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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 18TH INFANTRY (1ST INF. DIV)
IN THE COUNTER ATTACK OF THE "BULGE"
15-30 January 1945
(Personal experience of an Antitank Company Commander)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

During the period 15 to 30 January 1945, the 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, lent its weight toward the liquidation of the German winter counter-offensive. A review of the events leading up to this battle and a description of the offensive action of the 18th Infantry will be the subject of this monograph.

On the 6th of June 1944 the successful invasion of Hitler's fortress Europe was launched by the combined arms of Allied Forces under the supreme command of General Eisenhower.

By the end of the following month the American 1st Army and the British 2nd Army had enlarged their beachheads sufficiently to initiate their break-through attacks.

During August all allied forces were making rapid gains toward the German border. As the Siegfried Line and the German border were approached, the enemy resistance stiffened at all points.

The 1st Army captured Aachen on 21 October after overcoming the strongly fortified enemy garrison. This first strategic German city to be captured by the Allies fell to the men of the 1st Infantry Division who had been fighting with the 1st Army since "D" Day.

On 15 November the 21st Army Group launched its drive, designed to reach the Rhine, but progress was slow. However, by 4 December, the Mass and Roer Rivers were reached. East of Aachen the 1st Army fought a gruelling bloody battle through the Hurtgen Forest where severe casualties were suffered by our forces. (1)

(1) A-1.

THE ARDENNES COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

On 16 December 1944 the Germans launched their counter-offensive in the Eifel sector between Monschau and Echtermach. This area was lightly defended by our troops as large forces engaged in offensive operations had been committed in the Aachen area to the north, and the Metz area in the south. The enemy's attack was carried out with great secrecy and the assault employed three German armies totaling 14 Infantry and 10 Panzer Divisions. (2)

Six days after the initial assault, the German offensive advanced westward for 50 miles at the points of greatest penetration. These thrusts almost reached the Meuse River in an area west of Marche. Attacks on the northern shoulder of the salient in the Monschau-Elsenborn ridge area had yielded no appreciable gain to the Panzer and Infantry attacks. (See Map "A") (3)

To the south, contact between the surrounded 101st Airborne Division and III Corps of 3rd Army was made at Bastogne on 26 December. The 3rd Army had been attacking northward since 22 December. (4)

A Letter of Instruction, issued on 1 January 1945 by the 1st Army Commander, directed VII Corps to attack on 3 January and gain contact with the 3rd Army. The German offensive had thus been brought to a standstill 17 days after the initial assault. (5)

THE ALLIED COUNTERATTACK

The 1st Army, deployed facing south, consisted of the VII Corps, XVIII Airborne and V Corps from west to east respectively. (See Map "A")

(2,3) A-2, p. 104-110; (4) A-5, p. 185; (5) A-2, p. 127-130.

At 0830, 3 January, the VII Corps' attack was launched on a 25 mile front. Despite snow, icy roads and stiff enemy resistance, gains were made all along the line. The weather prevented the use of our Air Force. In the zone of V Corps strong combat patrols demonstrated to the front in order to give the appearance of a general attack all along the line. XVIII Airborne Corps attacked on the left flank of VII Corps to protect its left flank. The pressure continued and by 9 January 1945 the Germans were withdrawing from the western mouth of the salient. (6)

On 10 January, XVIII Airborne Corps was ordered to attack the salient between Stavelot and Malmedy.

After completion of this mission, designated as Phase One, V Corps was to attack, seize the defile below Ondenval, secure the high ground through Schoppen, the Butgenbacher Heck, and anchor its position at Dom Butgenbach, now held by the 26th Infantry. This mission was called Phase 2. Upon completion of Phase 2, V Corps was to secure the line, Mirfeld, the high ground southeast of Moderschied, and the key terrain below Bullingen. (See Map "B") (7)

The V Corps order was issued on 12 January, and the 1st Infantry Division, with the 23rd Regimental Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division attached, was to attack on H-hour, D-Day, seize the defile below Ondenval and secure phase line 2; also, on Corps order, to capture the Corps objective. (8)

The 1st Infantry Division consisted of the 16th, 18th and 26th Infantry Regiments; the 5th, 7th, 32nd and 33rd Field Artillery Battalions; the 1st Engineer Combat Battalion; the 1st Medical Battalion, the 1st Quartermaster Company; the 1st

(6) A-2, p. 127-130; (7) A-2, p. 135; (8) A-3, Field Order #34.

Reconnaissance Troop; and the 1st Ordnance Company. The 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 745th Tank Battalion had been attached to the Division since June 1944.

On 13 January, the 1st Infantry Division order was issued at its Command Post in the vicinity of Robertville. It ordered the 23rd R.C.T. with the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, attached, to attack from the vicinity of Waines and capture Odenval and the defile to the south. The 16th Infantry was to capture Faymonville and Schoppen. The 18th Infantry was ordered to attack south from its present position and capture the high ground north of Schoppen. The 26th Infantry was to maintain its defensive positions near Butgenbach. Further attacks were to be pursued on Division order.

The 1st Infantry Division had been defending the north shoulder of the "Bulge" since 17 December 1944. Repeated attacks by the 12th SS Panzer Division had failed to unhinge the Division's position. The enemy halted his attacks after suffering heavy casualties in armor and infantry. (9)

The alert for committing the 1st Division in the battle of the "Bulge" came on 16 December. At this time the Division was in a rest area north of Eupen, where it had been undergoing reorganization since 8 December.

The bitter fighting through the Hurtgen Forest had so depleted the ranks of the three Infantry Regiments of the Division that a rest and reorganization period was considered a requisite for future successful employment of the Division. The arrival of replacements and their training had just gotten underway when the Division was once again committed to action. Training was completed under the battle conditions imposed by the "Battle of the Bulge."

(9) A-4.

This should follow the next 3 paragraphs

The 18th Infantry's Commanding Officer, Colonel Smith, issued his order on 14 January from his Command Post in Nidrum. A warning order had been issued the previous day. The 3rd Battalion was ordered to attack at 0600, 15 January, and seize the high ground 1500 yards south of its present position. The 2nd Battalion, on the left, was to defend from its present position. Units attached to the 18th Infantry for this operation were Company B, 745th Tank Battalion; Company B, 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion; 1st Platoon, Company B, 1st Engineer Battalion; and 2nd Platoon, Company C, 86th Chemical Mortar Battalion. The 32nd Field Artillery Battalion was in direct support. One platoon of tanks and one platoon of tank destroyers were normal attachments to each battalion. (10)

The 3rd Battalion Commanding Officer, Lt. Colonel Peckham, requested permission to launch his attack at 0300, so that the open ground between the line of departure and the Battalion's objective could be crossed during the hours of darkness. Higher headquarters refused the request on the grounds that the early attack would alert the enemy's defenses facing the other attacking units of 1st Army; however, permission was granted to attack at 0500. (11)

The 3rd Battalion commander issued his order on 14 January from his Command Post in Butgenbach. Company I, with a platoon of tank destroyers and a section of light machine guns from Company M attached, was to attack south and seize Hill 566. Company L, with a platoon of tanks attached, was to attack on I Company's left and capture the Schleid. (See Map C.)

The line of departure, the 3rd Battalion's present front line, was to be occupied in its entirety by Company K, which was in battalion reserve.

(10) A-7; (11) A-6.

Company M's 81mm mortar platoon was to support the attack from its positions 1000 yards north of the front line. The platoon of chemical mortars was also attached to the 3rd Battalion for the attack. Cannon Company was in support from positions south of Nidrum. The 3rd Platoon of Antitank Company, whose guns were part of the 3rd Battalion's defense system, was to remain in position. The Regimental Field Train was released to the battalions, and the 3rd Battalion's train was located in Nidrum. The Battalion forward command post and aid station were in a farmhouse 1200 yards southwest of Butgenbach.

The platoon of engineers attached to the battalion were assigned the mission of clearing gaps in our minefield for the safe passage of the tanks forward.

In order to obtain secrecy, no preparatory fires were scheduled for the attack.

Having occupied their present positions for a week, the attacking companies were familiar with the terrain to their front and little reconnaissance was necessary to complete their plans.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The terrain to the 18th Infantry's front consisted of a series of high ridges cut by deep draws, both usually wooded. Approaches to the high ground were open and exposed. The towns in the vicinity were surrounded by open fields.

This wooded ridge, Butgenbacher Heck, and the high ground adjoining gave the enemy complete domination over the snow filled open ground between his line and ours. The snow averaged two feet in depth; however, it was 5 feet in the drifts. The temperature was well below freezing and cutting winds were common. (12)

ENEMY SITUATION

By now the enemy had lost the initiative and was determined to hold the shoulders of his original salient. It was imperative to the success of his withdrawal to prevent our cutting the roads clogged with his retreating troops and vehicles.

The enemy parachute units facing the 18th Infantry occupied strong defensive positions along the Butgenbacher Heck. The main line of resistance consisted of a series of log bunkers, emplaced as strong points, along the northern edge of the woods. The bunkers contained numerous automatic weapons as well as riflemen and were connected by trenches.

It was known that elements of the 3rd Parachute Division held the ground to the 1st Division's front. The 5th Parachute Regiment was facing the 18th Infantry. The enemy's reserves were in Moderscheid and Hepscheid. His artillery was in the vicinity of Heppenbach. (13)

Such was the situation as the 18th Infantry launched its attack at 0500 on 15 January.

THE 3RD BATTALION ATTACK 15-21 JANUARY

Company L did not attack at 0500, but crossed the line of departure at 0545. At first light, about 0630, the two assault platoons were met by heavy machine gun and rifle fire coming from the logged emplacements at the edge of the woods to their front. Mortar and Artillery fire were soon added to impede the progress of the plodding infantry moving slowly through the deep snow. The O.D. coated soldiers were ideal targets for the enemy sharpshooters.

The platoon of tanks attached to Company L had its own difficulties in attempting to negotiate the gap in the minefield made by the attached engineers. The first two tanks in column were put out of action when they hit mines in the

Casualties were heavy and at first count only one officer and 43 men returned from the abortive attack. The wounded were evacuated by the twelve litter squads attached to the Battalion for this operation. The Weasel was the only vehicle that could negotiate the deep snow and the three attached to the 3rd Battalion were a great aid in this work. Evacuation was extremely difficult and speed urgent. If casualties were not evacuated in a few hours the chances for survival of the wounded, if seriously hit, were slim. A considerable number of the men listed as missing had probably fallen where hit and had been covered over by the snow. Some men joined the company later in the day, suffering only from extreme fatigue. (17)

Company I on the right, with its attached armor, moved forward at 0500. No undue difficulty was encountered by the tank destroyers in crossing the gapped minefield. By 0600 the leading elements of the company had advanced 1200 yards towards its objective. A six man enemy outpost, comfortably situated in the railroad station, was captured as the attack moved south.

Daylight broke when the two leading platoons came within 200 yards of their objective. At this time they were brought under fire from the front, and flanking fire from the woods west of the railroad in the 16th Infantry's sector. The tank destroyers took the woods under direct fire with their 76mm guns. One section of 81mm mortars delivered fire on the enemy's position to I Company's front.

Continued attempts to move forward were met by effective enemy artillery, mortar, machine gun and rifle fire.

Captain Hess, Commanding Company I, at this time committed his support platoon to the east. This platoon encountered

(17) A-7.

heavy fire from the woods which had caused L Company its difficulties.

Repeated attempts to advance proved unsuccessful in the face of strong small arms and mortar fire. The tank destroyers fired continuously. A section at a time returned to the rear for replenishment of ammunition. Artillery fire was also poured on the enemy's position, but no further gains were made.

Company I dug in and defended the ground where they found themselves. (18)

The 3rd Battalion of the 16th Infantry cleared the enemy from the woods on Company I's flank at 1600, after an intense fire fight.

Company K, commanded by Captain Paulsen, attacked through Company I at 1800 and seized the high ground to the front which was originally Company I's objective. Attempts to move further south were repulsed. Patrols from K Company contacted K Company, 16th Infantry, at the railroad tracks during the night.

The Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, ordered Company I to deploy on Company K's left. Both companies dug in and prepared to defend their hard won gains.

Company I's casualties had been heavy, about 50%. K Company suffered 15 casualties. Frost bite caused 15 men to be evacuated from the Battalion. (19)

Efforts were made to get hot food to the troops living on the open ground. The bull dozers were in the process of clearing a road to the front line units, but it was not completed the first night of the attack. The three Weasels did yeoman service in evacuating the wounded and bringing up much needed ammunition and other vital supplies. The water in the 5 gallon cans were frozen by the time they reached the troops, as was the water in the men's canteens. "C" rations were also frozen (18, 19) A-6.

and the issued heat tablets were insufficient to thaw out the contents of the cans. The wool overcoats and gloves were wet from constant contact with the snow. The overshoes also proved inadequate to protect the men from the wet and cold. Although this same equipment was adequate during the Regiment's defensive stand in partially sheltered positions, it proved almost useless in the attack through the deep snow.

(20)

The 3rd Battalion received 150 replacements during the day. One hundred were sent to Company L which was now in Battalion reserve, and the remaining fifty marched to Company I's position in the line after dark.

During daylight 16 January the 3rd Battalion held its position while the 16th Infantry attacked Faymonville and Schoppen. Faymonville was captured during the morning hours.

(21)

At 0200 on 17 January Companies I and K attacked southward on a 600 yard front. After advancing about 500 yards against moderate resistance, the Battalion was forced to cross a stream where the snow was between four and five feet deep. Enemy artillery and mortar fire into the gully was intense but the attacking companies continued to move forward. As the attacking companies emerged from the draw and reached the crest they were held up by heavy fire of all types. The stubborn enemy resistance was aided considerably by liberal artillery support. Daylight found the 3rd Battalion occupying a bare hold on the crest of the hill after a gain of about 500 yards.

Casualties were between 30 and 35, with one third from frostbite. During the day an effort was made to get the men sorely needed dry clothing, but this attempt was only partially

(20) A-7; (21) A-4.

successful. During the night of 16-17 January the tank dozer attached to the Battalion managed to clear the road sufficiently to get some supplies through to the fighting troops.

At 0900 the Germans counterattacked the left platoon of Company K. Two enemy platoons of Infantry, supported by two tanks, were employed in the attack. By 1400, after bitter fighting, including close combat, the Germans were repulsed and five prisoners taken. (22)

The 3rd Battalion continued their attack and succeeded in completely clearing the crest of the Schleid and advancing about 400 yards eastward. Here the advance stopped at midnight. The men dug in on the open ground and prepared to defend their position during the night.

During the day's attack two men from Company L who had been wounded on 15 January during L Company's initial attack were found in a draw and evacuated. They had been existing on chocolate ration and snow. When found the men were suffering from exposure as well as wounds. Later investigation proved that one of the two men managed to survive the ordeal. (23)

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, attached to the 23rd R.C.T. attacked elements of the 8th and 9th Parachute Regiments holding a defensive pocket south of Ondenal, and routed the enemy force out of the woods. The 1st Battalion had made a wide envelopment through deep snow and had attacked up a steep slope during a heavy snow storm. The complete surprise of the attack netted the Battalion three 88mm guns, four 105mm howitzers, a half track and an ammunition dump. Well over a hundred prisoners were also taken. (24)

The 3rd Battalion was ordered to continue the attack on 19 January. At 0500 the attack jumped off with all three rifle

(22) A-4, A-6; (23) A-6; (24) A-4, p. 29.

companies in the assault. After gaining 400 yards through the deep snow, during the worst weather of the battle, and against a determined enemy using all types of fire, the attack was stopped at 1700. Defensive positions were prepared with Company I on the north flank, Company L in the center and Company K on the south. Moderscheid could be seen from Company K's position.

During the attack the 81mm mortars were displaced to the northern edge of the woods insuring continuous support for the Battalion. Artillery and mortar fire were available on call through forward observers, at all times. Liberal amounts of H.E. were expended in efforts to continue the attack, but due to poor visibility and deep snow the effectiveness of the fires was reduced. No further advance was made by the 3rd Battalion this day.

From the 30 to 35 prisoners taken it was discovered that elements of the 1055th Regiment, 89th Volkgrenadier Division, were holding the eastern half of the Butgenbacher Heck. (25)

The 16th Infantry captured Schoppen and contact was made with them by Company K, 18th Infantry.

The tank dozer and bull dozer were continuously in action clearing the roads to the fighting companies. Replacement overcoats, socks, gloves and shoes were being provided for the men fighting through the snow. A well heated house was procured in Butgenbach where the wet clothes were dried. Dry clothing was sent up each night with the battalion supply train. Hot meals were also delivered. Half tracks from Cannon and Antitank Companies were used to bring up the equipment. With the exception of the Weasel, this was found to be the best vehicle in the Regiment for negotiating the snow. Toboggans,

constructed by Service Company, were tied to the rear of the Weasels or pulled by the litter bearers in evacuating the wounded. (26)

At 0500 on 20 January, the attack through the Butgenbacher Heck continued against a skillfully dug in enemy. The 3rd Battalion cleared almost 600 yards of the woods in the face of heavy small arms, mortar and artillery fire. The harsh weather and difficult terrain continued to plague the attacking troops. Twenty-two prisoners were taken.

Defensive positions were prepared by the attacking troops for the night, and patrols sent out to the front. Company L had a 20 man combat patrol ambushed as it attempted to probe the enemy's defenses. Only 3 men returned safely to our lines. Patrols from Company I and Company K advanced into the woods until they were brought under intense small arms fire 200 yards forward of their positions. The patrols reported the enemy digging in and constructing defensive positions.

The next morning the attack was again launched at 0500, but by 0900, after advancing to where the enemy's defenses were organized, the assault companies came under strong small arms and mortar fire. Efforts to advance the attack were to no avail. The enemy's strong defensive position and fires, and the exhausted condition of the assaulting troops precluded any further advance by the 3rd Battalion.

The Regimental Commander decided to relieve the 3rd Battalion from its attack mission.

The 3rd Battalion was relieved by the 1st Battalion which had been returned to regimental control on 18 January. The relief, in place, was effected during the night of 21-22 January, and the depleted 3rd Battalion was returned to Nidrum for reorganization. (27)

(26,27) A-7.

The effective strength of the 3rd Battalion was approximately 40% at this time. The toll of enemy casualties was also substantial. About 100 German dead were seen in the woods through which the Battalion's attack progressed. Prisoners taken totaled 75. (28)

The 1st Battalion, fresh from its recent victory on the 1st Division's right flank, made a limited attack on the north flank of the Butgenbacher Heck against the 1055th Regiment at 0500 on 22 January. By the 23rd the 1st Battalion had succeeded in driving the enemy further west on the north flank of the Butgenbacher Heck.

That afternoon a regimental order was issued at Butgenbach, where the forward Command Post was established, calling for a coordinated attack by the 1st and 2nd Battalions at 0400 the next morning. The 1st Battalion was to clear the remainder of the Butgenbacher Heck and seize the high ground to the east. The 2nd Battalion was ordered to capture Moderscheid and the ridge line to the east in its zone of action. (29)

THE CAPTURE OF MODERSCHIED, HEPPENBACH AND HEPSCHEID
24-28 January

At 0400 the 2nd Battalion, commanded by Lt Colonel Williamson, attacked south, from its defensive position, in a column of companies. Shortly after daylight the enemy's well organized defensive position around Morscheck cross road 1000 yards south of Dom Butgenbach, was put to rout by the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry, and the 26th Infantry attacking on the left.

The 2nd Battalion continued its attack from the cross road southwest toward Moderscheid. The platoon of tanks and tank destroyers, attached to the 2nd Battalion, joined the attacking infantrymen at this time. The road leading south from Butgenbach was cleared of mines by the mine platoon of
(28) A-6; (29) A-7.

Antitank Company attached to the 2nd Battalion for this purpose. Mines were also encountered on the road through the Butgenbacher Heck leading to Moderscheid. (See Map "C")

The Battalion Commanding Officer reconnoitered the ground and discovered a by-pass suitable for the passage of armor. The tanks left the road and with the assaulting company mounted, led the attack onto Moderscheid. The remaining companies, afoot, followed in the path made by the armor through the deep snow.

As the 1st Battalion's attack progressed eastward, withdrawing German troops were encountered by the 2nd Battalion. After a short brisk fire fight the bulk of the retreating troops were killed or captured.

Shortly before dark the 2nd Battalion attacked Moderscheid, and, following a short intense fire fight, occupied the town. An enemy self-propelled gun fired on the rear of the Battalion column as it approached Moderscheid. The gun was located in the west edge of the woods 1000 yards east of Moderscheid. It managed to fire about 100 rounds before it was silenced by our artillery. The enemy's 3rd Battalion, 5th Parachute Regiment, which had been defending Moderscheid, withdrew to Hepscheid at dark. A total of 75 prisoners were taken by the 2nd Battalion during the day's fighting. (30)

The line was advanced 800 yards to the east of Moderscheid to take advantage of the dominating ground in that area. A perimeter defense of the town was organized.

During the night only Weasel drawn supplies were able to get through to the 2nd Battalion. An enemy strong point had the Moderscheid-Schoppen road cut and the remaining roads were impassable to other vehicles.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions moved out in the attack at 0600 the following morning, 25 January.

The 2nd Battalion eliminated the enemy force holding the road to Schoppen and captured the ridge line in its zone, southeast of Moderscheid. From the high ground the enemy was seen in Heppenbach preparing defensive positions. Artillery fire was called for and effective results were observed on these positions.

The 1st Battalion, attacking through the last 200 yards of the Butgenbacher Heck, captured the majority of the remaining troops of the 2nd Battalion 1055 Regiment encircled therein. The 1st Battalion reached the ridge line in its sector early in the afternoon of 25 January.

With its capture of Mirfeld the 16th Infantry was pinched out of the attack and became the 1st Division's reserve.

The next few days were spent by the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 18th Infantry organizing the ground gained for defense. A hasty minefield laid by the engineers and the mine platoon of the Antitank Company covered the main line of resistance. Antitank guns were dug in and the tank destroyers and tanks gave the position defense in depth.

V Corps' objective for phase 3 was secured, and the 1st Infantry Division passed to control of XVIII Airborne Corps.

During 26 and 27 January, as the attack halted, the Regimental Commanding Officer ordered his Supply Officer, Major Dupree, to secure sufficient supplies for the Battalion, to overcome, insofar as possible, the inadequacies of our equipment. Shoepacs, which protected the men's feet in deep snow, were issued prior to the attack on Moderscheid. The half tracks of Cannon and Antitank Companies continued to haul supplies, rations, and men up the snow clogged roads. This practice continued throughout the operation. Bull dozers and tank dozers were used to increase the circulation of the supply

lines. Mechanics of the regiment worked day and night in their endeavor to keep the vehicles running. (31)

With the capture of Moderscheid the Regimental Command Post moved to Butgenbach as did the aid station. Service Company, which had been at Saurbrodt, operated from Nidrum. Cannon Company displaced its guns forward south of Butgenbach. The Antitank Company's guns were deployed within the regiment's defensive position, one platoon being attached to each of the battalions. The Antitank Company Command Post was located in Butgenbach. The main supply route became the Moderscheid, Schoppen road. (32)

During the 26th and 27th the enemy's activities were devoted to work on his defenses and patrolling. During the night of the 27th a 2nd Battalion outpost from Company E, located in a patch of woods 1000 yards west of Heppenbach, was counterattacked by the enemy and forced to withdraw.

An attack order from the Division Commander was received by the 18th Infantry on 27 January. The Regimental Commanding Officer in turn ordered the 1st and 2nd Battalions to attack on 28 January and seize Hepscheid and Heppenbach respectively. Time of attack was set for 0500.

The 2nd Battalion moved out on time with Companies F and G in the assault and Company E in reserve.

The Battalion Observation Post was located in Mirfeld.

Shortly after the jump-off, two of the tanks, attacking with the 2nd Battalion, bogged down in the deep snow. The tank platoon leader had reconnoitered his route forward the previous day and assured the Battalion Commanding Officer that the draw forward of the position could be negotiated by his tanks. Lt Colonel Williamson, upon receiving word of the bogged down armor, ordered the remaining tanks and tank destroyers

to follow a platoon of Company E and a mine detecting team down the Mirfeld, Heppenbach road. (33)

The enemy had well constructed positions defending Heppenbach. Company G, in attacking the north half of the town, was brought under heavy fire from the rear as well as from the enemy's positions to the front. The German combat patrol, which had overrun E Company's outpost the previous night, were entrenched in the woods and brought G Company under heavy small arms fire from the rear. The G Company Commander had not been notified of the outpost's withdrawal.

After daylight Company F was fighting in the southern half of the Battalion objective against enemy troops well fortified in stone buildings offering stubborn resistance.

Shortly thereafter, the tanks entered Heppenbach from the south and the resistance subsided. A few rounds from the tank mounted 75's into the buildings holding enemy troops convinced the occupants that further resistance would be futile. Heppenbach's capture revealed that the defenders were from the 5th Parachute Regiment. Company G, after a sharp engagement, eliminated the strong position in the woods held by 40 men from the 48th Parachute Regiment under a Lt. Sprenger. Total prisoners taken by the 2nd Battalion were about 100. (34)

During the afternoon the Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, observed the movement of troops between Heppenbach and Werth. With the aid of field glasses, Lt Colonel Williamson discovered an enemy force, estimated as a company, organizing a defensive position astride the road about 1200 yards south and east of Heppenbach. Captain P.K. Smith, the artillery liaison officer, soon observed the "Artillerymen's dream." Within minutes the 32nd Field Artillery Battalion was placing battalion concen- (33, 34) A-8.

The 18th Infantry received orders on the 29th of January to continue the attack and seize Honsfeld and Hunningen. Colonel Smith ordered the 1st Battalion to attack early in the morning of the 30th and seize Honsfeld. After the capture of Honsfeld the 3rd Battalion was to pass through the 1st Battalion and capture Hunningen. For this attack all of Company B, 745th Tank Battalion, was attached to the 1st Battalion. Half tracks from Cannon and Antitank Companies, under command of Captain Buss, Regimental Motor Officer, were also attached to the 1st Battalion. An engineer platoon and two squads from the Mine Platoon completed the attachments to the 1st Battalion. The Regimental order was issued at Moderscheid. Time of attack was set at 0100, 30 January. (37)

All tanks and half tracks would be attached to the 3rd Battalion after the capture of Honsfeld by the 1st Battalion. The tracked vehicles were painted white, to blend with the snow, for this attack.

Bullingen was captured by the 26th Infantry on 29th January after stubborn fighting.

THE CAPTURE OF HONSFELD AND HUNNINGEN, 30 JANUARY

Just after dark on 29 January the Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, ordered a strong combat patrol from Company B, with the two squads of the mine platoon attached, to clear the road, forward of the present line, leading into Honsfeld, of mines. Lt Colonel Learnard, the 1st Battalion's Commanding Officer, planned to mount infantry on the tanks and half tracks and sweep into Honsfeld with the tank infantry team leading. Therefore, he ordered the road cleared before the attack.

The patrol cleared the road of 9 box mines and also captured a seven man outpost located in a farm house between Hill 620 and Honsfeld.

At 0100 the 1st Battalion, under the helpful illumination of a full moon, attacked across the waist deep open field toward Honsfeld, 1500 yards to the east. Companies A and C, mounted on tanks and half tracks respectively, led off in column in the order mentioned. The armor followed the road, which had been plowed by the engineers' bull dozers, to a point where the mines had been cleared earlier that night. At this point the tanks left the road and made their way through the field. Company B remained in position at the edge of the woods in Battalion reserve. The 2nd Battalion Observation Post was a dugout on top of the hill looking across the 1500 yards of open field, covered with snow, into Honsfeld.

By 0200 the leading elements of Company A had entered Honsfeld. The Germans offered resistance initially with their automatic weapons and rifles. No enemy artillery was employed. Company C attacked on the right and Company A on the left. The town was cleared systematically and within an hour or two the town was seized and the enemy troops of the 5th Parachute Regiment, organized as Battlegroup North, were routed and the majority captured. About 100 German prisoners were taken. Our casualties were very light. (38)

The 1st Battalion Command Post was moved into Honsfeld by 0430, followed by the reserve company. For the first time since the attack started on 21 January the fighting troops of the 1st Battalion were sheltered. The 100 odd buildings of Honsfeld, all of which contained cellars, protected the men from the harsh weather and enemy fire. Enemy artillery fire, for the first time since the 1st Battalion launched its attack at 0100, fell on Honsfeld shortly after its capture.

The 3rd Battalion which had assembled in the woods 1 mile west of Honsfeld was prepared to launch its attack through

the 1st Battalion and onto Hunningen, 1 mile north of Honsfeld. The medium tanks and half tracks which the 1st Battalion had used were now attached to the 3rd Battalion.

A task force was formed under the command of Captain Wardner, Commander of the Tank Company. It consisted of Company "B", 745th Tank Battalion, 2 tank dozers and Company L. An artillery observer with his radio was mounted on one of the tanks so that the attacking troops could secure close artillery support.

Company I was to follow at 600 yards, mounted in half tracks, and Company K followed on foot.

The attack moved out on the road, passed through the 1st Battalion, and at first light, 0700 this hazy morning, Task Force Wardner, with a tank dozer leading, entered the outskirts of Hunningen. The tanks fired as they approached the town. A base of fire, consisting of a platoon of tanks and a platoon of tank destroyers, was employed on the southern outskirts of Hunningen to closely support the attacking troops.

Surprise was not gained and the enemy offered strong initial resistance, but he was taken under effective artillery fire and direct tank fire. The 3rd Battalion's objective was taken by 1000 hours and the enemy's withdrawing troops were subjected to artillery and mortar fire. About 100 prisoners from the 2nd Battalion, 1056th Regiment, and the 86th Fusilier Battalion were taken prisoner. (39)

Despite the heavy snow which hampered our movements, the 1st and 3rd Battalions moved their lines forward to the high ground east of Hunningen during the day. (See Map "C")

The 26th Infantry captured Murringen on 30 January after a brief struggle.

(39) A-6, A-4.

The German Wehrmacht had been cleared from the last of the ground he had captured during his abortive winter offensive. The remnants of his retreating forces were making their way across the German border into the defenses of the Siegfried Line.

Casualties for the 18th Infantry totaled approximately 750 for the entire attack. Most of these casualties were suffered by the 3rd Battalion in its attack through the Butgenbacher Heck. Trench foot, frostbite and exposure took an unduly large number of men away from the front lines. (40)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The mission assigned the 18th Infantry was made most difficult because of the snow and weather conditions under which the attacks were made. The full significance of the obstacles encountered were not foreseen and, as a result, adequate preparations were not made. The responsibility for shortcomings in equipment and clothing must be placed on the heads of higher commanders.

Once the tremendous difficulties in carrying out the normal functions of traffic circulation, supply, evacuation, wire laying, and feeding were fully comprehended all efforts were bent toward sustaining the fighting soldier who was finding it a hardship to combat the elements, to say nothing of the enemy. The inadequacies of the individual equipment is starkly revealed by the great number of casualties due to exposure, frostbite, and trench foot.

The initial assaults by the 3rd Battalion on the Butgenbacher Heck were handicapped when Company L failed to attack on time. The seven day attack through this strongly defended position under the worst of conditions completely exhausted

(40) A-6, A-7, A-8.

the assaulting troops. The fighting efficiency of the individual soldier and leader was sharply decreased as the days wore on. The decision that kept the 3rd Battalion attacking after its effectiveness was destroyed must be questioned.

The effectiveness of swift early morning attacks employing armor with comparatively fresh troops can be attested to by the results achieved. The bold maneuvers caused maximum casualties to the enemy and the minimum to our own forces, and greatly aided in the capture of assigned objectives.

The enemy's practice of defending the towns from the buildings therein instead of the dominating terrain in the locality portended his defeat. Occupying the buildings for defense restricted his observation, reduced the fire power he could effectively employ against our attacking troops, and, lacking mutual support, the defending force invited defeat in detail.

We cannot fail but be impressed by the fighting infantryman, his devotion to duty, courage and resourcefulness as he fought his way during the most arduous of fighting conditions to achieve his mission - the destruction of the enemy.

During this period the 18th Infantry advanced approximately 13 kilometers in the face of bitter weather conditions, over difficult terrain and against an enemy who at times offered stubborn and fanatical resistance.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Adequate equipment and clothing must be provided for troops if they are to perform their duties efficiently and effectively under adverse weather and terrain conditions.
2. Fighting troops must be rested more frequently during such operations than normally.

3. Detailed planning is necessary to conduct an operation during unusual conditions of weather or terrain.

4. Tanks can be used to good advantage in snow if properly employed. Its capabilities and limitations must be fully understood by those employing the armor.

5. Pursuit by all means available, against a retreating enemy, is mandatory.

6. When the enemy's organized, hard crust of resistance is broken, the attack must be continued relentlessly and continually if maximum results from the break-through are to be achieved.

7. Unusual weather conditions or difficult terrain do not of themselves preclude the launching of an attack; however, to insure its success every effort must be made to prepare adequately and support the operation.

8. The oft repeated principles of surprise, firepower, mass, reconnaissance and flexibility are as applicable in the type of action described as they are in every operation.

9. The aggressive spirit and efficiency of the individual soldier are reduced by his arduous efforts while fighting under difficult conditions of weather and terrain. Every means possible must be employed to counteract the loss of this spirit. Frequent relief, adequate clothing and equipment, abundant good food and maximum support will greatly sustain the fighting soldier and help him retain the aggressive spirit which is so vital to successful combat.

10. Training under adverse conditions will best prepare the participants for combat under similar circumstances. From such training workable doctrines will also be developed.