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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 134TH INFANTRY
(35TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON HILL 122,
NORTH OF ST. LO, FRANCE, 15-17 JULY 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION ATTACKING
AND CAPTURING KEY TERRAIN HELD BY WELL DUG IN AND PROTECTED
ENEMY FORCES OVER DIFFICULT HEDGEROW COUNTRY TYPICAL OF
NORMANDY, FRANCE

Major Donald C. Rubottom, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE NO II

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry, 35th Division in the attack on Hill 122, one of the critical terrain features protecting the city of ST. LO, FRANCE, a vital communications center, in the NORMANDY CAMPAIGN, 15 July - 17 July 1944.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events which led up to this action.

Two years of planning and preparation led up to the Allied landings in NORMANDY on 6 June 1944. (1) The concerted efforts of the Allies were gathered together in ENGLAND in the shape of immense stocks of shipping, aircraft, supplies and manpower. For several months Allied air forces had carried out bombing operations which were a part of the invasion itself.

(2)

The NORMANDY invasion of necessity was to be a combined Army, Navy and Air Forces operation requiring the most exacting coordination. By June 1944 there were 1,526,965 U.S. troops and 2,500,000 tons of supplies over and above basic loads and equipment. (3)

Ground forces in the NORMANDY operation were led by General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, commanding 21st Army Group, consisting of the Second British and the First U. S. Armies. The Sec-

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

ond British Army struck in the BAYEUX and CAEN areas with three divisions landing on the beach and a brigade of the 6th British Airborne Division dropping inland between CAEN and the Sea. The U. S. First Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, struck in the neck of the COTENTIN PENINSULA at UTAH BEACH, east of STE-MERE-EGLISE; and OMAHA BEACH, northeast of TREVIERES, with 3 divisions while the 82d Airborne Division dropped at STE-MERE-EGLISE, and the 101st Airborne Division dropped halfway between STE-MERE-EGLISE and CARANTAN. (See Map A) (4)

By 9 June, the beachheads had been well established by the assault divisions and orders had been issued to continue the attack. (See Map B) (5) By 13 June further gains had been made and V Corps on the east and VII Corps on the west had linked up south of CARENTAN and no enemy threat had developed to split the link between the Corps. (See Map B) XIX Corps was assigned the mission on 13 June to enlarge the corridor of communication between ISIGNY and CARANTAN. XIX Corps became operational 141200 June. (6)

During the period 13 June -- 2 July 1944, First Army had built up its forces until now there were four Corps in operation, the COTENTIN PENINSULA had fallen adding the Port of CHERBOURG to its holdings, First Army front had remained relatively stable since 20 June and regrouping of forces had taken place ready for continued operations. (See Map C) (7)

The early July offensive was to open with three of the four Corps in line opening with successive blows delivered from

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- (4) A-1, p. 5
 - (5) A-1, p. 136
 - (6) A-1, p. 159
 - (7) A-2, p. 1 and 2

right to left, each Corps moving on army orders. The XIX Corps would be the third to launch its attack. (8) The XIX Corps had two divisions in line with the 35th Division on its way to FRANCE to reinforce its attack. However, the 35th would not immediately be ready to enter combat.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The 35th Infantry Division arrived at OMAHA BEACH in the vicinity of COOLEVILLE-SUR-MERE 05 1500 July. The first element of the 35th Infantry Division ashore was the 134th Infantry, Commanded by Major General (then Colonel) Butler B. Miltonberger. The division closed into an assembly area in the vicinity of COLOMBIERES on 7 July. (9) The XIX Corps Commander wished an immediate commitment to battle of the 35th Infantry Division. The division was destined to fight along side of the 29th and 30th Infantry Division's already seasoned and battle hardened troops. (10)

On 8 July the 2d Battalion, 134th Infantry entered the front lines in the vicinity of ST. NICHOLAS, relieving the 2d Battalion of the 120th Infantry. (11) This commitment of the 2d Battalion was a defensive position and the 2d Battalion was to rejoin the 134th Infantry on 11 July. (12)

On the night of 9 July the 137th Infantry and 320th Infantry, 35th Infantry Division, were ordered into the line relieving elements of the 29th Infantry Division on the left and the 30th Infantry Division on the right. The line ran from the VIRE RIVER above LA MEAUFFE and extended in a southeasterly

(8) A-2, p. 2

(9) A-3, Chap. II; A-4, p. 30

(10) A-3, Chap. II

(11) A-4, p. 30

(12) A-4, p. 32

direction through LA RIVIERE to LA NICOLLERIE, the 137th Infantry on the right and the 320th Infantry on the left. (13) The 35th Infantry Division minus the 134th Infantry launched their initial attack on 11 July. The 134th Infantry remained in Corps reserve until 14 July.

The XIX Corps plan at this time was to seize the ST. LO area on both the east and west sides of the VIRE RIVER. (14) Steady but slow progress had been made during the period 7 July to 13 July at which time Corps had three infantry divisions in the line, consisting of the 29th, 30th and the 35th Infantry Divisions. (See Map D) During this period the XIX Corps had come to blows with and were slowly overpowering elements of the enemy's 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, Battle Group Heintz (consisting of two rifle battalions of the 275th Division, the 275th Engineer Battalion, Engineer Battalion Angers, and one AA Battery), elements of the 38th SS Armored Infantry Regiment and the 352d Infantry Division. (See Map D) (15)

Much can be said about and much has been written about the difficult terrain over which operations were carried out. NORMANDY, FRANCE is basically composed of farming communities. The CORNISH countryside is well drained by a system of streams which flow generally northwest and empty into the ENGLISH CHANNEL. The land is broken up into many small fields by a system of hedgerows. The hedgerows vary in size and type. Generally they are composed of banks of dirt and rock varying in size from two to five feet in thickness at the bottom and tapering up to one to two feet in width at their top. Height

(13) A-3, Chap. III
(14) A-2, p. 3
(15) A-2, p. 7

varies from two feet to as much as six or seven feet. All hedgerows are covered with a thick vegetation, thorn bushes, fruit trees and various types of hedge bushes. Running along one side of each enclosed field a road, or rather a wagon trail is usually found. Often the trail runs between two such hedgerows, thus forming a rather formidable sunken road. The fields thus formed by hedgerows seemed to average about 100 yards long and 50 yards wide. "An aerial photograph of a typical section of NORMANDY shows more than 3900 hedged enclosures in an area less than eight miles square". (16) Needless to say these hedgerows which look so peaceful and picturesque during normal times afforded the enemy a system of ready made bulwarks behind which, with very little excavation, he was able to entrench and defend himself in ready made forts which offered protection from almost all types of fire. The method used by the enemy in preparing his defensive positions will be covered in more detail later on.

The weather during this phase of the NORMANDY campaign was generally clear and mild with occasional light rains which failed to hamper operations in any way. The hours of darkness were generally limited between 2300 hours and 0500 hours. The long period of visibility is due to the long twilight enjoyed by the natives of NORMANDY, FRANCE during the summer months.

The combat efficiency of the German soldier was excellent. He undoubtedly suffered from the period of combat prior to the period covered here, but as yet there were no indications of a letdown among his forces. The fact that the German soldier was fighting over terrain familiar to him and undoubtedly carry-

(16) A-4, p. 31

ing out prearranged defensive plans and in many cases occupying prearranged positions prepared on critical terrain and guarding likely avenues of approach more than made up for the losses and defeats he had suffered thus far since D day, 6 June.

The 35th Division was at full strength on 11 July and as yet the 134th Infantry had suffered no casualties. Morale was superior. The regiment had been in training as a unit since it had been mobilized and became a part of the U.S. Army, 23 December 1940. The former National Guardsmen from the state of Nebraska were again to participate in a world conflict. The men and officers of the 134th Infantry were ready and anxious to see what they could do after the years of careful training for their initial entry into conflict against an enemy of their country. (17)

Each man and officer was fully equipped and as yet there were no supply problems to complicate their entry into combat.

DISPOSITIONS AND PLAN OF THE 134TH INFANTRY

At 15 2030 July the 134th Infantry was relieved from assignment as Corps reserve and was ordered to move to an assembly area near LA CHITELIERE, FRANCE to relieve the 2d Battalion, 115th Infantry, 29th Division, and be prepared to participate in a coordinated attack 15 0515 July. This placed the regiment on the left flank of the 35th Division which would attack with three regiments abreast in conjunction with simultaneous attacks by the 29th Division on the left and the 30th Division on the right. (18)

The 3d Battalion was ordered to relieve the 2d Battalion,

(17) Personal knowledge

(18) A-4, p. 32; A-10, p. 86

115th Infantry, 29th Division without benefit of daylight reconnaissance. (19) The regiment began movement to the new area at 13 0100 July and the 3d Battalion had completed its relief by 13 1030. (20) This placed the regiment within the zone from which it would launch its nocturnal attack against the enemy. (See Map E)

The regimental attack order, Field Order #18, was issued from the 134th Infantry CP near LA CHITELIERE, FRANCE. The plan of attack, attachments, supporting fires and objectives was as follows: the 134th Infantry with 747th Tank Battalion (less Company B); 1st Platoon of Company A, 60th Engineer Battalion; one platoon 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company A, 110th Medical Battalion attached, supported by 161st Field Artillery Battalion and attached 92d Chemical Mortar Company and supported by 35th Infantry Division Artillery, attacks in zone, 15 0515 July 1944. Destroy enemy forces in zone north of ST. LO, FRANCE, and to seize and occupy ST. LO. 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry, pass through positions held by 3d Battalion, attack 15 0515 July 1944, seize and occupy objective in zone. 2d Battalion, 134th Infantry, with one squad Anti-Tank Company Mine Platoon, one 57 mm Platoon Anti-Tank Company, 737th Tank Battalion (-) attached, attack 15 0515 July 1944, to seize and occupy objective in zone. (21) This placed the 1st Battalion on the right with the 2d Battalion on the left after passing through the positions held by the 3d Battalion. The 3d Battalion was to remain in present positions and assemble as regimental reserve on order. The attack was to be a penetration with little room for maneuver, depending upon fire support

(19) A-4, p. 32

(20) A-10, p. 39

(21) A-8, p. 86; A-4, p. 34

and tenacity of the individual unit to gain the objective. The zone assigned the 1st Battalion had been the scene of repeated attempts by elements of the 29th Division to advance. (22)

THE BATTALION SITUATION AND PLAN OF ATTACK

Since landing in NORMANDY the 1st Battalion had attempted to take advantage of the time available to prepare its men and officers for combat. On 8 July the battalion moved from the vicinity of MERCY, FRANCE to an assembly area near LES ESSORTS, FRANCE. (23) In this assembly area every thought was directed toward the problems which might be encountered in the fighting that lay ahead. Much had been heard about the difficulties encountered in fighting through the maze of hedgerows -- each hedgerow a miniature fort -- mortars and artillery zeroed in on hedgerows, roads and trails -- enemy snipers in or behind almost every tree -- don't use your radios because transmissions immediately bring down fire. These were a few of the problems for which everyone was seeking an answer.

On 9 July and 10 July the battalion utilized the hedgerows within their assembly area in working out plans and developing maneuvers which would be successful. Simulated attacks were run through. Machine guns and automatic rifles were assigned to work in pairs from either end of the box-like enclosures formed by the hedgerows. Fires were crossed to the far corners of the field along the opposite hedgerow and moved back and forth as elements of rifle squads worked their way forward under the protective fire. As the riflemen approached, fires from the automatic weapons were concentrated

(22) A-7, p. 71-73

(23) A-4, p. 31

in the corners of the fields. Thus, the riflemen would know where their friendly fires were hitting, providing room for them to attack behind the hedgerows with grenades and rifle fire. Teamwork was developed so that each man knew his job. Due to the type of the terrain it was anticipated that the machine guns from the heavy weapons company would be attached. The rifle company commanders were able to plan on the attachment of four heavy guns to their companies. (24)

The contemplated employment of the light and heavy machine guns created a problem. In most cases the hedgerows were too high to utilize the tripods from which the guns are normally fired. Lieutenant Robert Gordon, Battalion S-4 solved this problem by securing bipods from captured machine guns. These were attached to the water jackets on the heavys, and the forward portion of the lights, thus enabling the gunners to place the guns on top of the hedgerows to deliver fire. It was believed that this addition to the guns would offer a flexibility in that the guns could be fired either from the bipod or the tripod according to the positions selected. (25)

On 11 July when the 137th Infantry and the 320th Infantry, 35th Division, participated in the attack, observers were sent up from each company and battalion headquarters to observe the action. The next day parties from regimental headquarters and battalion headquarters visited elements of the 29th and 30th Divisions to gain all the knowledge they could from these units which had already been in continuous combat for over a month. (26)

During the night 13 July the 1st Battalion had closed into

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- (24) Personal knowledge
(25) Personal knowledge
(26) A-4, p. 32

a forward assembly area in the vicinity of LA CHITELIERE. On the 14th, based on fragmentary orders, all commanders visited the front lines in the zone which was to be theirs and prepared initial plans for the attack to be launched the next morning.

(27) From this limited reconnaissance, company commanders and platoon leaders were able to select forward check points and establish a guide system to lead them into the final positions from which to launch their attack. Consequently, no guides were necessary from the 3d Battalion, which was in line and would be passed through at the line of departure which was the positions occupied by the 3d Battalion. (See Map E)

The plan for attack issued by Lieutenant Colonel Alfred C. Boatsman, Commanding the 1st Battalion, was itself relatively simple. Company A on the left, Company C on the right with Company B in reserve. 1st Machine Gun Platoon, Company D attached to Company A. 2d Machine Gun Platoon, Company D attached to Company C. 3d Mortar Platoon, Company D in general support behind the slight ridge immediately behind the front line positions. The 134th Infantry was to have the supporting fires of three battalions of field artillery controlled by the 161st Field Artillery Battalion which was in direct support of the regiment. Attached to the 161st Field Artillery Battalion was a chemical mortar company of 4.2 chemical mortars. The supporting fire plan was simple. Fires were to be placed on enemy positions beginning at H hour with the 4.2 mortars placing smoke on known enemy positions. For 15 minutes the full weight of all guns would place fire on the enemy at a fast rate, thereafter a rolling barrage was to be fired in front of the 1st Bat-

(27) Personal knowledge

talion, to be lifted and moved forward on call. (28)

Communication lines were set up during the evening and night of 14 July. All final preparations were made including the issue of one K ration to be carried by each man, issuance of ammunition, plan for dropping bed rolls and all extra equipment not essential to the task that lay ahead. Kitchen personnel were handed last minute letters, photographs, billfolds and personal keepsakes with the casual remark, "Keep these until I ask for them -- if not -- you'll know what to do with them." The men and officers sat around in small groups discussing the final details and knowing that the attack was very important. ST. LO was the hub of the German defenses in this sector and it was highly important that it fall because all suspected and had heard rumors that once ST. LO fell we could employ armor in a breakthrough which would exploit successes gained in NORMANDY thus far. There would be very little sleep this night.

The distance from the assembly area to the line of departure was about 2000 yards so there would be no stop until just before crossing, when a final pause for regrouping would take place. Movement would begin about 15 0330 which would allow ample time for the troops to reach the assault positions. (29)

The line of departure was located just south of the village of VILLERS FOSSARD along a hedgerow near a small trail leading southwest from the village.

The attack led down hill and across a small stream. There was a slight drop of about ten meters extending over a dis-

(28) Personal knowledge; A-4, p. 34

(29) Personal knowledge

tance of about 500 yards. It covered hedgerows to the stream bed and then extended up over a series of hedgerows and plateaus which formed the base of HILL 122. This hill took its name from its height in meters. The terrain then sloped to the city of ST. LO and the VIRE RIVER. The area was well covered with trees and heavy vegetation, and observation was limited to the next hedgerow which might be as close as fifty yards or as far as 300 yards depending upon the particular shape of the field formed by the hedgerows. Running generally south through the zone was what appeared on the map to be a good secondary road, but at places was actually a very narrow trail running between two hedgerows which were about seven to eight feet in height. Trees growing in the hedgerows at times were close enough on either side to form a leafy tunnel. It was over this difficult terrain the attack would take place.

The opposing enemy forces had been identified as elements of the 14th Parachute Regiment, Battle Group Heintz and 352d Infantry Division. The enemy was known to be well dug in behind hedgerows and was supported by mortars and artillery.

(See Map E)

The weather was clear, warm and visibility conditions excellent.

MOVEMENT TO THE LINE OF DEPARTURE AND FINAL PREPARATION FOR THE ATTACK

The movement from the assembly area to the line of departure was started about 15 0330 July. The attachments of machine gun platoons was effected in the assembly area in order to cut down on the confusion on the line of departure. Order of march was

A, C, D (-), Battalion Headquarters, and B Companies. Vehicles would follow the foot column by bounds, weapons would be taken from the transportation about 500 yards in rear of the line of departure. All transportation would then assemble in a motor pool previously selected by the battalion transportation officer. By 0500 hours the battalion was in position, wire communication established and as yet no incident had occurred to disturb the smooth movement into position. As directed by the regimental order, radios were to be silent until H hour. Artillery liaison personnel and forward observers from the 161st Field Artillery had reported and everything was in readiness for the attack.

Due to the completeness of preliminary planning in the rear area there was little remaining to do except to check final dispositions and nervously await the crawling hands of the clock to reach 0515. (30)

NARRATION

H-HOUR, THE INITIAL ASSAULT

No one needed to be told when H hour arrived. The tremendous fire being delivered by the supporting weapons was indeed signal enough to cause every man to get to his feet, grasp his weapon more tightly, check his supply of grenades and start moving the few remaining yards to breach the last protective hedgerow and advance into the area, approximately 300 yards wide, which separated the opposing forces. Every man knew that he had 15 minutes to cross the space and work in as close

(30) Personal knowledge

as possible to the friendly barrage ready to charge the enemy the moment it lifted.

Company A, Commanded by Captain Loren S. McGowan and Company C, Commanded by Captain John E. Davis were both employing similar formations for the attack. Each ^{was} were attacking with two platoons abreast, third platoon in support, machine guns attached to platoons and 60 mm mortars in general support of the company. Everything seemed to be going as planned. Leading elements of both assault companies were quietly slipping toward the enemy to be in as close as possible to the artillery that was falling to their front when it lifted. (31)

It was hoped by combining the mass of artillery fire and the initial assault that surprise could be attained. Up to this time fighting in this sector had been patterned by firing a preparation from ten to fifteen minutes prior to the launching of the attack. (32)

ENEMY ATTACK

Suddenly smoothness changed into an uproar. Enemy mortar and artillery was falling throughout the battalion zone of action. The leading elements observed German troops moving toward them accompanied by the rapid chatter of machine guns. Mortar and artillery fire seemed to come from everywhere. Surprise it was. At first it was thought the enemy was merely moving forward to get out of the barrage being laid down by the Americans but it was soon evident that the Germans were actually launching an attack at the same time our attack was scheduled.

(31) Personal knowledge

(32) A-4, p. 34

Company A and Company C maintained the impetus of their forward movement and it was the enemy that broke and fell back to the protection of their hedgerow. The situation failed to immediately clear because now the enemy was fully aware that an attack had been launched by the Americans. They immediately increased the volume and rate of their mortar and artillery fire, the majority of which was falling on the assault elements. The 3d Battalion and the support platoons of Company A and Company C began receiving casualties from the enemy fire. This situation undoubtedly would make the price of victory more costly. (33)

EARLY SUCCESS

By 0630 hours Company C had advanced to the second hedgerow beyond the creek immediately in front of the line of departure. Thinking was not so much in the yards gained but in hedgerows captured. For days to come advances were to be measured in this manner. This actually meant that an initial advance of some 800 to 900 yards had been made. (See Map E) (34) The initial gain however, had not been without difficulty. The initial force and speed with which the assault companies had jumped off and individual courage, daring and hand to hand fighting had cost C Company about 60% of their effective fighting strength.

The situation however, was still somewhat confused. Shortly after the jump off all wire lines had been knocked out due to enemy shelling. Communication with both the forward companies was non-existent. As yet the radios had not been used.

(33) Personal knowledge

(34) A-4, p. 36

Scare stories about the radio locaters used by the enemy made everyone reluctant to open his sets. The artillery rolling barrage had become difficult to control as the forward observers with the leading companies were either casualties or their radios were out of action and it was impossible to keep wire lines in operation. About this time Lieutenant Colonel Boatman sent Major Warren C. Wood, Battalion Executive Officer, forward to contact Company C and find out what the exact situation was. (35)

Major Wood found Captain Davis well forward reorganizing his company and attempting to hold what ground had been gained. Their combined efforts netted only 52 soldiers out of a full strength rifle company. Company C was holding on to what they had gained through complete disregard of personal safety. The position held by them was made as secure as possible for as far as they knew there were no other American forces within 500 yards. Plans were made for Company B to replace Company C in the assault echelon. (36)

Other elements of the battalion were faced with problems of their own. The Mortar Platoon of Company D had made careful plans for the attack. OP's were carefully selected and dug into the hedgerows in strategic spots which covered the entire zone of action of the 1st Battalion. Wire was carefully laid to these well prepared and protected observation posts. It was necessary to run new wire lines repeatedly to the gun positions. These wires were knocked out again and again after a few minutes operation due to the heavy shelling. Fate also seemed to be taking a hand. Shortly after the at-

(35) Personal knowledge

(36) Personal knowledge; Statement by Major Warren C. Wood, then Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, on 2-14, 1950

tack jumped off 2d Lieutenant James W. Powers, section leader, was occupying his observation post and firing effectively into the enemy positions when he was completely blown out of his vantage point by a German 88 mm round and had to be evacuated.

(37)

Prisoners taken by the 1st Battalion during two hours totaled only four. Fighting had been so intense that it was difficult to obtain captives, let alone guard them and see that they were sent to the rear. It seemed strange that these four battle weary, dirty and slightly dazed individuals were part of Hitler's super soldiers who were supposedly conquering the world. Rapid interrogation at the battalion command post indicated that we had partially penetrated the MLR for the city of ST. LO. (38)

CLOSE ENVELOPMENT

About 0730 hours communication was established with Company A on the left. The initial movement of both Companies A and C had swung slightly to the left and Company A was about 200 yards to the left rear of the positions of Company C. Captain McGowan's men were moving slowly against what seemed to be rather light resistance and soon were able to move up along side of the positions held by the other assault company. Captain McGowan requested tanks for the continuance of the attack. He believed that if he had tanks and was furnished some explosives he could blow passages for them through the hedgerows. Tanks also would lend confidence to his men as they progressed forward. (39)

A request was immediately placed with regiment for the

(37) Personal knowledge
(38) Personal knowledge
(39) Personal knowledge

tanks and the explosives. Response was immediate. The 2d Battalion had been able to make only slight gains and one platoon of tanks attached to the 2d Battalion were ordered to report to the 1st Battalion. (40)

The use of tanks in hedgerows had been developed by other units who found they aided greatly in the advance providing breaches in the hedgerows could be made for the tanks to pass through. Heavy iron prongs in some instances had been welded to the final drive housing. These prongs could rip holes in the upper portions of some hedgerows allowing the tanks to breach the obstacles. Also holes made by the prongs provided spaces in which to load demolitions in order to blow a gap through the hedgerows. (41)

At this time it was decided that Company A was in position to envelop the nose of HILL 122 from the left and work in behind the main enemy positions immediately in front of Company C. This envelopment was to be made at 0900 hours. Company C would remain in position lending what support it could by fire. Company B was then to be committed through Company C and join Company A in the push toward the town of EMELIE, a small group of buildings on the northeast nose of HILL 122. This plan had a strong possibility of succeeding and at the same time would straighten out the direction of attack and bring the full force of the two companies on the immediate battalion objective.

The terrain confronting the battalion at this time is worthy of note. The ground sloped upward toward the crest of HILL 122. Each field surrounded by hedgerows had apparently

(40) Personal knowledge

(41) A-2, p. 56

been leveled throughout the years and in doing so each successive field was higher. This created a terraced effect with each successive hedgerow higher. If it were not for the presence of trees in the hedgerows, the slopes of HILL 122 might resemble a giant irregular stairway. Behind these earthen walls the enemy had emplaced machine guns, cutting small openings through which observation could be obtained and the guns fired. The resulting fire would graze across the field, gradually rising so that it would also graze across the top of the opposite hedgerows. These emplacements were usually located in the corners of each field so that often two or more automatic weapons covered the entire area of each small field with low grazing fire. Within the battalion zone ran a sunken trail which offered the most cover when moving forward. This trail was quite narrow with the sloping sides forming the base of tall hedgerows on both sides. The entire length of the trail had been heavily mined with anti-personnel mines on the sloping sides. The narrow trail itself had been left free of mines. Prearranged fires had evidently been prepared to fall along the trail. Many casualties were suffered as the men instinctively stepped off the trail for the slight protection of the hedgerows as fire was brought down. This was the route over which all supplies were carried for the next few days operation. (42)

Shortly after 0900 hours Company A, this time accompanied by tanks, jumped off enveloping across the front of Company C. Tank-infantry cooperation was not at its best. There was no way of communicating with the men in the tank. Time after time it was necessary to crawl upon the tank, beat on the buttoned

(42) Personal knowledge

up hatch until it was opened, point out targets and change the direction of the tank as it was guided through the hedgerows. The attack proved to be successful. Company A found themselves moving down the rear side of a hedgerow and for the first time they could see what the enemy looked like from the rear. Thirty eight prisoners were soon on their way to the rear. (43) By this time Company B, Commanded by Captain Francis C. Mason, joined in the attack on the right of Company A and the attack continued until just short of the town of EMELIE, both companies were forced to stop and reorganize.

This now placed Company A and Company B in the assault with Company C in reserve. Company C now had the much needed time to reorganize its forces that had survived the first four hours of combat. (See Map E) (44)

CONTINUATION OF THE ATTACK

With the relatively fresh Companies B and A now abreast and well consolidated, the battalion commander ordered a continuation of the attack to commence at 1250 hours. The initial shock and confusion which had been evident in the battle thus far was beginning to wear off and the leaders were beginning to take a detached view in estimating the situation and in employing their troops. The initial fear in using radios had now completely worn off and all units were freely using radio communication which was essential to them in controlling their units.

The hedgerow fighting which had been new to them that morning was now an old story. The success of such fighting

(43) A-4, p. 37

(44) Personal knowledge

in reality depended upon the individual and the squad. The limited length of observation in all directions made the individual feel that he and the few buddies in his immediate vicinity were fighting all by themselves. It was impossible to see or know what was happening to the squad in the adjacent field. A full scale fight in which men died could take place 100 yards distant without your knowledge except an awareness of a firefight which did not immediately effect you. (45)

Reorganization was taking place throughout the battalion. Resupply of ammunition was no problem. The entire battlefield from the line of departure to the present positions was littered with equipment, ammunition, K rations and the bodies of countless men who had given their lives during the morning's conflict. Aid men were busily checking each body, eagerly looking for a spark of life in the inert forms. Much could be said about the bravery displayed by the unarmed aid men as they followed closely into the front lines rapidly evacuating those who were wounded. Battle weary soldiers could be seen taking ammunition from their fallen comrades who had no further use for it. Leaders were regrouping their men into fighting teams. Privates became Sergeants. Some Sergeants became Privates. The final test was developing leaders in a space of minutes. Some men had to be taken to the rear and placed in jobs in the kitchen area. Wire lines were repaired and artillery and mortar concentrations checked. (46)

The machine gun platoons from Company D were badly depleted. The platoon commanders, Lieutenants Alexander Cameron and Clarence C. Bartech were both dead. Technical Sergeants

(45) Personal knowledge

(46) Personal knowledge

Bernard A. Elliott and Raymond D. Wentz had already taken over and reorganized as casualties occurred. It was now possible to operate only two guns per platoon, each gun operated by four men. The machine gun platoons had suffered approximately 70% casualties. The mortar platoon had suffered few casualties but it was necessary to transfer some of the men to the machine guns so only four of the six mortars were displaced forward. Company D Executive Officer, 1st Lieutenant John W. Williams, Jr., had died from machine gun wounds. The mortar platoon commander and two section leaders had been wounded and evacuated. Company D found itself with the company commander and one other officer remaining of the eight entering combat. (47)

The rifle companies had suffered about 50% casualties among their officers and Captain Leslie G. Wilson, Commanding Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion had been killed.

Promptly on time the battalion launched a coordinated attack to gain the crest of HILL 122 which was now only 600 yards distant. Twenty minutes later the village of ENKLEIE had been captured. (48) The leading elements of Company B pushed its way to the crest of HILL 122 but were forced to withdraw to positions just south of ENKLEIE. During the remainder of the afternoon the 1st Battalion hung on to their precarious position. One counterattack was broken up by artillery, 4.2 chemical mortar, 81 mm mortar and 60 mm mortar fire delivered by the supporting weapons. Another attack delivered by the enemy actually penetrated the line held by Company A but was finally repulsed by fierce close fighting. Elements of Company B were again on top of HILL 122 at 2150 hours where they were

(47) Personal knowledge

(48) A-4, p. 37

joined a short time later by Company A. A twilight counter-attack, however, forced them to withdraw 200 yards. A coordinated twilight attack was launched and by 2305 hours Companies A and B were again in possession of HILL 122, this time to stay. (49) The 1st Battalion had advanced 2300 meters and were on the first objective assigned them in World War II. Eighty seven prisoners had been taken by the 134th Infantry during the day. (See Map E) (50)

The 1st Battalion consolidated its position for all around defense. Battalion headquarters moved up immediately behind the positions occupied by Companies A and B. Company C closed in the rear of the battalion. Ammunition was brought up. Food had not been thought of during the entire day. A check revealed that most of the men still had the full ration issued to them prior to the attack. Some listlessly opened a unit of their ration and automatically began to eat the cold food. Others didn't eat. Canteens were still full. The shock of entering combat was still being felt by the 1st Battalion -- no one wanted sleep -- everyone kept busy consolidating positions, sighting weapons, replenishing ammunition and grenades and trying not to think of their missing comrades. (51)

The advance made by the 1st Battalion placed them in a rather precarious position. The 2d Battalion had been able to advance 700 yards to the vicinity of LES ROMAINS. The 3d Battalion had been assembled in the afternoon and had moved up to positions about 1000 yards in rear of the 1st Battalion. They had been busy throughout the afternoon and the evening mopping up scattered resistance bypassed by the 1st Battalion. (52)

(49) A-4, p. 40; Personal knowledge

(50) A-10, p. 40

(51) Personal knowledge

(52) A-9, p. 2

In support of the 35th Division attack, division artillery fired 11,000 rounds while the 92d Chemical Mortar Battalion had fired 7,000 rounds. (53)

16 JULY 1944

At 0045 hours the regiment received a division order to consolidate its positions and to prepare to attack on order. (54)

As dawn broke the 1st Battalion discovered that it did not completely control Hill 122. The crest of Hill 122 is oval in shape approximately 700 yards long and 300 yards wide with the long axis running generally east and west. The battalion had attacked from the north and now occupied approximately one third of the crest. There were portions of 12 small fields each bounded by hedgerows on the crest of the hill and it was estimated that the battalion must capture two more hedgerows before they could begin to look down the other side. (55)

The positions now occupied by the battalion were well situated. Positions had been dug in during the night and it was believed that the ground could be held. During the early morning there was little firing carried on by either side. It was during this period that the bodies of several men were found who had been missing since the initial attack 150515. They were found approximately 100 yards beyond the Village of EMELIE which indicated that they had penetrated almost to the battalion objective in their initial attack. (56)

The slow arduous task of clearing the battlefield was now

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- (53) A-2, p. 107
(54) A-10, p. 40
(55) Personal knowledge
(56) Personal knowledge

in progress. Kitchen personnel had been organized in groups to help remove the dead men and cattle from the area. The days were quite warm and already the stench of over ripe flesh was ever present.

At 1100 the enemy launched it's one attempt of the day to retake the ground lost. Artillery and mortar fire had been increasing in volume since 1000 and every man was at his post ready to defend the ground which had been so costly the day before. The attack was successfully repulsed with only minor casualties while severe damage was inflicted on the enemy forces. (57)

The 2d Battalion advanced very little during the day and the 3d Battalion moved up to the right flank of the 1st Battalion against scattered resistance preparatory to making the main effort on the 17th. Thirteen prisoners were captured during the days operation. (58) (See Map F)

17 JULY 1944

The regiment had been ordered to continue the attack at 0430 with 3 battalions from their present positions. The day dawned dull and cloudy with a heavy ground fog which further limited the already limited visibility. The 1st Battalion jumped off on time, but were met with heavy mortar, artillery and machine gun fire and were forced to fall back to their prepared positions. It was almost impossible to utilize tanks and available fire support without better observation. The enemy continued to heavily shell the battalion positions and about 0630 an enemy raiding party penetrated to Company B's

(57) A-10, p. 40

(58) A-10, p. 40

CP before they were annihilated. (59)

The ground fog finally lifted and 1000 found the battalion moving forward with Companies A and B still leading. Previous training was now paying off. Machine gun fire was placed on the hedgerow ahead keeping enemy fire down while demolition crews prepared and blew gaps in the hedgerows. As tanks moved through the gaps, riflemen would storm the hedgerow ahead seeking out the dug in and well protected enemy. It was often necessary to throw grenades in the enemy dugouts to stop enemy machine guns. The enemy, protected by a log covered dugout and firing through a small slit in the hedgerow, continued to fire until his position was entered from the rear.

(60) Prisoners testified that they had been ordered to hold their positions "to the last man" and under any circumstances.

(61)

The third day of combat could well be described as a repetition of the first days action with the individual soldier dominating the scene with his guts, determination and complete disregard for personal safety carrying him over hedgerow after hedgerow. The entire action thus far, had been characterized by a narrow zone with only one direction to go and that was forward toward the objective.

By late afternoon the 1st Battalion was established well down on the forward slope of Hill 122. The battalion had advanced about 400 yards finally breaching the crest of Hill 122.

(62) These positions proved to be the last prepared positions encountered by the battalion north of ST. LO. (63)

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- (59) Personal knowledge
(60) Personal knowledge
(61) A-2, p. 102
(62) A-6, Item 1933
(63) Personal knowledge

The enemy however, had not yet given up. The 1st Battalion was counterattacked at 1810 by a strong force supported by the usual devastating mortar, artillery, and machine gun fire. This attack was repulsed and the battalion occupied these positions throughout the night. (64)

In summary of this action, the 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry attacked on a narrow front through hazardous hedgerows overgrown with trees and vegetation, captured and secured critical terrain overlooking the city of ST. LO, FRANCE. Thus they broke the last enemy main line of resistance north of ST. LO. Due to the type of terrain, width of the zone and dispositions of the enemy, who were well dug in and protected from all types of fire except direct artillery hits, the attack was delivered frontally. Throughout the operation the battalion was approximately 1000 yards in advance of all other friendly units thus leaving both flanks unprotected. The capture of Hill 122 assisted greatly in the capture of ST. LO, an important communications center located on the VIRE RIVER.

During the operation the 134th Infantry captured 100 prisoners and killed many more who were making a last ditch stand in their prepared positions. (65) The Regiment suffered 102 killed, 589 wounded and 101 missing in action during the three day period covered. (66)

The 1st Battalion was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for the aggressive capture of Hill 122 against a determined enemy by General Order 66, 10 August 1945, War Department, Washington 25, D. C. (67)

(64) A-4, p. 43
(65) A-10, p. 40
(66) A-3, Chap. III
(67) A-4, p. 148

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. RECONNAISSANCE

Complete and thorough reconnaissance for any action, however minor, is highly important. In the action previously described, a limited amount of reconnaissance was successfully carried out, but in the writer's opinion the reconnaissance was incomplete. This was probably due to inexperience on the part of the unit leaders, rather than the lack of knowledge. In this type of terrain a complete reconnaissance is dangerous and sometimes costly, but later actions proved that a plan of action based on a complete reconnaissance accomplished the mission with a minimum loss of personnel. Unit leaders must have sufficient time and maximum information available while conducting reconnaissance to insure that maximum results may be achieved.

2. SMALL UNIT LEADERS

The operation just described proves the value of small unit leadership. Although not explained in detail, it was at times essential for the company commanders and platoon leaders to personally lead small groups in destroying enemy strong-points. In any operation it is essential that each squad leader, each section leader and each platoon leader must fulfill his job to further the mission. Generally it should not be necessary for the next higher commander or leader to actively engage in the action of the subordinate unit, although at times it is necessary for the higher commander to be present with the unit on any level to further the accomplishment of that

units mission. Individual squad action typified the leadership in the small unit by actively taking the initiative by defeating the enemy immediately in front of them without knowledge of the accomplishments of their adjacent elements. At times this placed them in precarious positions well in advance of the other portions of their platoons. This was further exemplified by the individual soldier taking the responsibility and the initiative when his leader became a casualty. In any well trained unit, individuals must be ready and willing to take over the leadership of a unit in the eventuality their leader becomes a casualty.

3. SUPPORTING AUTOMATIC FIRE

Supporting automatic weapons can and do play an important role in any action. In many cases it is wise to attach these weapons directly to platoons during the attack so that full benefit of their volume of fire may be utilized. In the attack on Hill 122 it was impossible to employ the machine guns of the Heavy Weapons Company in direct or general support of the attacking companies. Realizing this, plans were made and units trained utilizing the machine guns as an integral part of a rifle platoon. This enabled the machine guns, combined with automatic rifles, to lay a heavy concentration of fire on the next hedgerow while the riflemen worked forward to assault the enemy positions. The heavy water-cooled machine gun was not designed for this type of use in offensive action. The men who normally manned these guns preferred to use them with the addition of a bipod to the water jacket than exchange them for the light machine gun. This employment of the machine guns of Com-

pany D proved to be highly effective in the attack. Defensively they were employed in the normal manner and were fired effectively against enemy counterattacks.

4. AGGRESSIVE ACTION

Success or failure can sometimes be measured by the force and determination with which an attack is launched. The 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry, attacking in a narrow zone, restricted in its ability to maneuver its elements by the nature of the terrain necessarily had to attack frontally the enemy's well protected defensive positions. It was highly essential that once forward movement began it be continued until enemy positions were overrun. This required aggressive action on the part of all individuals who repeatedly attacked through final protective fires delivered by enemy machine guns and rifles with complete disregard for personal safety. This necessitated crossing open spaces without benefit of cover or concealment. It was necessary to exercise constant pressure on the enemy to prevent him from organizing successive positions. The impetus gained in the initial attack was attributed to the aggressive spirit and initiative displayed by the assault elements which contributed largely to the successful capture of the objective where others had failed.

5. MORTAR FIRE, OBSERVATION AND CONTROL

During the conduct of the attack, mortar fire can be a decisive factor in the defeating of the enemy. In order to accomplish this observation and control are essential. During the initial phase of the action described, effective prearrang-

ed fire was delivered on enemy positions. The only means of observing and controlling this fire was through the use of wire laid between the forward observer and the mortars. This method proved to be highly ineffective due to the frequency of the damage to the wire inflicted by enemy fire. This indicated a need for an additional type of communication between the forward observer and the gun position. In later operations the use of forward observers equipped with the SCR 300 radio communicating directly with an SCR 300 radio at the mortar positions proved to be highly effective. Forward observers for the mortar platoon accompanied each rifle company in the assault, firing the mortars in a manner similar to that utilized by artillery forward observers.

6. CLOSE ENVELOPMENT

In the conduct of the attack each unit should strive to locate a weakness in the enemy position. This can often be accomplished by enveloping the enemy position and attacking across the rear from a flank. Company A found a weak spot in the enemy defenses which enabled them, in spite of the close terrain, to penetrate and attack the enemy positions from the enemy's rear. In this instance the close envelopment was accomplished by a short penetration. In conducting an envelopment it is advantageous to secure critical terrain in rear of the position being enveloped. However in this instance a close maneuver enabled Company A to envelop the enemy position and inflict serious damage in his main line of resistance with minimum losses.

7. BATTLEFIELD CLEARANCE

In reviewing this action it was evident that a unit participating in its first combat action may not be fully aware of the importance that should be attached to removing the dead men and animals and discarded equipment promptly from the battlefield. This may be largely contributed to the initial shock experienced when engaging in combat for the first time. Although the action described covered a period of three days, no concerted effort was made to clear the battlefield until the second day. This was due in part to the intense enemy artillery and mortar fire encountered throughout the Battalion zone. It is believed that the presence of the dead lowers the morale of the men. In my estimation it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the wounded and the dead be evacuated without delay. Discarded ammunition, equipment and rations should be promptly gathered, salvaged and reissued in order to prevent loss.

LESSONS

1. Reconnaissance is essential in any type of operation to insure that all precautions have been taken in the employment of troops to accomplish a given mission.
2. Success of any unit depends upon the leadership and initiative displayed by small unit leaders.
3. All supporting automatic weapons must be utilized regardless of the problem encountered and in any type of terrain in order that maximum fire power available can be delivered on the enemy.
4. Constant pressure on the enemy in the attack can be

achieved by aggressive action.

5. Adequate communication between the mortar observer and the gun positions is essential in delivering effective mortar fire.

6. Success and surprise can be achieved by an envelopment through enemy weakness irregardless of the depth of the envelopment.

7. Prompt battlefield clearance is necessary to maintain a high state of morale and fighting spirit in a unit.