

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

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
(1ST INFANTRY DIVISION) AT DOM BOTGENBACH, BELGIUM,
16 - 21 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of an Antitank Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION DEFENDING
HILLY TERRAIN AGAINST COORDINATED TANK-INFANTRY ATTACKS

Captain Donald E. Rivette, Infantry

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st US Infantry Division during its defense of the Misenborn Ridge in the vicinity of Dem Butgenbach 16 - 24 December, 1944 in the "Ardennes Campaign."

Going back to the 6th day of June, 1944, we find that the 1st US Army, having as one of its assigned units the 1st US Infantry Divisions, had secured a beachhead in Normandy, France. (See Map "A") A month later it forced an opening at St. Lo, France on 25 July, swung south to Avranches and northeast to Falaise to assist the British Army in annihilating the German units trapped there. From that point it swiftly moved due east, seized Paris and raced to Mons, Belgium where the remnants of the First German Army attempted to escape from the pocket caused by the rapid advance of the First American Army and the Second British Army. (1)

On 21 October, 1944, the Commandant of the German forces in Aachen, Germany surrendered to the 1st US Army. In November the 1st US Army moved into the Hurtgen Forest area of Aachen and on 13 November began to extend its penetrations further into Germany. (2)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

On 13 December, 1944, the 1st US Army, consisting of the Vth, VIIth and VIIIth Corps, was continuing its attack east into Germany in an effort to seize the Roer River Dams south of the German city of Duren. (See Map "B")

(1) A-2, p. 258; (2) A-2, p. 269.

On the left flank was VII Corps which was engaged in consolidating its positions and taking limited objectives between Altdorf, Germany on the north and Lammersdorf, Germany on the south. Between Lammersdorf, Germany and a point approximately 20 miles north of Losheim, Germany V Corps was making the main effort by attacking due east to seize the Roer River Dams. On the right flank, VIII Corps was engaged in a purely defensive roll, being very thinly spread between the above mentioned point north of Losheim, Germany on the north and Remich, Belgium on the south where it tied in with the 3d US Army. (3)

On 14 December, although V Corps attack was continued, there was little advance. (4)

On 15 December, enemy action was strong. Units in V Corps repulsed a counterattack from the southeast in front of Lammersdorf, Germany and pressed forward for small advances to secure the balance of their objectives. (5)

On the morning of 16 December, 1944, after a careful analysis of the dispositions of the troops of the 1st US Army and the successful assembly of twenty-two divisions in almost complete secrecy, the enemy launched the greatest counter-offensive against the Allied forces since our invasion of Normandy. After heavy concentrations of artillery fire commencing at 0530 on front line troops, artillery positions, command posts and communications centers; the attack, spearheaded by two panzer armies, hit on a broad front between Koenigsmann on the north and Echternach on the south. (See Map "B") As soon as the artillery fire was lifted on the front line troops, it was shifted to key rear installations and fell for two and one half hours

The overall plan of the enemy was to drive toward the Moselle River and on to seize Brussels and Antwerp as the final objective.

(3) A-I, pages 95-98; (4) A-I p. 98; (5) A-I, p. 98; (6) A-I, p. 103.

In addition to all this, approximately 800 parachutists, under the command of a Col. Von der Heydte, were to jump on the Eisenborn Ridge area to seize important road junctions between Mupen and Malmedy. Their mission was to immobilize and block movements by American troops from the north that could be used to stem the German attack. In spite of the fact that initially they met little or no resistance in their drop zone, their operation was a failure. A bad drop apparently scattered men and equipment and they never did get properly organized. We later found out later that none of the paratroops had been told of his mission, other than that further instruction would be given him when he had landed. The only thing the NCOs knew was that they were to hold certain key road junctions; they had no secondary mission. When they were unable to carry out their primary mission, they hid out in the woods, harassing isolated vehicles and taking a few prisoners. Their operation was considered a complete failure as they failed to block any of our movements toward the penetrated area. (9)

The heaviest attack on VIII Corps hit at 6700 hours on 16 December on either side of the Schnee Eifel Forest. (See Map "C"). Here there were two avenues of approach towards the northwest and the enemy objective of Antwerp. One of these avenues led into the key road junctions at St. Vith and one on the north led to the important Eisenborn Ridge. Here, on the boundary between V and VIII Corps, the right flank of the 99th Division in the Bucholz Forest was sent back and an enemy penetration made nearly to Bullingen. (See Map "C"). By night, the Germans had made a deep penetration 2 miles west and southwest of Holzheim between the south edge of the Bucholz Forest and ^{from} Holzheim to the Eifel. West and southwest thereof, the enemy attack had driven across our lines in a northwesterly direction so as to ~~to~~ ^{to} bring them back in the zone of the 106th Division in a shallow arc which bent back toward St. Vith. (10)

(9), 1-3, p. 10; (10) 1-1, p. 10.

The German attacks on 17 December were slow in getting started. A vigorous attack on the ^{NAM} 78th Division at Monschau was repulsed but units of the 2d Infantry Division and the 99th Infantry Division to the south were forced to fall back. The 20th RCT from the 1st Infantry Division had moved up and counterattacked south of Butgenbach to restore the line north of Bullingen. South of Bullingen the German 1st SS Panzer Corps had begun to pour through the gap. (See Map "C"). Enemy units reached Malmedy where they were blocked from driving to the north by elements of the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion. These elements were bypassed and the panzer spearhead raced as far west as Stavelot. One armored infantry regiment and a TD battalion were sent to reinforce the area around Malmedy. The 100th Infantry Division was still believed to be holding out along positions in the Schnee Eifel Forest even though communications with them had been cut. The enemy had driven deep toward St. Vith, where the 7th Armored Division had been sent to check it. (11)

On 18 December the enemy greatly extended its penetrations. The 2d and 99th Infantry Divisions along with the 20th RCT continued to hold the line around Butgenbach and protect the important Elsenborn Ridge. The timetable of the 2d SS Panzer Corps was being held up as the 1st SS Panzer Corps was having difficulty in securing this ridge. Through the gap south of Butgenbach enemy units had advanced as far west as Werbomont with additional elements at Stoumont. At 1200 on the 18th of December the 30th Infantry Division reported one RCT in Stavelot and Malmedy. During the 18th General HODGES (CG 1st U.S. Army) notified General GEROW (CG V Corps) that the 82d Airborne Division was moving to the threatened sector near Werbomont on the night of the 18th. The 82d Airborne Division was to be attached to V Corps. (12)

The 1st Infantry Division was spread out over the Elsenborn Ridge with the 26th RCT at Butgenbach, the 20th RCT at Stavelot, and the 29th RCT at Malmedy.

(11) A-1, p. 106; (12) A-4, p. 236;

Force DAVIDSON, made up of tanks, TDs, and reconnaissance elements of these units attached and assigned to the 1st Division, were in the vicinity of Weimes while the 18th Infantry was under V Corps control in the vicinity of Eupen on an anti-parachute mission. (13)

Prior to the 18th of December the 1st Infantry Division had left the vicinity of Verviers, Belgium where it had been in V-Corps reserve on 16 December. This unit had been relieved from its position in the Hurtgen Forest on 7 December by the 9th Infantry Division and was receiving its first rest period since its assault on the beaches of Normandy six months before. The Division had suffered very heavy casualties in the Hurtgen Forest action. Especially severe casualties were experienced by the 20th Infantry Regiment which had had approximately 1800 casualties out of 2700 men in two weeks of fighting. Included in the above figure was the loss of two companies of the 2d Battalion that were cut off, surrounded, and either killed or captured in the town of Merode, Germany. (14)

When it became apparent that the breakthrough was of major proportions, the 26 RCT was put on a one hour alert at 1800 16 December. At 0300, 17 December, the 26 RCT, less attached tanks and tank destroyers, moved to Camp Elsenborn where the CT commander reported to the CG 99th Division, to which the regiment was attached. The early morning movement to Camp Elsenborn was in the cold, penetrating fog of mid-December. Supporting units of the 99th Infantry Division were clogging the highway in an effort to displace to the rear. At the triangle formed by the junction of the Verviers-Eupen-Malmedy Road the leading battalion commander was stopped by a soldier in the uniform of an American M1 from the 99th Infantry, who probably was a German in a captured uniform, told the battalion

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(13) A-2, p. 231; (14) Personal Knowledge.

The battalion commander replied that that was just who he was looking for and moved the column on. At this junction the area was covered with parachutes and a little further up the road two or three enemy paratroopers fired on the column, severely wounding one Lieutenant. This was the extent of the "blocking action" of the German paratroops of Col. Von der Heydte encountered by the 26th RCT. (15)

The 26th RCT reached Camp Elsenborn at 1700 hours 17th December and was given the mission of containing the enemy's drive and to prevent it spreading north to Eupen and Verviers. This caused something of a race to develop between the 26th Infantry and the 12th SS Panzer Division for the occupation of Butgenbach. At 1400 hours the 26th Infantry seized Butgenbach and pushed its 2d and 3d Battalions directly south to secure the hill masses overlooking Bullingen in order to safeguard the main road to Malmedy as well as a large stock pile of artillery ammunition on the southern edge of Butgenbach. This was accomplished with little opposition. The 1st Battalion remained in Butgenbach where it secured the town and began consolidating the stragglers in the area and using them to further strengthen the defense. Late that afternoon the attached tanks and TDe joined the 26th RCT and were placed in position. (16)

TERRAIN ANALYSIS

One of the most important terrain features in the entire "Break-through" area was the Elsenborn Ridge. (See Map "C"). Except for a break around Bullingen it was part of the same land mass as the Schnee Eifel Ridge that was captured by the enemy in their initial assault on VIII Corps. The Elsenborn Ridge ran from the first hill mass behind Butgenbach in a northwesterly direction to Eupen in the center, to Werschau on the right and on the left to Verviers.

(15) Personal Knowledge, (16) Personal Knowledge

Once the Eisenborn Ridge was secured the Germans could drive straight down a series of corridors and seize the huge American dumps at Liege. From there the Germans could resupply their panzer units with American gasoline and roll on to the port of Antwerp, their final objective. Also from Bullingen to Butgenbach to Malmedy was an additional supply route needed to maintain the forward movement of their penetration. On the east, the Eisenborn Ridge was protected by a series of heavily wooded hill masses that gave all the advantage to the defender. The southwestern flank of the ridge from Malmedy to Stoumont was also well protected by the Ambleve River and a series of hill masses that formed cross compartments for anyone attacking from the southeast. General Eisenhower was also very much worried about the defense of this particular piece of terrain and called up General Bradley to inquire about it. General Bradley replied; "They can't come through, I've got the 1st Division there." (17) Not only was the 1st Division there it was going to stay there at all costs.

For the first time since our landings in Normandy enemy air became a factor to contend with. All day on the 18th of December they were active across V Corps front but the IX Tactical Air Command was on the job. During the day a total of 400 sorties were flown and claims were high: 119 enemy aircraft destroyed, and 73 damaged; twenty three armored vehicles destroyed, 12 damaged; 188 other vehicles destroyed and 172 damaged. (18) A large part of this damage was inflicted by the air blow between Stavelot and Stoumont. (19)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

As stated earlier, the 2d Battalion 26th Infantry had seized the hill mass at Dom Butgenbach, about one and a half miles east of Stavelot, in order to secure the southern flank of the main front.

(17) A-2, p. 319; (18) A-4, p. 263; (19) A-4, p. 263.

During the late afternoon of 17 December, the battalion commander, Lt. Colonel Derrill Daniel, called his company commanders and battalion staff together and gave his defense order. On the left he placed "F" Co on a ridge that overlooked the town of Bullingen and one of the main supply routes of the Sixth SS Panzer Army. On the right of the main road to Bullingen he placed "G" Co to defend the saddle facing south east and extending to the right to include the main road running south. "E" Co took up a reverse slope defense from this point extending along a tree line until it hit the edge of the woods. On both side of the tree line the ground was absolutely devoid of cover. The trees themselves were tall heavy pines that offered little protection and whose only use was in making a tree burst more effective by their evenly spaced branches. A series of outposts were established on the forward slope in front of "F" Co on the left extending across the front of the battalion sector to the right where they reached the crest of the hill mass in front of "E" Co. Because of the nature of the terrain and the fog that had settled on the area, the battalion commander placed his anti-tank defense well forward. On his left, facing towards Bullingen, he placed three 57mm anti-tank guns in the MLR with three tank-destroyers in close support. The latter mounted 3" naval guns. On his right, protecting the MLR of "G" and "E" Companies, he placed three more 57mm anti-tank guns. Each of these 57mm anti-tank guns carried as part of their basic load 10 rounds of British two pounder set in a composition ring that would fit tight into the bore of a 57mm anti-tank gun or the British counterpart, the six pounder. It had a muzzle velocity of approximately 4200 feet per second and would penetrate approximately six inches of armor at a 30 degree angle of incidence. The significance of this ammunition will be brought

out later. The battalion command post was located in a heavily walled stone building that had been the main structure at Dom Stengen.

Supporting his anti-tank defense on the left the battalion commander had placed two more tank-destroyers in the next tree line and kept his four tanks around the CP and to the rear of it to be used as a counterattacking force. Behind the hill mass that was north of Dom Butgenbach he placed his 81mm mortars (six). Because of the depleted condition of the battalion caused by the afore mentioned action in the Hurtgen Forest, the battalion commander was only able to keep one platoon as reserve. (20) This unit was placed on the high ground north of Dom Butgenbach. No real counterattack plan was devised as the battalion commander didn't feel much could be done with such a small unit. Any effective counterattacking force would have to come from one of the other battalions. At the end of the defense order he warned all commanders that the battalion must hold at all costs and that no man could give up an inch of ground.

During the 18th of December the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry further consolidated its positions and sent patrols to the edge of Bulligen. Heavy enemy traffic had been moving out of Bulligen going west during the night, consequently, this road was kept under observation and artillery fire.

On 19 December, the 12 SS Panzer Division launched a heavy attack in an effort to break through to Malmedy but was repulsed with heavy losses. (21) The heaviest of these attacks hit the 2d Infantry Division at Wirtzfeld and the 1st Infantry at Dom Butgenbach. (See Map "D") The first thrust at the positions of the 2d Bn, 26th Infantry east of Butgenbach was launched around 0800 hours when something like a battalion of infantry and several tanks hit up the Bullingen-Dom

Butgenbach road, north of the road, astride the secondary road

shown on Map "D"

(21) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Major Thomas Gendron on 1 Dec. 1948; (21) A-1, p. 108;

Through the heavy fog that settled down on the area the men on the MLR could see the enemy infantry deployed perfectly in approach formation and allowed them to approach within 100 yards of the position without a shot being fired. Every man was ready and waiting. About that time the leading Germans hollered "Surrender" (in English) and the 2d Battalion let them have it; small arms, machine guns, mortars, artillery, anti-tank guns, TDs and tanks. (22) Very few of the enemy escaped. Patrols from "F" Company later counted over 100 dead and five tanks destroyed in front of their position. Later, at 1010, two tanks and about a company of infantry were observed moving in on the 2d Battalion positions from the south. The tanks managed to work their way up to our road-blocks where one of them was destroyed by fire from a TD; the other tank withdrew, but not before a bazooka team had damaged one of our tank destroyers. (23) The supporting infantry was disposed of by small-arms and artillery fire. At the same time another attack in about the same strength thrust eastward from Bullingen; it, too, was dispersed with one tank destroyed. Other tanks, working their way toward Weismes from the east and west, were turned back by intense artillery and mortar fire. (24) Units were reorganized and positions dug a little deeper. Machine guns were moved to alternated positions and supplementary positions improved. At about 1300 a German reconnaissance vehicle mounting a 50mm anti-tank gun, followed by a Mark V tank, approached one of the 57mm anti-tank guns facing to the South in "G" Company's sector. The squad held its fire until the vehicles were within 100 yards of their 57mm gun, when it fired three rounds in rapid succession, one hitting the reconnaissance vehicle and two penetrating the Mark V. Although both vehicles were ~~destroyed~~ ^{damaged}, the reconnaissance vehicle managed to get away. The 57mm anti-tank gun, however, was destroyed.

(22) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Lt. Col. Darrill Daniel on

20 Oct. 1948; (23) A-3, p. 24; (24) A-3, p. 13.

The two men manning the gun were killed instantly but the German ^{sd} panzers attack/no more that day in that particular sector. (25) Mortar and artillery fire continued to fall in the area for the rest of the day as the enemy attempted to soften up the 2d Battalion in preparation for new attacks. Altogether, the day was totally unproductive from the enemy's point of view; not only did he fail to sound a hollow spot in our defenses, but his attempts to do so were very expensive in both infantry and armor. (26) The battalion commander ordered all company commanders to warn their men again that they must, "Hold at all costs".

Nevertheless, with the 1st SS Panzer Division in serious straits to the west on account of the 12th SS Panzer's failure to clean up the north flank, and probably because it was clear to the most inflated SS ego that the campaign had stalled, the enemy continued resolute in his decision to force a passage to the north and west. (27) According to an enemy document their attack on the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry was to jump off at 2310 hours on the night of 19-20 December. (28) (This document had contained an after-action report of the units attacking northeast from Bullingen on the night 19-20 December. It was captured by the 18th Infantry on 24 December, 1944). This force consisted of the 2d Battalion, 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, attached parachutists from the special parachute regiment (Operation GREIF) and the 3d Battalion, 12th SS Panzer Regiment which had their normal strength of three companies of tanks. These numbered companies were the 9th, the 10th and the 11th. (29) The early morning attack hit the 2d Battalion on the left flank with tanks and infantry. It was met by heavy fire from all our weapons and repulsed before it reached our MIA. The area was continually

lit up by flares from the battalion mortars but because of the heavy fog a lot of the artillery fire had to be directed at the exhaust flashes from the enemy tanks or in the general location of their sound. The second attack, at 0500 hours, came up the secondary road running west from Bullingen, following an artillery and heavy mortar preparation of about one half hour's duration. The enemy tanks got over our MLR but our infantry waited for the German infantry and kept them from following the tanks by using all fire available; machine guns, mortars and artillery. We stopped the infantry but the German tanks faced back east and tried to keep our troops down by machine gun fire. This fire also kept the German infantry from advancing. (30)

One of our TDs in position on the hill facing Bullingen never did fire because the crew chief, thinking he was cut off by the enemy tanks, removed the firing pin assembly from the gun and departed for safer surroundings. Also, because of the heavy fog, two more TDs sitting behind "F" Company on the next hill back were unable to fire at any known enemy targets. (31)

By 0600 the enemy tanks were over our MLR and facing east. (See Map "D") Three enemy tanks had moved to their left in front of "G" Company and had reached the high ground south of Dow Butgenbach. About this time one of the 57 mm antitank gun crews went into action, crawling out of their muddy holes to face the enemy armor. In the light of the flares the squad leader observed two enemy tanks approaching his position. Sending a lookout team to his right flank, he took over the job of assistant gunner and ordered the next in command, Corporal Warner, the gunner, to commence firing. Two tremendous flashes directly to their left front indicated that two enemy tanks were firing

by personal knowledge, Statement of Lt. Col. Merrill

Daniel on 20 October 1948.

at the 2d Battalion CP. Corporal Warner put four rounds into the nearest tank, setting it on fire and putting it out of action. A second tank then appeared out of the mist in an attempt to overrun the main line of resistance. The squad leader again rained home another shell while Corporal Warner sighted and fired, scoring a direct hit. Three more rounds were fired to ensure its destruction. (32)

On the last round the breech block failed to open and the gun would not eject the old round and return to battery. A minute later a third tank appeared from the right, spattering machine gun bullets at the antitank gun. The gun crew dived for its fox-holes with the exception of Corporal Warner, who remained at the gun. The enemy tank swung left and came head on in an attempt to overrun the emplacement. When about ten feet away the German tank commander stopped his tank and stuck his head and shoulders out of the turret to direct its movement. Corporal Warner, still trying to free the breech block, drew his pistol, fired at the head of the tank commander and quickly ducked down into his gun pit. He heard the tank gun its motor and start to move toward him. Just as it reached his gun position it stopped, reversed, and moved back towards its own lines. Stealing a quick look, Corporal Warner could see it proceeding through the early morning fog with its commander slumped out of the hatch, evidently killed by Warner's .45. The enemy tank crew must have become confused by the loss of their commander and decided to retreat to safer territory. A third enemy tank was claimed by the bazooka team although it was never located. (33).

for refueling, repairs and receipt of ammunition. However, each of

(32) Personal Knowledge; (33) Personal Knowledge.

our artillery having zeroed in on Bullingen, this could not be accomplished there as originally planned but had to be done two kilometers to the rear in the vicinity of Tiefenbach. (34) The enemy combat report stated that only 3 Jagdpanther and 10 Mark IV tanks were left. If the panzer battalion had had an average strength of 8 tanks per company at the start of the attack, which is quite logical to assume as they had not had too much action prior to this attack, then we can assume that around 11 tanks were destroyed by antitank guns, tanks, ~~TPs~~, artillery and 4.2 mortars. This is much in excess than that which was claimed at the time of the action.

By 0815 the enemy tank-infantry attack had been completely repulsed. However, attacks without tanks kept coming up in the same vicinity from Bullingen about every 4 or 5 hours until dark on the 20th. (35) Spaced between these attacks was intermittent mortar fire that fell on the 2d Battalion all morning and afternoon. At 1100 hours the CO of the regimental Antitank Company was ordered to reconnoiter the battalion area and emplace another platoon (the 1st) there to strengthen the antitank defense and further coordinate it. It was agreed that the 57mm would stay on the MLR and remain the first echelon of defense, particularly on the right flank in the Company's sector, stopping the enemy armor before it could chew up our front-line troops and at the same time pointing out targets to the M-10s and tanks sitting 300 yards back. This target designation mission was an important factor at that time as the fog and mist of early morning made it almost impossible for our armor to see the approaching enemy tanks at any range greater than 200 yards. Tanks

(34) ~~...~~ (35) ~~...~~
Derrill Danial on 30 Oct. 1948; (36) Personal Knowledge.

As dusk settled down on the 2d Battalion the new antitank platoon moved its guns into position by infiltration and began digging the guns in as well as preparing loggers in shelters for each crew. The rest of the battalion dug in a foot or two deeper and prepared new alternate positions for their automatic weapons. The firing pin assembly was put back into the TP, moved it to a better position and the crew chief straightened out as to what his job was. The battalion commander checked the entire battalion line, reorganizing where needed and warned every man personally that he must hold at all costs. The engineer finally brought up the mines that the battalion commander had been screaming for since the 17th and they began laying what became the largest continuous mine field ever laid on any American division front. They worked in front of "F" and "G" Companies until heavy artillery and mortar fire forced them to cease operations. (37)

platoon

At about 0100 hours on the 31st another assault was launched. "Into it the enemy put everything he had at his command, as well he had to, for by this time his need to break through to the north and come to the rescue of the beleaguered 1st SS Panzer Division to the west was imperative." (38) The Germans attacked with tanks and infantry in "G" Company's area south of the Dem Rugenbach Road just south of where our mines ended. The attack was beat off without more than one tank and no infantry getting inside the 2d Battalion's MLR.

Post written

At 0300 hours the enemy blanketed our positions with an intense, and concentrated artillery, nebelwerfer and mortar barrage on both 2d and 3d Battalions. The nebelwerfer rounds were falling 96 rounds per salvo with many salvos hitting the CP area. Three of the long barns in the area caught on fire, including one that was

aid station, and burned to the ground.

(37) A-5, p. 63; (38) A-3, p. 14.

These barrages continued for at least two hours, tearing into our positions and inflicting very heavy casualties. The battalion positions were blanketed, communications were reduced to a minimum and no contact at all was possible with the forward elements of the battalion. (39)

At approximately 0630 hours the Germans attempted a double envelopment of the 2d Battalion with about one regiment of infantry and about thirty-five tanks. They hit first with infantry and tanks up the road from Bullingen, and then through the woods on the right flank. (See Map "E") On the left the enemy hit "F" Company with about two companies of infantry and 10-15 tanks while on the right at least two battalions were committed with approximately 20 tanks. At this time the battalion commander began calling heavy concentrations of artillery and 4.2" mortar on the woods on the right in front of "E" Company, for no better reason than it was a good place for the Germans to assemble and also because their attacks had tended to slide from east to south. When the enemy attack hit, our MLR had been chewed to pieces by the artillery, mortar and rocket barrage. At least one third of the riflemen and gun crews were casualties and were still in their foxholes. (40)

On the extreme right of the MLR (See Map "E") was the antitank gun squad (No 5) commanded by Staff Sergeant Collier, with a field of fire to its front and left 90 degrees along the front of the MLR. His right flank was protected by dense woods and his rear by two tanks and two M-10s. He had a BAR team from Easy Company to protect his gun crew from enemy infantry infiltrating through the woods. (41)

At the end of the shelling Sergeant Collier discovered that both of the BAR men were wounded and had to be evacuated. Manning

the BAR himself, he ordered his gun crew to immediately for the Germans could be heard rolling as they moved in. (42)

(39) Personal Knowledge; (40) Personal Knowledge; (41) Personal Knowledge; (42) Personal Knowledge.

The German infantry attacked first, before the tanks, laying heavy automatic fire on the MLR. They started to move in from the edge of the woods, which was perpendicular to the MLR and directly in front of Collier's B&F, giving him perfect flanking fire, while Collier was cutting the enemy infantry down with his P&R a huge Mark VI rumbled forward out of the fog. The 57mm antitank gun was already loaded with a round of Sabot ammunition when Corporal Schwartz fired and scored a hit just where the left front drive sprocket joined the chassis. Attempting to back up, the tank swung around to the right because its left track was out of action, thus exposing its thinner armor on the side. A second round set the tank on fire, this time the enemy infantry were moving in so close that Corporal Schwartz had to pick up his M1 to come to the aid of Sergeant Collier. Another enemy tank a Mark IV, appeared moving out of the fog on the left and was quickly engaged by Corporal Schwartz who knocked it out with three rounds. A few minutes later an enemy bazooka destroyed the 57mm gun and the gun crew was forced to retreat for lack of small arms ammunition. (43)

In the meantime the next gun on the left (No 4 on Map "E") was having a very tough time. As the enemy tanks began to move in, the squad leader rallied his crew and engaged the first of two enemy tanks that were moving in on his position. He had just fired the second round when a burst from an enemy machine gun hit the recoil cylinder as the gun was going back into battery. It is not known whether he scored any hits or not. Ordering his gun corporal to take over, the squad leader picked up a bazooka, and, with another member of his crew, crawled out into no-man's land in an attempt to knock out one of the tanks.

(43) Personal Knowledge.

He was wounded and captured by the enemy. (44)

To the left of the No 4 gun, the No 3 gun was covering the fronts of guns 4 and 5 with flanking fire to the right. The artillery and mortar barrage had left only three men to man the gun. Just as the shelling ceased, the squad leader could see a tank moving toward the M.R., about halfway between his gun and that of the No 4 gun position. As he gave the order to load, the tank fired, lobbing a large shell in the direction of the 2d Battalion CP. Through the haze, the squad leader saw that the "tank" was actually a self-propelled 150-millimeter howitzer on a Mark II chassis. He fired four rounds, setting the SP on fire and knocking it out of action. (45)

With his attention centered on the self-propelled, the squad leader did not notice a Mark IV which was creeping up on his left flank. One armor-piercing round from the German tank penetrated the left of the gun shield and hit the barrel just in front of the breech ring, knocking the gun off its pintle. This gun crew was captured by the enemy a few minutes later. (46)

But Corporal Warner, manning the No 2 gun fifty yards to the left, had not been caught napping. His assistant gunner being wounded, he loaded the gun himself and fired. The round struck just in front of the rear idler of the tank. Smoke began to pour from the rear of the tank but its crew still had some fight left. As Corporal Warner reached for another round, the turret swung toward him. The shell was half in the chamber when a burst of machine-gun fire from the enemy tank mortally wounded him. In two days, singlehanded, he knocked out three German tanks and caused a fourth to retreat. He was later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously. (47)

When the antitank guns destroyed in this sector, the enemy tanks drove up and down the main, crossing the remaining still in position.

(44) Personal Knowledge; (45) Personal Knowledge; (46) Personal Knowledge; (47) Personal Knowledge.

Five Mark IV tanks advanced down the forward slope of the hill in an attempt to seize Dem Butgenbach itself and the 2d Battalion CP. Here they were halted by the fire of one of our tanks dug in the right corner of the barnyard and by the tanks and T-34s from the direction of the main road. Our two tanks in the barnyard were destroyed after they had knocked out one German tank while three of the enemy tanks closed in and took cover behind the long barns. The other enemy tank retreated to the rear, evidently damaged by our tank fire.

About this time the battalion commander was calling down all the artillery he could possibly get his hands on. He was using what he called the "Measles System". In preparing his battalion fire plan he had every conceivable spot numbered where he might want artillery fire. The enemy barrage at 0300 hours had cut all wire so communications were reduced to radio and runners. When the attack really began to erupt from the woods on the right he started to shoot in earnest. There wasn't much real control of fire after daylight when the German attack really got rolling but four to five battalions of artillery were kept firing continuously in the woods most of the day, assisted by the 4.2" mortars. This was the only sector that the latter could reach. Cannon Company had its own FOC and observers and also supplemented the artillery fire. The Battalion Commander estimated that there was ten or twelve battalions of artillery firing for him most of the day. Most of this shooting was at tank sounds as very little could be seen because of the fog. Mortar fire was controlled by the front lines. (48)

The three enemy tanks in the vicinity of the battalion CP now prevented any re-establishment of the MLR by our infantry and also limited any movement around the CP. When the CO Antitank Company was hit by ~~the~~ fire from one of the enemy tanks ~~and~~ up to the back ~~and~~ movement thereafter was made by crawling or running ~~past~~ danger areas.

(48) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Lt. Col. Merrill Daniel on
20 Oct. 1948.

The battalion CP was down the basement of the large farm house behind walls consisting of about four feet of concrete and stone. However, those four feet seemed extremely thin when the enemy tanks attempted to break a hole in it by firing at one spot at a range of 75 yards. At the same time five SS troopers tried to rush the building but were cut down by fire from a BAR. Additional attempts were discouraged by the fire from our tanks. (49)

The situation was rapidly becoming desperate. The enemy had rolled up our right flank and forced a gap of 300 yards in our MLR from the edge of the woods on the right to the north-south road leading into Dom Butgenbach. The rest of the MLR through "F" Company was still intact and fending off periodic attacks. However, if the enemy infantry were able to break out of the edge of the woods on the right, the 2d Battalion would be cut off and annihilated. For this reason the battalion commander kept as much artillery firing on the woods as he could get his hands on. (50)

Inside the CP, however, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel had everything under control. Thoroughly and systematically he broke up the German attack in the manner of a skillful checker ^{player.} He had commanded this battalion since the battle of El Guettar, through five campaigns, and he wasn't about to give it up without a last ditch fight. Nevertheless, all official papers were destroyed in the CP as a precaution. (51)

Tank and TD commanders were brought in and personally directed. One of our tanks was moved down off the hill north of the CP to the north side of the CP building. There he poked his nose around the east side of the building just as a German tank was going down the trail east from the CP. He fired one round at the enemy tank but must have been so excited that he hit the turret because the shot bounced off without damage. The German tank left in a hurry and took the building. Our tank ducked back behind the CP building as it was stripped a gear or two. This was the last action for the day. (52)

(49) Personal Knowledge; (50) Personal Knowledge; (51) Personal Knowledge; (52) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Lt. Col. Daniel on 20 Oct. 1944

One of the TD's northeast of the CP had been disabled during the barrage. The only tank or TD left that the battalion commander felt he could move was the second tank from the hill north of the CP. Because he was afraid of losing it if he brought it right to the CP, he moved it behind the small house northwest of the CP and had him watch the hedgerow to the south while he tried to chase the German tanks out with mortars. The latter action stirred them up but did little damage. Several bazooka teams were sent out which succeeded in knocking out one tank. The last six rounds were fired at the remaining two enemy tanks. Five of them missed and the sixth one that hit was a dud. (53)

In the early afternoon "B" Company from the 18th Infantry was sent down to the GO 2d Battalion to use as he saw fit. Because the enemy tanks could still block any infantry attack to regain the MLR and our tanks were unable to maneuver, he told the company commander to keep his men behind the hill until they could be moved. There they remained for two days as no counterattack was ever organized. (54)

It was now 1500 hours and the gap had been in the MLR for eight hours. The enemy had launched attack after attack on both flanks but was always held back by our artillery. Only one TD and one tank were in positions where they could be of some use in dislodging the enemy tanks in the CP area or in preventing any new thrusts by the enemy armor. The battalion commander turned to the GO Antitank company and asked him if he had any suggestions for getting rid of the enemy tanks. He replied that he knew a 90mm TD platoon had moved into the 1st Battalion sector the day before, ^{and} might be able to assist him by moving to the woods on the right and engaging the enemy tanks. Although the road to the

(53) Personal knowledge; statement of Lt. Col. Daniel on 20 Oct. 1948;

(54) Personal knowledge.

rear was believed to be cut, the 90mm TD platoon from the 013 TD Battalion was ordered to move to the Dom Butgenbach sector. We had not expected these TD's as the 1st Battalion had been hit late in the morning by a couple of tanks spearheaded by a battalion of infantry. (55)

In fifteen minutes the platoon leader of the 90mm reported into the 2d Battalion CP. He had infiltrated four destroyers into the position without being hit. Lt. Col. Daniel had the latter place 2 guns near the small house along the road to the northwest of the CP to watch the woods and the hedgerow. The other two were sneaked down to the vicinity of the CP. (See Map "E") One was placed where it could stick its nose around a building and fire at the east end of the shed south of the CP where the German tanks were hiding; the other stuck its nose around the west side of the CP where it could fire at the west end of the same shed. Both 90's started firing at the same time with AP through the wooden shed. After each shot they quickly loaded and fired the next one ten feet toward the other end of the shed. After two shots were fired from each gun we heard the Germans moving frantically. One German tank crashed through the hedgerow on the southwest side trying to escape to the woods on the right. He no sooner got through than one of the 90's knocked him off. This left only one German tank and he finally got away in the fog at about 1600 hours. (56)

To further assist him, "K" Company, 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry, was moved at about 1630 hours to protect his right flank from any further attacks from the heavy woods on the right. After the last tank had been chased out of the CP area, the battalion commander began to check up and round up those who had survived the attack and decided, with the help of "K" Company, 26th Infantry, he could just about make

it without the help of "K" Company, 26th Infantry. However, he

(55) 23 14 (56) Personal Knowledge: Disturbed, Lt. Col. Daniel
on 20 Oct. 1948.

kept "B" Company in reserve behind the hill north of Dom Hutgenbach until the next day. (57)

At approximately 1700 hours the battalion commander felt that he could re-establish his line and began leading the men back into position from the east, coming in through "G" Company's sector. Tanks and TD's were shifted to new positions while another anti-tank platoon (the 3d) was emplaced by the 3d Anti-tank Company in the area where the other four had been destroyed in the morning.

The Division engineers continued working on the mine field, extending it to the right in front of "E" Company. Throughout the day "F" Company had also been subject to heavy attacks, having destroyed ten enemy tanks in front of their MLR by their attached TD's. (58)

Heavy artillery was still placed on the enemy in their probable assembly areas in case they had any more ideas about attacking the 2d Battalion. The re-organization continued throughout the night. During the first few hours we killed or captured at least five black-suited tankers behind our own lines. (59)

Through enemy prisoners it was determined that the attacking infantry had been the 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, whereas on the previous day it had been the 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. (60) It has never been exactly determined as to what unit the attacking tanks belonged but it can be reasonably assumed that they were the 1st Battalion and 2d Battalion of the 12th SS Panzer Regiment. This was the last coordinated attack that the enemy attempted against the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, during The German Ardennes Offensive.

(57) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Lt. Col. Daniel on 20 Oct. 1948;
(58) Personal Knowledge; (59) Personal Knowledge; (60) Personal Knowledge

DEFENSE AND COORDINATION

The intensity of the attacks hurled at the 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry south of Butgenbach indicated the importance the II Panzer Corps placed on securing an additional supply route and the possession of the Eisenborn Ridge itself.

See memo 1/1/47

The successful defense of the Butgenbach sector also indicated that the battalion commander, 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry, had observed most of the principles of defense. Six of these, organization of key terrain, organization in depth, mutual support, all around defense, coordinated fire plan and coordinated anti-tank plan were carefully observed. However, the defense plan could have been slightly more flexible in so much as an organized counterattack with JDS and infantry should have been launched immediately after the last two enemy tanks were destroyed. This would have restored the position sooner and better prepared the battalion to withstand any additional attacks.

When forced into an unfavorable situation, as the 2d Battalion was on the afternoon of the 21st of December, the first thing that had to be accomplished was to stop the forward movement of the enemy and fix him where he could be hit. This was accomplished by the tenacious defense of the MLR and the use of our artillery on the enemy's forward assembly areas and lines of departure. This separated the infantry from their tanks and prevented the former from following the tanks into our lines. The next thing that had to be done was to destroy the penetration either by artillery, counterattack with reserve, or, if the latter is not available as in this situation, by the fire of the supporting units. Lt. Col Daniel made use of the last means by

in defending the Dom Dag, Sombach sector, the battalion commander, 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry had to make the best of a bad situation. As stated before, his battalion had lost two anti-aircraft companies in the fighting in the Hartgen Forest just two weeks prior to this action. Because the battalion had been thus weakened and not completely replaced, all three companies had to be placed on the line with only one platoon held in reserve.

It must be remembered that "esprit de corps" and "pride in unit" had a great deal to do with the success of this action. Having been so successful in combat over a period of two years it was almost impossible for these men to believe they could be defeated. This, combined with the attitude of composure and steadiness that ran throughout the Division, proved to be the unseen force that kept these men in position and fighting when they were cut off and apparently defeated.

At 1400 hours, on the 21st, when the gap in the right flank had existed for over seven hours, two enemy tanks were within 75 yards of his battalion. If no reserve was available to counterattack with, the battalion commander of the 2d Battalion would have been justified in pulling back his left flank to consolidate his position. However, through experience gained from commanding this battalion in five campaigns, Lt. Colonel Daniel knew that, in every engagement, when things look blackest for your side the same is quite often true for the enemy. And the side with the greatest staying power can come out victorious even though it has become weaker as a result of the action.

After three days of repelling heavy enemy attacks, the 2d Battalion 26th Infantry, and attached units, had destroyed approximately 44 enemy tanks. Two days later the Graves Register in the area (61) contained

at least three times that many must have been committed.

(61) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Major Thomas Gendron on 1 August 1950

57 mm antitank guns. U r casualties were estimated at 250 men,
killed, wounded and captured. (62)

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. In the defense of an MLR, maximum effect can be obtained by having all weapons open fire at the same time.
2. In a defensive position, tanks must not be dug in so deep that they cannot maneuver to effectively engage the enemy.
3. Artillery can be an effective antitank weapon if employed in mass on tanks in the open.
4. Reserve should be employed as soon as available to regain lost positions.
5. The first step in halting a tank-infantry attack is to separate the infantry from the tanks - either by artillery or small arms.
6. In a tank-infantry attack the ^{de} remaining infantry must remain in position even after the attacking tanks have passed through so they can engage the enemy infantry following them.
7. In a deliberate defense the integrity of the MLR must be maintained at all costs.
8. After every enemy attack on a deliberate defense all automatic weapons must be moved to alternate positions.
9. Tanks should always employ the principle of having one of their members watch over the battle field while the other maneuvers.
10. "Esprit de corps" and "pride in unit" pays off on the battle-field.

(62) Personal Knowledge.



MAP "A"

LANDING IN NORMANDY

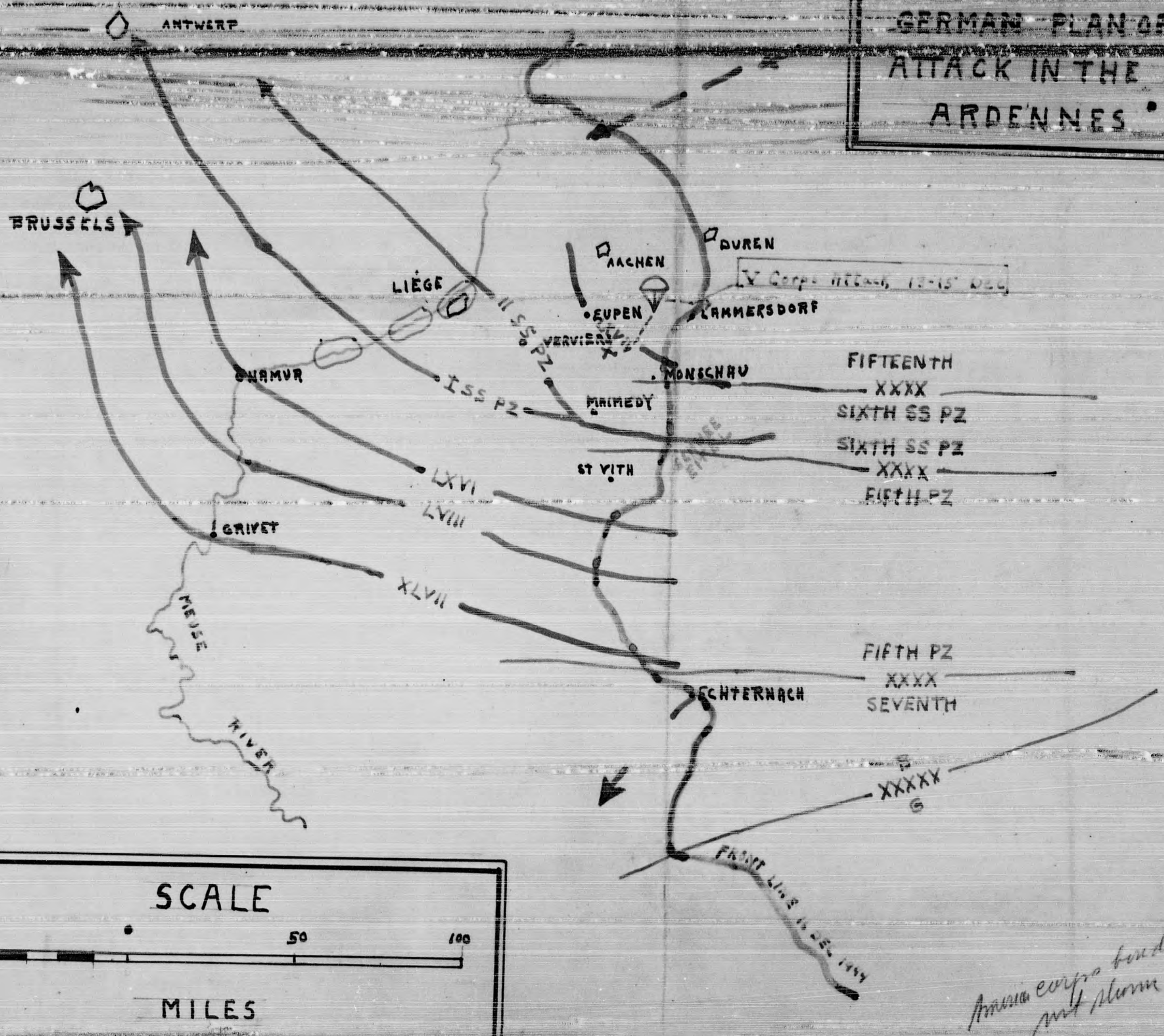
TO BE USED

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MAP "B"

GERMAN PLAN OF ATTACK IN THE ARDENNES



DÜREN

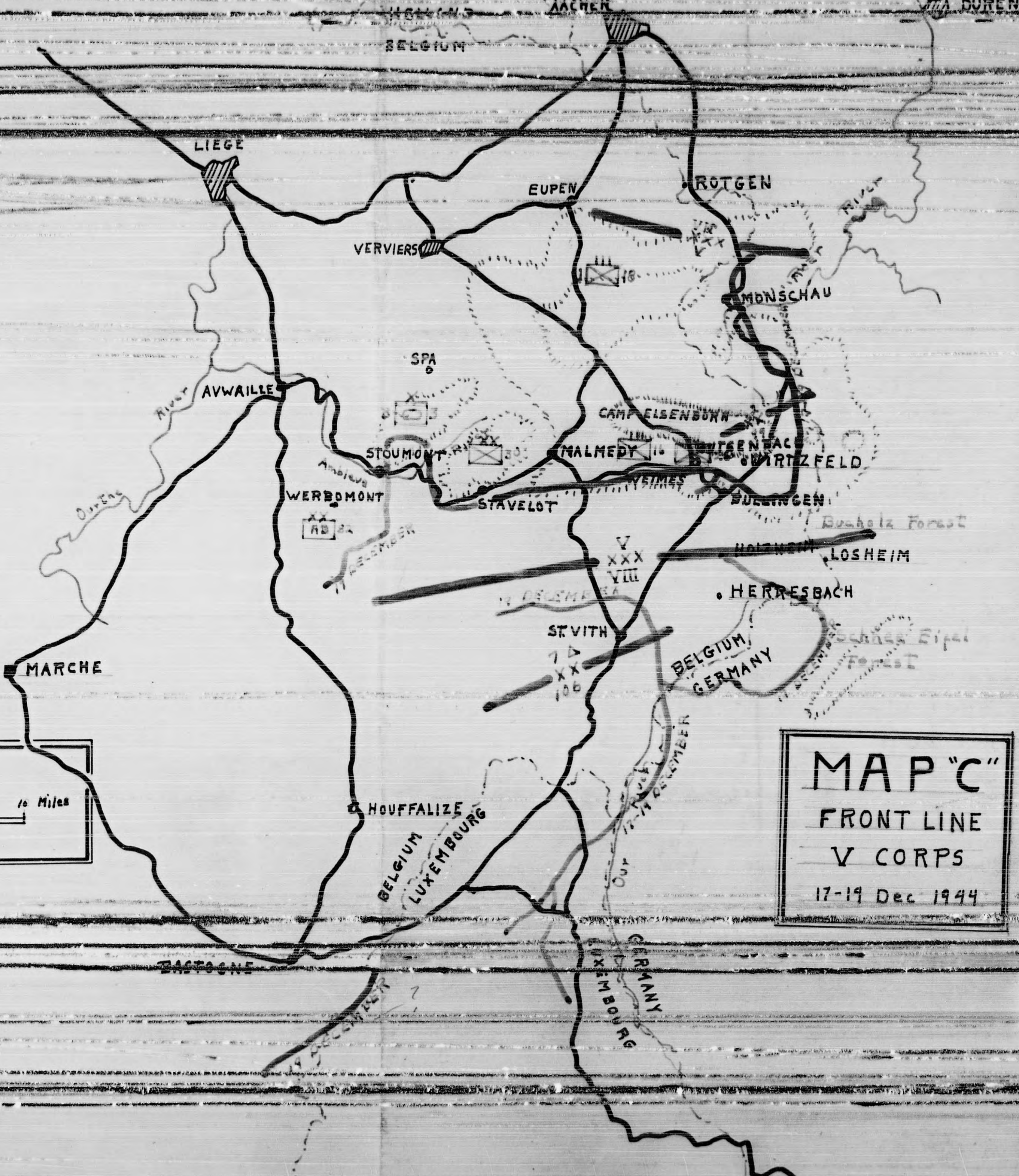
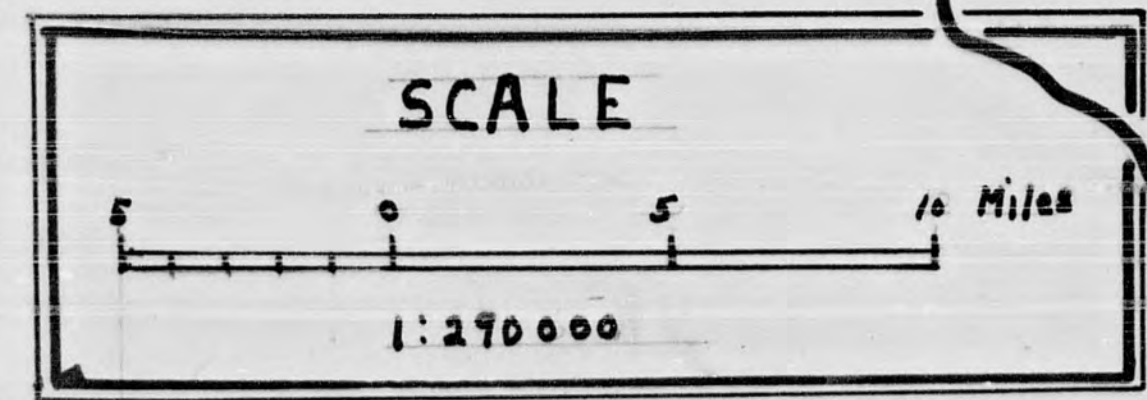
AACHEN
BELGIUM



NAMUR

DINANT

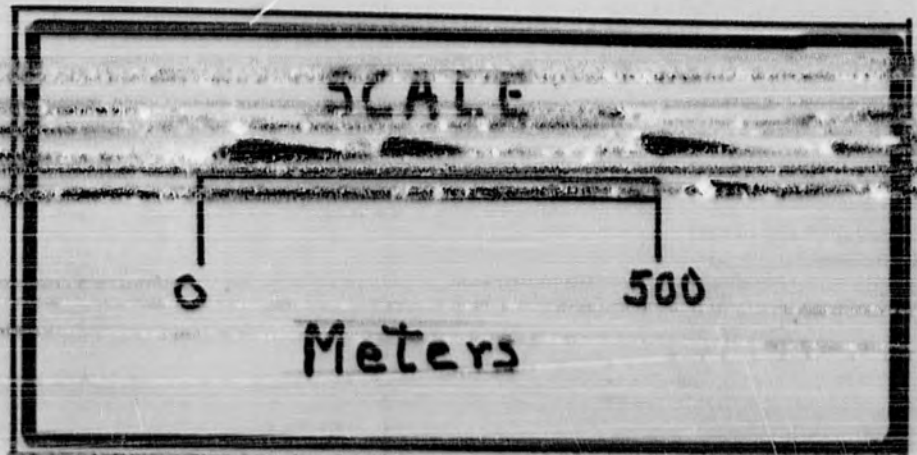
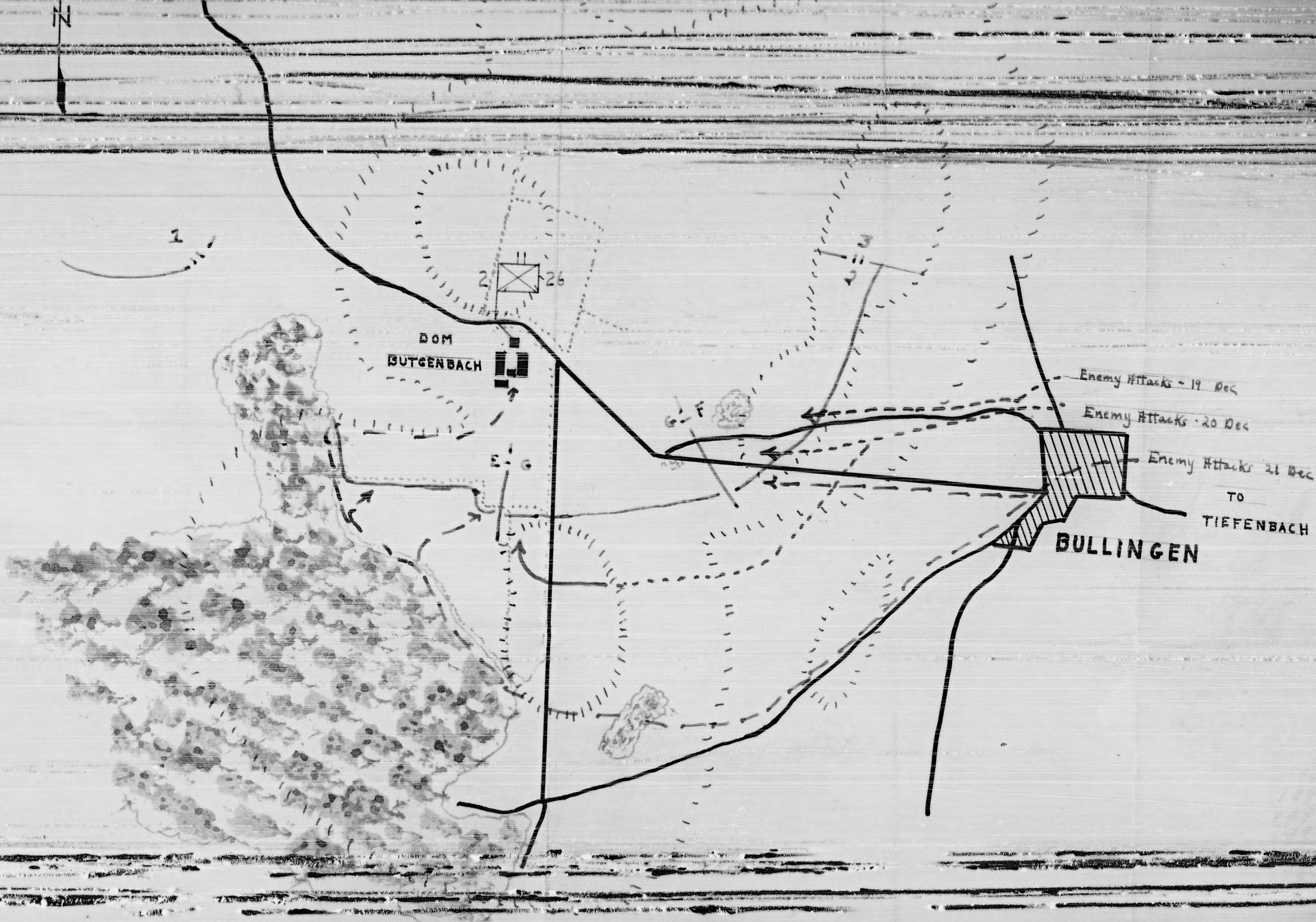
MARCHE



MAP "C"
FRONT LINE
V CORPS
17-19 Dec 1944

EASTONE

LUXEMBOURG
GRANNY



MAP "D"

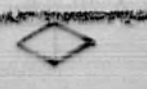


LEGEND

→ 57 MM A-T GUN



FRIENDLY TANK



FRIENDLY T-D



ENEMY TANK



ENEMY TANK DESTROYED

SCALE

0 250 METERS