had a target to shoot at, and so very few targets had been seen during the day. (21)

SECOND DAY OF ATTACK (13 JULY 1944)

At 0730 hours the artillery preparations began to cover the area as planned.

At 0755 the Battalion Commander contacted the S-3, 219th Field Artillery to assure himself of the coordination of fires as planned. Company Commanders were contacted and reported all in readiness for the attack. At 0800 hours the artillery lifted and all three (3) companies jumped off.

Company I requested the lifting of artillery fire about 0810, followed closely by K Company. Company L on the right reported receiving fire from their right flank but reached their 100 yard objective about 0830.

These same tactics were repeated three successive times for an advance of about 350 yards. Little resistance was encountered except on the right flank of L Company which consisted of some small arms fire and mortar fires.

About 1000 hours the same plan of fire ~~maneuver~~ was attempted again, but with no success. As the artillery lifted and the companies jumped off they were met with a blast of machine gun and small arms fire all along the line. Within a matter of minutes the enemy ranged in with mortar barrages ~~barrages~~ on the positions of the front line companies, causing a large number of casualties.

No further gains were made during the day.

About 1400 hours the battalion began to receive intensive artillery and mortar fire along the front lines,

(21) Personal knowledge

and extending about 800 to 900 yards to the rear.

I Company reported a counterattack. The Battalion Commander directed I Company to hold, and artillery fire was requested and received on the area to the front of I Company.

I Company was successful in stopping the counterattack, but not without severe losses in men and officers. The Company Commander and Executive Officer were killed, the Weapons Platoon Leader, the Artillery Forward Observer and the Machine Gun Leader of M Company were wounded. The loss of these leaders and key officers coupled with the loss of a number of excellent NCO's and riflemen, left I Company badly disorganized.

The Battalion S-3 took over the task of reorganizing the company under the command of young 2d Lieutenant Ashley, the junior officer of the company, a few minutes prior, but now the senior and only officer remaining with I Company. With the able assistance of several excellent NCO's and privates the reorganization was completed and I Company was ready to go again, badly battered and shaken, but willing to fight. (22)

During this reorganization the Battalion Commander had shifted elements of K Company over behind I Company in case the enemy pressed his attack. (23)

About 1800 hours L Company attempted to advance by a sudden mass crossing of the hedgerows to their front, but was stopped cold, and received the customary artillery and mortar barrage in return. This sudden attack by L Company

(22) Personal knowledge

(23) A-6

disclosed the positions of three strong points and one (1) self-propelled 88 mm gun, however, these targets were reported to the Artillery Liaison Officer and the artillery was quick to engage them. The 88 mm S.P. was knocked out and fires along L Company's front was reduced somewhat.

The forced withdrawal back across the hedgerow left a number of casualties laying on the forward side of the embankment that could not be recovered until darkness fell.

About 2200 hours the attack was called off for the night. The Battalion Commander directed all companies to secure their positions and to prepare to attack the following morning. (See Map D)

During the days operations all companies reported our artillery falling short causing casualties and considerable mistrust of the artillery among the men.

This is explainable by the methods the enemy used in ranging in with counter-fire of mortars each time our artillery fired. In the battlefield noise and confusion, that faint whisper of mortars falling in could not be heard, therefore officers and men alike in their confusion blamed the artillery for short rounds and casualties, which actually was results of enemy action.

One other confusing report reoccurring throughout the day was the ever prevailing report of 88 mm fire, every round was reported as a 88 mm S.P. gun firing it. This resulted in inaccurate shell reports and confusion of the artillery in counter-fire attempts.

During the course of the days fighting all of the battalion staff had occasion to remark of the large amount of

individual and crew equipment strewn about the battle position. Everything from meat cans to machine guns. It should be recalled here that this was a new unit in combat, undergoing their first baptism of fire, and of course had entered battle carrying full equipment, including such items as signal panels, extra shoestrings, etc. However, in all fairness to members of the battalion, a large part of this equipment resulted from casualties. When a man was wounded, and started for the rear he would drop all of his equipment, further the aid men would relieve a man of all his equipment prior to carrying him out.

THIRD NIGHT IN BATTLE

After the forward areas of the battalion had been secured for the night, the Battalion Commander and S-3 again planned the attack for the following day, (this became a nightly ritual for the battalion staff and was never neglected thereafter) 14 July 1944. (24)

One platoon of tanks from the 737th Tank Battalion was attached for this attack. (25)

The following plans were set-up for 0700 hours, 14 July. K Company reinforced by the platoon of tanks was to make the main effort along the sunken road in their zone, then across two open fields toward HIGHWAY 2, the Regimental objective.

I Company on the left to advance under the protection of K Company's advance and to secure the left flank of the battalion. At this time there existed a gap of about 600 yards between the 2d and 3d Battalions, the 2d Battalion

(24) Personal knowledge

(25) A-7

being held up by a strong point of the enemy M.L.R. which was referred to as an ideal school solution for the defense of this area, by the G-2 of XIX Corps. (26)

L Company on the right to attack in conjunction with K Company and the tanks. As an alternate plan, one (1) section of the tanks would be shifted to L Company's area if there appeared a possible route of advance for tanks. An artillery rolling barrage was planned for 0700 hours without the prior preparation fires of the previous day. This was an attempt to deceive the enemy as to the time of attack. (27)

This was to be the initial operation of this battalion as Infantry-Tank team, and experiences from this action provided much toward later integrated team operations which was to develop to a high degree before the end of the hostilities.

During the night, rations, water and ammunition and medical supplies were brought forward and distributed by the personnel of the battalion train (cooks, clerks, supply sergeants and members of the A & P Platoon).

This was strictly a hand-carried operation, due to the lack of roads or trails available and also due to the heavy shelling the battalion was subjected to twenty-four hours a day. Further, the noise of a few vehicles would be easily located, and result in additional shelling.

After darkness fell, the medics of the battalion won the enduring admiration and everlasting thanks of the battalion for their attention to duty and disregard of danger in hand-carrying all of the wounded of the battalion from the forward areas. At times crawling forward of the front lines to reach

(26) A-4, p. 1

(27) Personal knowledge

members who were wounded earlier in the day, and in places where no man could have gotten to during daylight and returned alive. The Battalion Surgeon himself, acted as a litter bearer, until the arrival of reinforcements from the Corps Clearing Station.

The casualties to date had been extremely heavy in officers and senior NCO's. Company I was left with one (1) officer and had lost a large portion of their NCO's. Company K, commanded by Captain Stephens, had three officers, and had lost heavily in Squad Leaders. L Company now commanded by Lieutenant Dogget had three officers of which one more was wounded just prior to the attack hour the following morning.

Company M had lost through casualties both Machine Gun Platoon Leaders. The 81 mm Mortar Platoon Leader was evacuated as a C.E. case.

M Company Commander reorganized with Lieutenant Hutton in charge of the 81 mm mortars. With instructions to fire all six guns the next day, even if it was only in the general direction of ST. LO. The Company Executive Officer, Lieutenant Decker was placed in command of the machine gun platoons, with the Platoon Sergeants in direct charge of their platoons. A modified B. A. R. mount which had been modified by M Company Commander and the Regimental S-4, Major R. E. Frizzelle, was issued for use on the heavy guns during the next day, it proved to be superior to the ordinary mount for use in the hedgerows. (28)

The 1st Platoon, under command of Technical Sergeant Hupp in I Company's area dug through the forward hedgerows

(28) Personal knowledge.

during the night. Resulting in some excellent firing positions, and support of I Company the next morning.

Radio remained the principal means of communications for the day. Wire was layed to rifle companies, and to forward observers, but was of little use by reason of the constant interruptions caused by enemy shelling and breaking of wire.

FOURTH DAY IN BATTLE

At 0700 14 July 44, K Company supported by the platoon of tanks, and artillery, jumped-off. By 1200 hours they had reached a line about 400 yards short of HIGHWAY #2, by-passing the strong point of a group of farm buildings on their right and in front of L Company. Suffering the loss of (4) of the (5) supporting tanks, there they were held up for the day despite repeated attempts to advance.

L Company on the right using the old doctrine of fire and movement succeeded in flanking the strong point to their front and reduced it. Making the first large capture of enemy troops a total of 21 prisoners. After the capture of this strong point L Company succeeded in reaching a line about 50 yards to the rear of K and extending back about 200 yards along the river road along their right flank.

I Company on the left flank, experienced the same heavy resistance of the previous days, and despite all their probing efforts gain little ground.

About 1000 hours the battalion received two (2) tank destroyers from the 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which ~~was~~ placed in support of I Company. Using these T. D. s as self-

propelled assault guns T/Sgt. Gunazoles, platoon Sgt., commanding the 1st Platoon of I Company succeeded in blasting the way clear for an advance of about 200 yards for I Company. (29)

During the late afternoon K Company was extended to the right taking over L Company's Zone of Action which had gradually narrowed into a platoon front. L Company was moved over to the left of the battalion to pinch out I Company. About 1900 hours I Company was able to withdraw from the left flank. This could be effected by reason of the success enjoyed by the 1st Battalion in their attack, through the gap between the 3rd and 2nd Battalions. The 1st Battalion had succeeded in reaching a line about 200 yards short of that held by the 3rd Battalion. (30)

The anti-tank platoon was brought forward and took up positions covering the secondary road along the VIRE RIVER, and protecting the right flank of the battalion.

K Company was now in a position to command the junction of HIGHWAYS 2 and 3. The regimental objective, however, the objective was not yet secured. Further the command of this important R. J. relieve some pressure on the 30th Division across the VIRE RIVER.

About 2000 hours the battalion was secured for the night. Company K and L providing security to the front and flanks, I Company patrolling the rear of the battalion.

The battalion aid station moved up behind I Company and was ready for action, route of evacuation through that now well known sunken road in the middle of the battalion area. (See Map # D)

(29) Personal knowledge
(30) A-6

The Battalion O. P. moved to a location about 150 yards behind K Company. (See Map D)

Sniper action had increased during the day to such an extent that the Battalion Commander directed that no individual was to move about singly, but to travel in pairs or in small groups. The S-2 and S-3 ^{Were} ~~was~~ directed to select one or two riflemen to accompany them at all times. This was not considered to be waste of manpower inasmuch as the S-2 and S-3 had been pinned down on several occasions due to sniper action and the Battalion Commander was deprived of their staff assistance. (31)

FIFTH NIGHT IN BATTLE

for The attack for the morning of the 15 July 44, was planned 0700 hours, and coordinated with 1st Battalion on the left. Companies L and K were to attack and secure the ST LO-PONT HERBERT HIGHWAY, (HIGHWAY #2.) I Company in reserve. K Company retained the 2nd Platoon of machine guns of M Company. The 1st Platoon of MG'S was shifted to the support of L Company. The 81mm mortar platoon took up positions about 750 yards in rear of K Company. The artillery was to fire a 15 minute preparation 0644-0700 hours. (32)

No tanks or TDs was available to the battalion for the 15 July 44. By reason of the bulk of the Division's strength being shifted to 134th Infantry's attack on the left of the division and aimed at ST LO itself.

Lt. Hutton had succeeded during the day in getting the 81 mm mortar platoon organized and firing, using SCR 300 radios

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- (31) Personal knowledge
(32) Personal knowledge

for communication. No efforts was wasted on wire communication. The accuracy obtained and the rapidity of fires from the mortars, reward the efforts directed toward this end, since ~~entering action~~. The raise of morale among the officers and men resulting from this firing was itself a reward for mission accomplished.

As one of the enlisted men of L Company put it. "Sure makes a man feel better whenever a private can pull in something with a wallop on these _____." (33)

Re-supply of rations, ammunition and water was delivered to a battalion release point at the junction of the sunken road and HIGHWAY #3. From this point delivery to the companies was made by carrying parties from the kitchens and the A&P Platoon.

ATTACK 15 JULY 1944

S. M. P. E.

At 0700 hours 15 July 44, the attack jumped-off, supported by artillery and the battalions heavy weapons. The six remaining heavy machine guns had good positions having dug through the corners of the forward hedgerows during the night. The light machine guns of L and K was placed in the center of the hedgerow field and dug underneath the embankment to obtain firing positions.

The 60 mm mortar crews of L and K Companies were consolidated under the command of the mortar section leader of K Company, Sgt. Parks, and from a central position in rear of both companies, rendered excellent support.

Lt. Hutton using the machine gunners and platoon sgts.

(33) Personal knowledge

in addition to his mortar observers delivered 81 mm mortar fire on call and at will during this attack. (34)

By 0910 K Company had reached the highway. Company L on the left gained one hedgerow. At this time heavy machine gun, mortar, and artillery fires, forced these two companies to cease the attack and dig-in.

The pattern of the attack was repeated. That of digging through the hedgerows for fields of fire, coordination of mortar, and artillery fires.

About 1200 hours the enemy launched a strong counter-attack. The bulk of this attack was directed at the 1st and 2nd Battalions.

The attack in the 3rd Battalion area was stopped with no loss in ground gained, and few casualties. The preparations made for the attack proved valuable in stopping the attack. Those prepared fields of fire and coordinated efforts of the mortar and artillery fire gave the 3rd Battalion the same advantages they had been fighting against for the past 4 days.

No further effort was made to attack during this day by the 3rd Battalion.

About 1600 hours, the Battalion C. O. received orders to the effect that the 1st Battalion would shift over and relieve the Battalion during the night. This was made possible by the success of the 2nd Battalion attack during the day, and the breaking of strong resistance in the path of their advance.

By 2400 hours, 15 July 1944, the relief of the 3rd Battalion had been completed, and the battalion was assembled in the general area of their initial flight with the Germans,

(34) Personal knowledge

just north of HIGHWAY #3. (See Map E)

SUMMARY OF ACTION

After 5 1/2 days and nights of combat the 3rd Battalion had succeeded in taking the objective given them.

Those members of the battalion remaining had emerged from this short period of battle seasoned veterans, in every sense of the term. They had learned the hard way how to apply the hedgerow terrain to their use. They had found ways and means of caring for their wounded.

The 81 mm mortar platoon had overcome its initial failure, and was now organized and ready to provide excellent supporting fires and had regained the respect of battalion. Officers and men alike gained the know-how of utilizing to the fullest, all available supporting weapons, machine-guns, mortars, both the 81mm and 60mm, artillery, tanks, tank-destroyers. And how to re-supply themselves during contact with the enemy. Plans for the battlefield recovery of salvageable equipment were in the making, and, were completed and set in operation during the 16th and 17th July 1944.

For this short 5 day period of action, the battalion suffered in killed in action, wounded, captured, and missing in action, a total of 374 officers and men.

Communication techniques had been tested and proved. The battalion concentrated on three principle means, Radio, Telephone and runners in that order.

The system of supply within the battalion was found to be workable, and resulted in good control by the Battalion

C. O. plus relieving the new company commanders of this additional load allowing them to devote their main effort toward fighting their units.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. TERRAIN AND ENEMY POSITIONS

The Germans had taken full advantage of the terrain, across which the battalion was to attack. Choosing his own defensive position with care to provide good observation, fields of fire, and mutual support of his strong points. There position had been planned and prepared long in advance of the attack, as evidenced by the terrific fight necessary to overrun them. In all fields defended by the Germans, it was found, there were well placed machine gun positions in each corner of the field permitting ^zgrazing fire across four fields, mutually supporting each other. There were well dug in camouflage^d positions along the edges of the field for individual riflemen plus the usual connecting trenches. In addition, the supporting fires of the enemy was well planned to include zeroing in of weapons and barrages. In short they had the school solution, and applied it with decisive force.

For some unexplained reason (it could have been explained by reasons of security prior to the invasion of 6 June 44, but not some 36 days thereafter) no warnings or instructions were given on such a weird phenomenon of terrain as the hedgerows of Normandy. At no time during the training phase in England, or the planning phase of this attack from the time of landing in

France, moving up to and the relief of elements of two (2) veteran Divisions, was this vital subject (conduct of the attack thru Hedgerows) mentioned. It is conceivable that with the explanation of ways and means of attacking hedgerows, the losses in men and equipment could have been reduced, through prior planning, close coordination of supporting weapons and the individual riflemen.

2. SUPPORTING WEAPONS

MACHINE GUNS

Firing support provided by the battalions organic heavy weapons proved inadequate initially, primarily due to lack of good observation, and fields of fire.

In each attack as the machine gunners exposed themselves in efforts to gain positions from which they could fire on the enemy positions. The enemy, from his carefully prepared and concealed positions, brought in his supporting fires to neutralize or knock out the guns and crews. This was extremely costly in trained crews, and guns.

Through the school of experience M Company devised two methods of overcoming this.

One (1) The adoption of the BAR mount to the Heavy Machine-gun, by welding a clamping band onto the BAR Mount that could be clamped around the water-jacket of the gun, this method permitted the gun to be mounted on the usual mount at will or across the embankments sandbag fashion.

Two (2) By stealing a page from the German's manual, and digging thru or underneath the embankments as they did.

81 MM MORTARS

The 81 mm mortar platoon provided inadequate support initially due to the lack of confidence in themselves, their platoon leader, and their weapons. The lack of confidence in their weapons resulted, from too much dry firing and not enough live ammunition practice. Plus the fact they could not see "what, or where their rounds landed."

The lack of confidence in their platoon leader was justified. This was recognized and corrected at an early date by the Company Commander but not before considerable damage to morale occurred.

Communications within the platoon proved inadequate. Wire in such heavy shelling as the area was subjected to, was impossible to maintain. One break in the wire would require time and men from the platoon to repair. Results, no communications with observers, no firing. SCR 536 radios failed due to distance and the terrain. On the fourth and fifth day when the platoon, and observers were equipped with the SCR 300 radio, communications were good, and the platoon began to fire, and regain their confidence in their ability to fire and hit targets. Further they became battle-wise in self-preservation which permitted them to absorb the counterfire placed on their positions and then return it twofold addressed to the Germans.

3. RIFLE COMPANY SUPPORTING WEAPONS

Rifle Company officers and men alike failed to include the 60 mm mortars, and the light machine gun sections in the attack, through ignorance, or confusion and excitement of their

first battle. In training days and through all maneuvers, it was standard practice for the Weapons Platoon to follow the reserve platoon, waiting the opportunity of employment. In battle the opportunity must be created, by prior planning, proper emplacement, and constant supervision. When these light, but effective weapons are employed, they provide that additional punch, close up and at hand for the company commander.

4. FAILURE OF THE INDIVIDUAL RIFLEMAN

The failure of great numbers of individual riflemen to fire at targets, target areas, or likely targets (all hedgerows presented likely targets) resulted in a greater volume of enemy small arms fire, and observed mortar, and artillery fire than would have been possible, had all riflemen fired constantly as they advanced. Well aimed and distributed small arms fire on a position will prevent the enemy from returning fires. To bring out this point all one has to do is point to the effectiveness of the Germans hated and respected "BURP" gun, one blast across a hedgerow was all that was needed to gain fire superiority and thereafter easily maintained. This same principle applied to our superior weapons is what we should strive for.

The small amounts of small arms ammunition requested daily in re-supply is explainable only because of the individuals failure to utilize to the fullest his principle means of supporting his own advance.

5. INFANTRY-TANK TEAM

The loss of 4 tanks in a short two (2) hour battle can

be attributed to improper employment in unfavorable terrain, and lack of Infantry Support. It is very easy to write now of our past mistakes (honest but costly). As already pointed out this was the 1st such Infantry-Tank team action, in training or in battle. And what prior planning and coordination that did exist between the Infantry and Tanks on the ground was pure chance and individual initiative. However lessons learned here were later put to good use. That of communications, mobility of tanks, their fire power, and shock action effect and their ability to further the advance of the Infantry Soldier.

6. SUPPLY

There was no shortages apparent in the supply of battle equipment during this short period. However, it was brought out that a dire need for battlefield recovery of equipment existed. This is properly a function of the S-4, and can well be cared for by utilizing those non-effectives in battle that crop up in all units.

7. LEADERS

The Loss of Commanders, company, platoon, section and squad in the early stages of the attack or during the attack can be disastrous. And all possible precautions should be taken to assure that subordinates are trained, and capable of taking over the next higher post and preferable^y two positions higher.

The fighting during the action reported on was broken down to that of squads, and platoons, and the lack of addition-

al trained leader became very apparent in the face of the loss of key personnel through casualties. Resulting in the lack of team work, and aggressiveness on the part of those who were rapidly promoted beyond the scope of their training.

LESSONS

1. In the initial planning of all operations the military implication of terrain must be studied carefully, and all specialized techniques of attack and defense made available for the training of units to be engaged (at the earliest date possible).

2. a. The highest degree of training possible must be obtained in alternate means of employment of supporting machine guns.

2. b. In training, heavy mortar crews must be provided with ranges and live ammunition for practice in addition to gun drill.

2 c. Commanders must be taught the prompt elimination of unfit leaders, both officers and enlisted men.

3 A. The prompt and proper employment of supporting weapons must be taught and impressed upon rifle company personnel in training.

4 B. Riflemen must be given confidence in the fire power inherit within their platoons, squads, and the individual, through training in actually firing problems with live ammunition (at all times).

4 C. Fire power and fire superiority is essential to the advance of the infantry.

5 D. a. Coordination and cooperation is vitally necessary

in the Infantry-Tank-team, and the rapid progress of the attack.

6/ b. Battlefield recovery of lost or abandoned equipment is vital to the maintenance of good supply in battle.

7/ 8. Training of personnel for key positions must be two deep, and preferably three deep.

9. Initiative in the individual must be encouraged in training.