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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY G,
23D INFANTRY REGIMENT, 2D INFANTRY DIVISION,
(ONDENVAL, BELGIUM)
15 - 20 JANUARY 1945
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY WITH ATTACHED TANKS
ATTACKING OVER OPEN, ROLLING TERRAIN

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph is concerned with the operations of Company G, 23d Infantry Regiment, 2d Infantry Division, in securing the Ondenval defile in the vicinity of Ondenval, Belgium, during the period 15 January to 20 January 1945.

In order to understand the events leading up to the action herein described, it is necessary to consider events as they transpired from 16 December 1944 to 15 January 1945.

By late 1944 it was evident to the German High Command that the Allied Armies, if unchecked, would shortly cross the Rhine River and slowly but inexorably cut the German Armies to pieces. The Germans knew that if they intended to prevent this certain defeat, drastic measures to stop the American and British advance were necessary immediately.

Germany's decision as to the nature of these measures was to execute an all-out thrust through the Allied Armies with the object of driving through Belgium to Antwerp, thereby depriving the Allies of a vital port, a port absolutely essential to the Allies in order to shorten their ever lengthening lines of supply. (1)

On 16 December 1944, three German Armies made the desperate thrust through the Ardennes. The attack was initially successful, and a penetration of the American lines extending from Elsenborn on the north almost to the city of Luxembourg on the south resulted. The attack forged ahead until on 26 December 1944 it was successfully stopped on the Meuse River. (2)

Even before the offensive was stopped, the Allied Forces were making preparation to regain the ground lost and therewith the initiative. Attacks were pressed on the flanks of the salient by the First US Army on the north and by the Third US Army on the south. (See Map A)

(1) A-5, p. 291; (2) A-6, p. 167.

These attacks were intended to converge in the vicinity of Houffalize, Belgium, and from there both armies were to continue a concerted drive to the Rhine River. (3)

On 1 January 1945, the First Army had as units on line, the V Corps on the left, the XVIII Airborne Corps in the center and the VII Corps on a narrow front on the right. (4) The VII Corps was to make the army main effort to establish contact in the center of the salient with Third Army. (5) V Corps and the XVIII Airborne Corps were to attack on line as VII Corps advanced.

The weather during the period 21 December 1944 to the end of January 1945 increased the difficulty of an attack immeasurably and gave the enemy every advantage. Roads became almost impassable for vehicles due to ice and snow, and troops suffered severely from the 20-degree cold and from the difficulty of attacking through snow as much as two or three feet deep at times. (6)

Camouflage clothing was improvised, but it was light weight and not sufficiently durable to withstand the rough treatment to which it was subjected. (7) As a result our troops in dark uniforms frequently became excellent targets against a background of white snow.

GENERAL SITUATION

V Corps on the north flank of the First Army had remained in position throughout the period of the breakthrough. The south flank of the Corps had been forced to fall back, but the northern shoulder held fast. As VII Corps and the XVIII Airborne Corps moved back up on line during early January, it was necessary for V Corps to resume the attack in order to keep the flank of XVIII Airborne Corps covered.

On 10 January, First Army issued a letter of instructions to V Corps, directing that an attack be made on 15 January in conjunction with XVIII Corps. V Corps was given the mission of supporting the XVIII Corps and of securing the Ondenval defile on the boundary between V and XVIII Corps. (8)

(3) A-5, p. 364; (4) A-1, Situation Map No 11; (5) A-1, p. 126; (6) A-6, p. 193 and A-3, p. 108; (7) A-7; (8) A-1, p. 135.

For this attack a temporary boundary between V Corps and XVIII Corps was established, which made the villages of Weismes, Ondenval and the woods southwest of Ondenval a responsibility of V Corps. (9) (See Map B)

The plan envisaged that after the Ondenval defile had been secured by V Corps, the original boundary would be resumed, and the 7th Armored Division would attack through the Ondenval defile with a mission of securing St Vith. (10)

Because the advance of the 7th Armored Division on St Vith was dependent on the earliest possible availability of the Ondenval defile, the main effort of V Corps was to be made in this area by the 1st Infantry Division.

The 2d Infantry Division, as the center division in V Corps, was holding on a narrow front. The 1st Division on the right of V Corps had a wide and difficult front on which to attack; therefore, a decision was made to attach one combat team from the 2d Infantry Division to the 1st Division to expedite the corps' main effort. (See Map B)

On 13 January 1945 the 23d Regimental Combat Team of the 2d Infantry Division left an assembly area in the vicinity of Elsenborn and moved by truck and foot to the town of Weismes, which was then held by the 16th Infantry Regiment of the 1st Division. (11)

The 2d Battalion, 23d Infantry, moved into the town of Weismes, Company G occupying houses on the southern edge of the town and prepared to attack from that position on 15 January.

map c.
On 14 January orders were issued by the regimental commander of the 23d Regimental Combat Team for an attack in which the 1st Battalion was to seize the town of Steinbach on the left, and the 2d Battalion was given the objective of reducing the town of Remonval and of securing a small group of houses at the intersection of two roads southwest of Remonval. This intersection was designated in the attack order as "Crossroads 68." The 3d Battalion was to be initially in reserve. Company C of the 741st Tank Battalion equipped with M-4 tanks and Company C of the 612th Tank Destroyer
(9) A-11, p. 135; (10) A-1, p. 135; (11) A-3, p. 109.

Battalion equipped with M-18 self-propelled tank destroyers, were to support the regiment. (12) (See Map C)

*BN
Notes*

On the afternoon of 14 January the 2d Battalion Commander held a meeting of all company commanders of the battalion at the battalion CP for the purpose of issuing the attack order. The gist of this order was that Company F would attack on the left of the battalion zone on order, with an initial mission of securing Remonval. Company G was to attack on the right on order with an initial objective of reducing the enemy positions at "Crossroads 68." A platoon of tanks was to be in general support. After the initial objectives were secured, both companies were then to advance abreast down the Weismes-Ondenval Highway and secure the sections of Ondenval in their respective zones. Company E was to follow Company F as battalion reserve, and Company H was to support and follow the advance by bounds.

A study of the terrain over which this attack was to be made showed that the advance was to be made down a terrain corridor. (See Map C) The Weismes-Ondenval Road extends north and south in a small valley between two parallel ridges. The west ridge on which Weismes and "Crossroads 68" are located extends south to Ondenval and tapers off to the Ambleve River valley and Thirimont. The east ridge on which Steinbach is located extends south and joins the high ground southeast of Ondenval. Ondenval itself is between these two ridges. (See Map C)

Map D

The German forces in the area were known to be well organized in and around Steinbach, Remonval and "Crossroads 68;" German forces also occupied positions along the east ridge as far south as Ondenval. The number of enemy troops in this area had not been determined. They were also known to have tanks and self-propelled guns in this area. The company commander of Company G, after consideration, decided to attack "Crossroads 68" frontally and from the east simultaneously. The line of departure was to be a hedgerow about 300 yards from the objective. Behind this hedgerow was fair concealment but between the hedgerow and the objective was an open field with

(12) A-3, p. 109.

neither cover nor concealment. The 1st Platoon was to make the frontal assault with marching fire while the 3d Platoon to the left was to advance from the same line of departure immediately after the 1st Platoon moved out and was to swing in from the left and surround the objective.

The company commander of Company G asked the battalion commander for two of the attached tanks on the night of 14 January, but the request was refused. The plan was to place the two tanks on the line of departure with the 1st Platoon and have them advance on line in the assault.

THE ATTACK OF "CROSSROADS 68"

Early on the morning of 15 January the battalion commander relented and gave Company G the two badly needed tanks. At 0800 hours Company G with its two attached M-4 tanks moved out of Weismes and launched the attack on "Crossroads 68" as planned.

The 1st Platoon on the right moved to its assigned position on the line of departure without receiving as much as a single welcoming shot from the enemy position.

The company command group, consisting of the company commander with his runners and a radio operator, joined the 1st Platoon immediately in order to facilitate control and coordination with the tanks. There was some delay in waiting for the 3d Platoon to report itself on the line of departure. During the delay, no enemy movement could be observed around the houses to the front, and it seemed that the enemy might have withdrawn to Thirimont during the night. After a delay of about ten minutes, the 3d Platoon had not reached the line of departure. Fearing that the platoon might have had difficulty in moving into position through the deep snow, a runner was sent by the company commander to check on the situation. The runner returned shortly with news that he could not locate the 3d Platoon. The company commander at once made a decision to deploy the 1st Platoon on the right and to attack immediately rather than to wait longer for the 3d Platoon. The 1st Platoon Leader, who was nearby, was

hurriedly given the new plan which was to attack from the north and west, and within ten minutes he had deployed his platoon on line with the 2d Platoon and was prepared to begin the assault.

The tanks and light machine guns immediately opened fire on the windows of the houses as planned and after about three minutes of heavy firing the 1st and 2d Platoons began a coordinated advance across the open field using assault fire. The tanks advanced on line, stopping to fire a round from their 75-mm guns every 20 to 30 yards. The enemy was apparently completely surprised, for there was no return fire. Within 30 minutes the assault platoons had surrounded the houses at "Crossroads 68" and there remained the difficult problem of removing a stubborn and uncowed enemy from the basements. This job was made doubly difficult due to antipersonnel mines which had been placed around the houses and carefully covered with snow. This strong point was reduced by tossing grenades into the basement windows and firing the 75-mm tank guns into the houses at point blank range. The enemy finally reluctantly surrendered.

During this time the 3d Platoon had moved up to a point about 100 yards from "Crossroads 68" and was awaiting further orders.

About 1200 hours the battalion commander called on the SCR-300 radio and informed the company commander of Company G that he had been forced to change the battalion plan of attack. Company F, after leaving Weismes, had advanced with some difficulty to the open fields north of Remonval. As they tried to enter Remonval about 1100 hours, they were met by a hail of machine gun and small-arms fire from the edge of the town. This fire prevented them from either advancing or withdrawing without sustaining excessive casualties in addition to the initially large number of wounded on their position. Almost the entire company was pinned down on open flat ground. Company F had made several futile and costly attempts to advance, but the attack had lost its momentum.

To relieve this situation, Company G was ordered to change the direction of attack from south to northeast and to take Remonval from the rear.

*2nd platoon
on line
and included
as Co platoon
etc*

from where?

(See Map C) This attack would divide the enemy's strength and allow Company F to advance into the town.

Quick action was essential in this new plan. The wounded of Company F were suffering from shock and cold. Many could not be reached for first aid until the withering defensive fires from Remonval had been diverted. Cold, exposure and shock were many more times fatal to men who in milder weather might have survived their wounds. (13)

As the platoon leaders moved to join the company commander, the 3d Platoon Leader became the only casualty from the antipersonnel mines in the area. He was killed almost instantly when he stepped on a mine concealed under the snow which covered the road. His loss required a quick reorganization of the 3d Platoon, and more valuable time was lost.

The company commander ordered the 1st Platoon and 3d Platoon to attack abreast with the tanks advancing on line. The 1st Platoon was to attack on the right and the 3d on the left. The Weapons Platoon was to follow at 75 yards, and the 2d Platoon was to follow the Weapons Platoon.

At about 1300 hours, Company G began an advance down the side of the bare, snow-covered slope toward Remonval in the valley. This exposed approach was the only feasible method of moving on the town.

When about halfway down this ridge, the company was raked by long-range machine gun fire from the ridge to the east. Because the company was deployed, only two casualties were sustained; however, to continue this advance across the 400 yards of open field would prove too costly unless the gun was silenced. The men of the company, when fired on, ran forward to a single hedgerow which extended across the field, and they were protected from the fire by this natural barricade. As the casualties from this unexpected fire were being brought to a covered position, another enemy machine gun sent a blast of enfilade fire down the hedgerow. The company, caught by machine gun fire from the front and flank, began to dig in as quickly as the frozen ground would permit. The tanks had stopped in

(13) A-7.

an overlooking position about 75 yards in rear of the company. By arm and hand signals, they were moved to the left flank of the company toward the enemy machine gun firing from that direction. After about 30 minutes of intermittent firing, they drove the enemy gun crew back to Remonval. During this time, a light machine gun from the company Weapons Platoon had been returning the long-range machine gun fire from across the valley. The enemy was firing only at intermittent intervals now.

Leaving one rifle platoon and one tank to cover the advance, the company again moved down the hill toward Remonval. As the leading elements of the company reached the edge of Remonval, enemy infantrymen could be seen withdrawing across the snow-covered fields southeast of the town. The entire company and both tanks were brought on line and delivered all fire available on the enemy troops. As darkness was approaching and visibility was reduced, Company G advanced rapidly into the town and began mop-up operations.

Company F by this time was able to advance also, and they entered the northern end of the town, and the two companies systematically cleared the town of German troops. By 2000 hours, positions were organized for the night. Company G set up defenses for the night, covering the road to the south toward Onderval to intercept any counterattack from that direction. Company F covered the northern and eastern approaches.

The road leading back to Weismes was cleared of mines by about 2300 hours, and jeeps came forward with much needed ammunition, hot food and the company bedding rolls. About midnight the battalion commander assembled his company commanders and issued orders for the attack the next morning. Company G and Company F were to continue the advance to Onderval abreast, with Company F on the east of the Onderval-Weismes Road, and Company G moving along the side of the ridge to the west. The M-4 tanks were to remain overnight and move to the rear the following morning, when the 2d Battalion moved out. The two tanks were to be replaced with three M-18 tank destroyers. (See Map D)

^{'C'}
Anton Map D.

THE ATTACK OF ONDENVAL

*Map?
in as good
many*

On the morning of 16 January, the weather was cloudy and cold. Jeeps with hot breakfast arrived about 0530. Just as Company G was finishing breakfast, the tank destroyers arrived, and this unit was given enough hot coffee to help them wash down the K rations which were their breakfast. At 0730, Company G, with the attached tank destroyers, moved out of Weismes in a column of platoons toward Onderval. Progress was slow because of the deep snow; however, there was no enemy resistance. The tank destroyers functioned quite well even moving across country in the deep snow, and the men in the company liked them better than the M-4 tanks because they were smaller and didn't present such a large target. Also they made less noise than the tanks. The M-4 tanks made too much exhaust noise, and the engines backfired excessively if they were driven at low speed for very long. (14)

About 400 yards from Onderval small-arms fire was received by Company F from the edge of Onderval. The battalion commander, fearing a repetition of the action at Remonval on 15 January, ordered Company G and Company F to hold their positions until the artillery liaison officer could place artillery fire on the town. Within about five minutes the 37th Field Artillery placed a battalion concentration on the town. The shells used were equipped with proximity fuzes, and Company G from its position on the ridge above the town could see the ground in the entire area churned by shell fragments. On the battalion commander's order, the advance into town was immediately resumed and no small-arms fire was received from the defenders.

The tank destroyer platoon leader was dubious about moving his vehicles down the exposed slope toward Onderval. There was no concealment except for one seven-foot high hedgerow running north and south about half-way down the ridge. He finally decided to move one vehicle at a time to the hedgerow in one bound and from there into town on the second bound. His suspicions were well founded for as the second tank destroyer reached (14) A-7.

the hedgerow, a high velocity enemy antitank gun began to fire rapid but poorly aimed fire at the tank destroyers. Five rounds killed one man from Company G, but they also allowed the other tanks of the platoon an opportunity to pick up the location of the enemy weapon. Three well-placed rounds from tank destroyers effectively neutralized the enemy weapon. Without further firing, Company G and the tank destroyers advanced into Onderval. This was the third time the town had been fought over, and as a result there was little left but the skeletons of houses. (15)

By 1100 hours Onderval was completely occupied by the 2d Battalion. While Company G and Company F were eating their lunch of K rations, the battalion commander issued the order for a continuation of the attack which was to secure the high ground south and southeast of Onderval.

(See Map D) *not on map D*

Between Onderval and these hills was a small valley about 800 yards wide. It was across this low ground that the battalion was to attack with Company G on the left and Company E on the right. Initially, Company F was to remain in battalion reserve in Onderval. The M-4 tanks had rejoined the battalion in Onderval, and a section of two tanks was attached to each company for the attack.

Company E was to secure crossings of the Ambleve River to the southwest, while Company G was to attack southeast and secure the gap in the hills through which ran the highway to St Vith. The terrain over which the assault companies were to advance was open and almost devoid of cover or concealment, and the hills south of Onderval commanded the entire area. Because they were held by the enemy, they presented a most threatening aspect. About 1230 hours the attack was launched and both companies immediately received long-range machine gun fire when they moved away from the edge of the village. Company G was advancing with two platoons on line with the two tanks following. The tanks were to stop when they reached a point from which they could cover the assaulting platoons until they reached the woods across the valley. The 3d Platoon on the left stopped (15) A-7.

because of the enemy machine gun fire after advancing about 100 yards. The 1st Platoon on the right, however, increased its speed and moved at a run down the hill to a low hedgerow. This offered some protection from the machine gun fire which had increased in volume as the platoon advanced, and which had caused several casualties during the rush down the hill. Mortar fire began to fall on the 1st Platoon immediately and prevented any possible reinforcement of, or a withdrawal from, the position. The platoon leader informed the company commander by radio that the number of casualties in his platoon was steadily increasing and that the platoon was digging in along the hedgerow as quickly as possible. The first platoon was now only about 350 yards from the enemy position along the edge of the woods on the hill, and any man who exposed himself for even a moment drew a heavy concentration of fire.

The two tanks were ordered by the company commander to move down the hill about 100 yards and attempt to draw some of the machine gun and mortar fire on themselves and also attempt to locate the enemy machine guns. At the considerable risk of drawing antitank fire, they moved out as ordered. Some machine gun and mortar fire was diverted to them, but they could not locate any enemy weapons. Artillery and tank fire was placed on the edge of the woods but seemed to cause little reduction in the volume of enemy fire. Both the attackers and the attacked continued to fire across the valley until dusk when all but sporadic firing ceased.

At about 1700 hours permission was obtained from the battalion commander to move Company G back into Onderval. The 3d Platoon was moved back off the forward slope and the 2d Platoon was moved into the valley to help evacuate the casualties of the 1st Platoon and to furnish security until the position could be vacated. By 1830 hours withdrawal to Onderval had been completed. The 1st Platoon had lost about 17 men and the platoon leader. This loss to an already understrength platoon left so few men that the platoon was eliminated and the men were placed in the 2d and 3d Platoons. The company was now short two platoon leaders as well as a

complete platoon. The total effective strength of Company G at the time was only about 50 men and officers. (16)

During the attack of Company G, Company E had experienced similar difficulties, but had been able to maintain position because they had sustained fewer casualties. Company F moved from battalion reserve to a defensive position on the edge of Onderval, and Company G was designated as battalion reserve. There was no action during the night of 16 January. (17)

On 17 January the regimental commander decided that an effort to take the high ground and secure the St Vith Highway would be made by the 1st Battalion down the east ridge on which Steinbach was located. The 2d Battalion was to remain in position in Onderval.

18 January was spent in cleaning and replacing equipment and resting. All men in the company were exhausted from the two days of fighting in deep snow, and the cold had contributed materially to their loss of energy. 19 January was also spent in Onderval while the 1st and 3d Battalions were engaged in heavy fighting to secure a foothold in the edge of the woods on the high ground to the southeast. This woods was known as Rohr Busch. On the night of 18 January they finally succeeded in establishing a line in the northern edge of Rohr Busch, and the 2d Battalion was given the mission of attacking through this position on 19 January and reducing the town of Eibertingen. (18) (See Map E)

On the night of 18 January, the company commanders of the 2d Battalion were briefed on the terrain from Rohr Busch to Eibertingen and were given an opportunity to use aerial photographs and stereoscopes to study the routes of advance into the town. The battalion was to advance astride the road through Rohr Busch into Eibertingen. Determined opposition was not expected in the Rohr Busch, but a strong defense was expected at Eibertingen. (19) The area between Rohr Busch and Eibertingen was characterized by rolling hills broken by hedgerow-bordered, open fields. This meant no cover and little concealment for approximately 1500 yards before (16) A-7; (17) A-7; (18) A-7; (19) A-7.

reaching Eibertingen. The battalion commander ordered that Company G advance on the right of the road and secure the portion of Eibertingen in its zone. Company F was to advance on the left of the road and secure that portion of Eibertingen in its zone. Company E was to follow Company F and remain in battalion reserve. Two M-4 tanks were to be attached to each assault company for the attack.

THE ATTACK OF EIBERTINGEN

About 1000 hours on 19 January 1945 the 2d Battalion left Onderval and passed through the 3d Battalion on the northern edge of Rohr Busch. No opposition was encountered until the battalion reached the southern edge of the woods. Here there was a small delaying force which was quickly overcome by the coordinated action of Company F and Company G.

The advance continued until a small road junction known as Am Kreuz was reached. At this time Company F on the left was relieved by Company E for the assault on Eibertingen. (See Map E)

As the attack continued, contact with Company E was made difficult due to a light snow and also by snow blown up by the cold wind whipping across the open fields. Both companies, using the highway as a guide, advanced until the downward slope of the ground indicated that a small draw about 1000 yards from Eibertingen was ahead. The assault companies stopped along a hedgerow in order to coordinate the advance on the town which, at this time, was entirely obscured by blowing snow. Although the halt was brief, the wind died while the company commanders of Companies E and G were checking their maps. This left the two companies entirely exposed. The commander of Company G immediately ordered his two tanks to open fire at a rapid rate with both the 75-mm guns and .30 cal machine guns. Company G moved out at a fast walk, firing as they moved. A small stream in the draw was crossed by the foot troops without difficulty, and they entered the houses on the edge of the town without serious opposition. The tanks were following the company, and when they reached the low ground and the small stream, they found crossing difficult due to the fact that

they broke through the thin layer of frozen ground and became mired in soft mud just under the ice. (See Map E) The lead tank finally succeeded in crossing, and after that it was used to tow the second tank across.

Having secured the houses on the edge of town, in which were found machine guns and ammunition still in position in windows, an attempt was made to advance farther into town. The result was an immediate and vicious counterattack. The counterattack was stopped by the tanks and riflemen with no losses to either.

Now began the slow and painful process of attempting to drive a stubborn enemy out of individual houses in house-to-house fighting.

Company G at this time was faced with the following problems:

1. All communication with other units was out. Neither battalion headquarters nor Company E could be contacted.
2. Ammunition for all automatic weapons was critically low.
3. 80-mm mortar ammunition which had been hand carried was sufficient for use only in case the company was forced to withdraw from the town.
4. The radio with the artillery forward observer was inoperative due to the loss of the antenna during the advance from Onderval. Consequently, artillery support was unavailable.
5. At least two enemy tanks had been seen in the town and could be heard firing.
6. The two M-4 tanks had about five rounds of 75-mm high explosive ammunition together. They were also low on the solid antitank rounds which they had been firing into windows to discourage enemy bazooka teams.

At about 1300 hours intermittent artillery and mortar fire began to fall around the houses which were held by Company G, but no casualties were sustained. About 30 minutes after this fire began, one of the tank commanders saw what apparently was an enemy officer issuing orders to about five subordinates who were grouped around him. One expertly placed round from the 75-mm gun on the tank eliminated this group. Ten minutes later the same tank knocked out a German self-propelled high velocity gun which

was firing from Eibertingen toward Onderval. Later inspection of this weapon led to the conclusion that it was the same gun which had fired on the tank destroyers at Onderval. The gun had not been damaged at that time, and the carriage had been towed back to Eibertingen and used as a fixed weapon. (20)

About 1400 hours enemy troops and three tanks could be seen moving out of town on the road toward St Vith. The artillery observer had by this time found a make-shift antenna for his radio and called for fire on these troops. The enemy troops broke formation and ran. As a result of this and subsequent shellings of the road as the enemy attempted to leave town, more than 200 dead German soldiers were counted later. (21)

The SCR-300 radio had, of its own accord, resumed operation and effective liaison was again established with Company E on the left. By 1500 hours the enemy was making desperate attempts to delay the advancing companies and still salvage as many troops and as much equipment from the town as possible. Ammunition shortage had become so critical that .30 cal ammunition from the machine guns on the tanks was being removed from the belts and loaded in M-1 rifle clips and BAR magazines.

By 1800 hours all houses in Eibertingen had been cleared, and Company E and Company G had set up defensive positions for the night. The road to Onderval had been cleared by the engineers by 2300 hours and hot food, ammunition and bedding rolls had been brought in. Fuel and ammunition for the tanks was also brought up, and the tanks were resupplied on position.

The night of 19 January was uneventful, and about 1100 hours Company G was relieved by elements of the 7th Armored Division.

The 2d Battalion walked back to Onderval and from there transportation was furnished back to the 2d Division.

The termination of this action left the 7th Armored Division in position to retake St Vith.

(20) A-7; (21) A-3, p. 112.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In the attack on "Crossroads 68" the terrain and the battalion frontage combined to render contact between Company G and Company F almost impossible to maintain. As a result there was no flank contact between the two companies as they advanced on their separate objectives. When Company F was stopped outside Remonval, the commander of Company G was unaware that the left flank of his company was entirely exposed. This might have been avoided had the battalion commander decided to attack Remonval with both companies and then have Company G attack "Crossroads 68," which was further ahead and on a flank.

The fact that the 3d Platoon did not arrive on the line of departure until too late to participate in the attack on "Crossroads 68" was probably due to the inexperience of a new platoon leader. This could never be ascertained because he was killed before he could explain his lateness. Had the company commander of Company G taken into account the relative inexperience of the officer and his unfamiliarity with company standing operation procedure, the platoon might have been on time.

This delay could have resulted in a loss of surprise and excessive casualties to the company.

The use of tanks by Company G in coordinated assault with infantry on "Crossroads 68" and on Eibertingen proved highly successful. Tanks gave added shock power to the attacking troops. The fact that no attached tanks were lost on this operation, however, was due more to a lack of enemy armor and antitank guns than to sound doctrine in the use of tanks with infantry.

The commander of Company G in the attack on the hills south of Onderval made a serious error when he failed to request an artillery preparation on probable enemy positions before the attack. Lives would have been saved if the assumption had not been made that the enemy had withdrawn entirely. There was no basis for this assumption, and prisoners had stated that some positions had been prepared on the high ground.

The decision to attack Eibertingen immediately when visibility suddenly increased gave advantage to the attacking troops in that surprise was complete and shock to the enemy was thereby increased. That maximum coordination was not attained was more than offset by the rapid and determined attack which forced the enemy back into the town before reinforcements could be moved to the threatened area.

In the attack of Eibertingen adequate support from the 60-mm mortars of the company was conspicuous by its absence. There was only sufficient ammunition for limited support. A decision was made to keep this ammunition until the situation forced its use. Due to this decision, there was no mortar support in Eibertingen. Had the company commander of Company G required that some of the riflemen assist the understrength weapons platoon in carrying extra 60-mm mortar ammunition, there would have been sufficient ammunition for support and a reserve stock for emergency. Lack of this mortar ammunition could have resulted in the forced withdrawal of Company G from Eibertingen as well as excessive casualties.

The conduct of the attached elements of Company C of the 741st Tank Battalion and of elements of Company C of the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion during the period of this operation contributed in a great measure to the success of Company G in its attacks. The officers and men of these units had learned through experience and training the value of coordinated tank-infantry action. They depended entirely on the supported infantry for protection from enemy infantry armed with short-range antitank weapons. They were thus able to concentrate their entire attention on aggressive support rather than dividing the attention of the crews between support of the infantry and their own defense. Due to the extremely limited visibility from a tank under small-arms fire, the tank crews must rely completely on the supported troops for close-in protection. This reliance is based on mutual understanding and thorough coordinated training. Tanks fall easy prey to well-trained enemy infantry when they are unsupported by their own infantry.

The use of standardized bedding rolls consisting of two blankets, a shelter half, poles and pins which were brought up at night and taken to the rear by motor the following morning, proved highly successful. The men were relieved of carrying this equipment and were able to move with far less effort through the deep snow.

Distribution of bedding rolls during darkness was simplified by having all rolls identically equipped. In that way the rolls could be distributed to platoons according to the number of men present rather than to individual men.

Use of .30 cal machine gun ammunition from the tanks in emergency proved invaluable during the operation. While the process of unloading the belts and reloading the ammunition in clips is a slow process, it can be done even while the company is engaged in a fire fight, although the volume of fire is greatly reduced.

LESSONS

of 1. In cold weather fighting, proper clothing, hot food and proper rest are essential if an operation is to extend over a period of more than two or three days.

2. Supply and evacuation of casualties during winter operations present serious problems, especially if a unit is operating off roads or in an area where roads have not been cleared of snow.

of 3. Casualties, when weather is very cold, must receive immediate first aid to minimize shock, and evacuation must be accomplished sooner than when fighting in mild weather.

4. When there is little or no antitank defense, attached tanks attacking with infantry can move with the infantry in the attack, thereby allowing close coordination and maximum control and utilization of the tanks by the infantry commander.

5. The tank-infantry team can perform with highly successful results only if thorough previous coordinated training has been accomplished prior to actual engagement.

*6. Better lessons
would be how can
the troops solve problems
if roads come.*

6. Leaders of both infantry and armored units should receive special instructions in the use of tanks and infantry in order that each may be thoroughly familiar with the other's capabilities and limitations.

7. Tanks can achieve a high degree of cross-country mobility when working with infantry; however, tanks are more vulnerable to antitank fire when terrain is unfavorable, and therefore must be given additional protection by infantry troops being supported.

8. Maintenance of communication, when there is snow, is much more difficult than during mild weather. Increase in depth of snow and in the degree of cold causes a corresponding increase in communication difficulty.

9. Radios of attached tanks, artillery radios and wire to artillery forward observers provide a highly valuable alternate means of communication for the infantry unit commander in emergency situations.

10. When electrical means of communication are interrupted, the lower unit commander, although not responsible for communication to higher headquarters, must immediately utilize every means at his command to assist in reestablishment of communication at the earliest possible time in order that supporting fire may be called for, information furnished both ways, and that orders may be transmitted.

11. When severe weather conditions and reduced visibility are encountered while an attack is in progress, the attack should be maintained with maximum intensity so long as control can be maintained. Attack during heavy rain, fog or heavy snow has the advantage of offering attacking troops concealment and allows achievement of the maximum amount of surprise.