

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

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST PLATOON, COMPANY "H",
422ND INFANTRY, (106TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE
GERMAN ARDENNES COUNTEROFFENSIVE,
12-19 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: MACHINE GUN PLATOON IN
ATTACK AND DEFENSE IN WOODED TERRAIN

Captain Levene J. Weigel, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Index.....	1
Bibliography.....	2
Introduction.....	4
The General Situation.....	5
Special Situation.....	9
The Relief.....	10
Defense.....	14
Night Withdrawal.....	16
Attack on Schonberg.....	19
Analysis and Criticism.....	26
Lessons.....	30

Map A - German Counteroffensive

Map B - St. Vith

Map C - Defense of the Schnee Eifel

Map D - Movement to Contact

Map E - Attack on Schonberg

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 First United States Army
Report of Operations (1 Aug. 1944 to 22 Feb. 1945) (TIS Library)
- A-2 Dark December
By Robert E. Merriam
Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 1947 (TIS Library)
- A-3 Report of the General Board, United States Forces,
European Theater
Strategy of the Campaign in Western Europe (1944-45) (TIS Library)
- A-4 - Battle of the Ardennes
By Theodore Draper
US 84th Division, 1945 (TIS Library)
- A-5 Top Secret
By Ralph Ingersoll
Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946 (TIS Library)
- A-6 Bastogne, The First Eight Days
By S.L.A. Marshall
Infantry Journal Press, 1946 (TIS Library)
- A-7 German Offensive in the Ardennes
By E.W. Sheppard
Military Review, September 1945, page 90 (TIS Library)
- A-8 Strategy of the Battle of Ardennes
By Alfred H. Burne
Military Review, June 1945, page 87 (TIS Library)
- A-9 Battle of the Bulge
By Theodore Draper
Infantry Journal, May 1945, page 9 (TIS Library)
- A-10 The West German Front (19 November - 18 December 1944)
By Conrad H. Lanza
Field Artillery Journal, February 1945, page 80 (TIS Library)
- A-11 US First Army
Army Navy Journal, 24 February 1945, page 765 (TIS Library)
- A-12 British and American Army Group Commanders Discuss Von Rundstedt's
Counterattack
Army Navy Journal, 13 January 1945, page 598 (TIS Library)
- A-13 The West German Front (16 December 1944 - 18 January 1945)
By Conrad H. Lanza
Field Artillery Journal, March 1945, page 146 (TIS Library)
- A-14 The West German Front (19 January - 18 February 1945)
By Conrad H. Lanza
Field Artillery Journal, April 1945, page 208 (TIS Library)

- A-15 My Three Years With Eisenhower
By Harry C. Butcher
Simon and Schuster, 1946 (TIS Library)
- A-16 Great Decision (Bulge Christmas 1944) w/Maps
By Hanson W. Baldwin
Infantry Journal, May 1947, pages 14-21 (TIS Library)
- A-17 Glorious Colapse of the 106th
By S. Frank
Saturday Evening Post, 9 November 1946, page 32 (Columbus City Library)
- A-18 Defense of St. Vith
By Alan W. Jones
The Cub of the Golden Lion, February 1948, page 47. (Personal possession of author)
- A-19 Company H, 422nd Infantry
By Lewis H. Walker
The Cub of the Golden Lion, June & July 1948, page 86. (Personal possession of author)
- A-20 Company H, 422nd Infantry
By Lewis H. Walker
The Cub of the Golden Lion, August-September 1948, page 10. (Personal possession of author)
- A-21 The 106th
By Donald A. Stroh
Orientation Branch, Information and Education Service
Headquarters, TSFET. (Personal possession of author)
- A-22 Company Commander
By Charles B. McDonald
Infantry Journal Press, 1947. (Personal possession of author)
- A-23 The Invasion of Western Europe
United States Military Academy. West Point, N.Y. 1946 (TIS Library)

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST PLATOON, COMPANY "H",
422ND INFANTRY. (106TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE
GERMAN ARDENNES COUNTEROFFENSIVE,
12-19 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

INTRODUCTION

"Take it easy! Those Krauts won't attack if ordered". Those were the last words spoken by General Roberts to General Jones when the 106th Division relieved the 2nd Division in the Schnee Eifel area of the Ardennes Forest. (1) This monograph covers the operation of the 1st MG Platoon, Company H, 422nd Infantry, 106th Division in the German Ardennes Counter-offensive 12-19 December 1944, and what happened to the platoon when the Germans received the order. It will discuss how they became victims of the general underestimation of the enemy that was prevalent among the Allied troops during the period just prior to the attack, how they were annihilated both by the attending circumstances and by the failure to apply the fundamentals they had been taught during training. It is a little story about the small part this unit played in one of the most crucial battles in American history.

By 24 September 1944, leading the forces of 1st Army through France and Belgium elements of the 4th Infantry Division broke through German positions in the Schnee Eifel area of the Ardennes and occupied positions generally running northeast facing Olzheim and Hontheim. (2) (See Map A) They were perched on the high ridge, a deep salient dangerously exposed to German fire and constant counterattacks with extreme difficulties in keeping them supplied. Because of the strategic importance of this penetration in the West Wall the 1st Army Commander refused repeated efforts on the part of VIII Corps to pull the troops back to a less exposed position. Finally, in desperation, two battalions were withdrawn, German

(1) A-17, p. 32; (2) A-1, p. 50.

pillboxes were blown up and the extent of the salient was reduced. (3)

The front immediately settled down to a ghost front, a "quiet sector", in which both sides carried on aggressive reconnaissance while either battle-weary units recuperated or new divisions received their battle endocrination.

(4) It was under these conditions that the 106th Division relieved the 2nd Division on 12 December 1944.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The Ardennes Forest, located between the Our and Meuse Rivers, was the key to the entire sector. It dictated the German's choice of the area as the location of their last desperate gamble to knock the Allied war machine off balance. (5) It also suggested the choice of the area by our leaders to spread the troops so that more would be available at the critical points. (6)

The terrain in the Ardennes was ideal for defense. Each patch of woods, field and hilltop was a key and separate tactical feature. All would have to be taken one at a time. Small villages sat astride the many little winding, narrow and unimproved roads. These were invariably strong points in the defense. (7)

Even though the road system in the area was fairly good it was not suitable for large scale offensive action chiefly because vehicles, especially tanks, were unable to leave the roads which they must do if met by determined resistance. (8) Even though there were enough roads they were not the high speed roads for which the German plan was designed. (9) There were diagonally running rivers that offered numerous opportunities to halt or delay the enemy advances. (10) The rugged terrain, lack of good roads in the Ardennes and the absence of strategic objectives in the rear of this area dictated Eisenhower's decision to thin out the troops

(3) A-2, p. 79; (4) A-11, p. 765; (5) A-3, p. 62; (6) A-6, p. 245; (7) A-4, p. 101; (8) A-4, p. 84; (9) A-4, p. 10; (10) A-2, p. 13.

in this sector. (11)

It seemed that the first German code name for this operation "Herbst Nebel" (autumn fog) was suggested by the weather in this area. During the fall and winter of the year the fog and overhanging clouds limited aerial reconnaissance and provided the enemy the opportunity to concentrate his troops. The fog and overcast prevented our planes from supporting our ground troops or striking at enemy columns. The snow and rain made the fields soft and soggy which limited cross country mobility and increased the camouflage difficulties for both troops and vehicles. (12)

Our defensive line in this sector consisted mainly of reenforced concrete pillboxes, newly constructed wooden and earthen bunkers, extensive foxholes, sparsely scattered mines, plenty of natural cover and concealment, strong points that were widely separated and organized in depth, and were lightly held by American troops. Between these organized strong points were gaps through which the Germans were able to infiltrate almost at will. (13)

Some 80 miles of this sector were held by the VIII Corps composed of four divisions, two untried and two battle-weary divisions, and a cavalry group which was neither trained nor equipped for defense. (14) The defense, based on the Our River, lay in the rolling wooded hills in eastern Belgium and Luxembourg with some elements on the high ridge of the Schnee Eifel protruding into the Siegfried Line. The American divisions were disposed with the 4th Division making contact with VII Corps on the south, then the 28th Division in the center, the 106th Division with 14th Cavalry Group attached, to make contact with the 99th Division of the V Corps on the north. The 9th Armored Division, split into combat commands, was located in the rear of these positions to provide mobile reserves for any enemy attack in the area. (15) Each division held about a 26 mile front

(11) A-12, p. 598; (12) A-5, p. 224; (13) A-10, p. 146; (14) A-2, p. 7;
(15) A-5, p. 168.

as compared with the average four or five mile front usually recommended by military manuals. (16)

The Allies were very optimistic because they had driven the greatest military machine in the world behind its own border and they felt that under no circumstances would the Germans attack with large forces in such difficult terrain. (17) Bits of information that were picked up were interpreted to be forecasting an attack in the Aachen Area and, as propaganda moves, to bolster the morale of German troops. (18) Finally the Allies gave very little consideration to the fact that the Germans crashed through the same area in 1940. All of this set the stage for the German counter thrust in mid-December 1944. (19)

The Germans selected the area of the Ardennes for their counter-offensive because the sector was lightly held by the Americans, the weather at this time of the year was conducive to the movement and the concentration of troops, the woods gave ample cover and concealment to the troops should the fog lift, and finally they had the experience of 1940 to aid them in the conduct of the campaign. (20)

In order that the reader will be better able to understand the operation that is to follow let us take a brief look at the German plan as it had been set up prior to 16 December 1944. Their plan stressed three key objectives: the vital Elsenborn Ridge in the north, the Schnee Eifel in the center and the junction of the Sauer and Our Rivers in the south. (21) The plan consisted of twin thrusts by two panzer armies. The 6th SS Panzer Army in the north was to attack on a 25 mile front astride the boundary of the V and VIII Corps opening the holes with infantry and following through with panzers then plunge across the Elsenborn Ridge to Malmedy, to Leige, and finally on to Antwerp. Further to the south was the 5th Panzer Army with three corps; the 66th, the 47th and 58th.

(16) A-17, p. 70; (17) A-2, p. 100; (18) A-2, p. 92; (19) A-2, p. 102;
(20) A-3, p. 62; (21) A-2, p. 105.

The 66th Corps was to envelop the Schnee Eifel and the American troops occupying this small segment of the West Wall, meet behind the Schnee Eifel, push on west and capture St. Vith while the 47th and 58th Corps were to burst through the 28th Sector on to Bastogne and then to the Meuse between Dinant and Namur. (22)

On to the south the 7th German Army was to make a diversionary attack, push the 4th Division back, then wheel south and establish a defensive line from Eichternach west to Givet on the Meuse River, thereby preventing re-enforcement of the battle area from the south. (23)

The 15th Army in the north was to do the same by holding the shoulders of the penetration and thereby blocking units from Aachen that were expected to rush to the battle area. (24)

In conjunction with the attack the Special Operation known as "Greif" (grab) was to be carried out by Skorzeny's English speaking group. They were equipped with Allied uniforms, vehicles and weapons. (25) Small groups were to break from the leading units, disrupt and disorganize rear installations then race to secure bridges across the Meuse. (26)

Paratroops, under Von der Heydte, were to be dropped at key points in the early hours of 16 December to aid in confusing and disrupting a startled enemy. (27)

German troops were composed of the best panzer units on the western front. Volks Grenadier Divisions, composed of young and old, pilots, ground crews and sailors, were moved by a series of night moves to the forward assembly areas. Daylight movement of troops was forbidden. Combat planes were held deep in Germany until the last minute. Most of the foreign soldiers had been weeded out of the front line troops and moved to the rear. (28) All of this was molded into a plan which achieved the first major prerequisite for a successful attack -- complete surprise of American troops in the VIII Corps sector. (29)

(22) A-2, p. 105; (23) A-1, p. 104; (24) A-3, p. 63; (25) A-2, p. 32;
(26) A-2, p. 103; (27) A-1, p. 104; (28) A-2, p. 7; (29) A-2, p. 18.

SPECIAL SITUATION

On 11-13 December the 106th Division relieved the 2nd Division with the mission of conducting an aggressive defensive and be prepared to advance to Koblenz on army order. (30) (See Map B) Its 27 mile sector lay in a slightly bulging arch of the Siegfried Line along the wooded ridge of the Schnee Eifel, approximately 12 miles east of St. Vith. The front running north, northeast with the 14th Cavalry Group attached to the 106th making contact with V Corps on the north, the 422nd in the eastern most part of the curve, the 423rd further to the southwest and the 424th to the right with its right boundary at the junction of the Luxembourg-Belgium border and some elements in division reserve. Division command post was at St. Vith. (31)

The 422nd was on high ground in the Schnee Eifel with the 2nd Battalion on the left, the 1st and 3rd Battalions spread to the right and rear. The regimental CP was located in Schlaussenbach with the AT Company providing local security. (32) (See Map C)

To the left of the 2nd Battalion was an 1800 yard gap to the 1st elements of the 14th Cavalry Group. Patrols of both sides operated in this gap. At night the area was covered by an occasional burst of a 50 Cal. MG. (33) The road net into the positions was entirely inadequate for supplying the troops and the positions were tactically unsound. They left little choice for location of weapons and men to meet a determined German attack. (34)

Efforts were made by the division to get essential mortar and AT ammunition but, because of the lack of transportation, the low priority and the sector the division occupied, the front line troops did not have the ammunition to carry on against a sustained counterattack. Transportation was available to get personal baggage to the very front lines. (35)

(30)A-1, p. 88; (31) A-21, p. 5; (32) Personal knowledge; (33) Personal knowledge; (34) A-18, p. 49; (35) Personal knowledge.

The division was assigned 80% of the riflemen and 50% of the junior officers just prior to movement to the port of embarkation. The replacements were good men; they had come from ASTP, QM, MP and other disbanded units. They were not infantrymen. They hadn't had time to learn to be infantrymen, to gain the confidence in their weapons and leaders that is so essential in infantry operations. (36)

THE RELIEF

In the early hours of 12 December 1944, the weary, cold, and disheartened men of the 2nd Battalion arose from the wet sleeping bags and blankets to find that during the night the snow had blanketed the woods and ground of the Ardennes with a snow, the kind many had witnessed in the area of the Rocky Mountains or the New England States. Despite the fact that many were cold and wet they were all ready to move up to the front to either get settled or started with the task which they realized had become a grim reality. Many were enthused by the move because the commanders had been to the front to look over the positions and brought back the good news that we were going into a "quiet sector". All gave the impression that we were going to have a good deal. (37)

The men had spent the day before making final checks on their weapons, camouflaging helmets and receiving final instructions from the platoon leader concerning the process of effecting the relief of the units in the line. Plans had been completed for the motor movement to the very front line positions. Men were designated to ride in definite places and vehicles. The order of march had been set. (38)

At 0700 hours the units started the move. The march seemed to be one delay after another and no one could find the reasons for the delay. The men's morale had been getting lower because their entire trip across France had been such a march. The men were anxious to get where they were going.

(36) A-18, p. 48; (37) Personal knowledge; (38) Personal knowledge.

At one place along the route we were held up for two hours while another unit that had been relieved moved to the rear. A second delay was caused while each vehicle made an individual dash across an open area that was under enemy observation and artillery fire. All along the route we met troops that constantly reminded us of the break we had to be going into a "quiet sector". (39)

The battalion closed in and occupied their positions about 1800 hours on 12 December, four hours behind schedule. The battalion positions were in the form of a large "S". Company G on the left, E Company further to the right and then a gap of 600 yards and F Company further to the right and rear. H Company and Battalion HQ Company were in position deeper in the woods. Our positions were outposted by a series of company outposts from 200 to 300 yards in front of our main positions. From these there was good observation into enemy positions which in some places was 200 yards, at others up to three miles. The gap between E and F Companies had prepared positions to be occupied if necessary. On clear days observation did exist in certain lanes. There were points in the battalion area that had to be avoided during periods of good visibility. The Germans occasionally dropped artillery on these areas. (40)

The battalion position was precarious with enemy troops on three sides. We had high ground, cover and concealment, and we were making use of many of the German pillboxes and bunkers that had been a part of the Siegfried Line. (41)

At 1600 hours the platoon leader, who had preceded the rest of the platoon to the positions, met the platoon as it arrived at the 2nd Battalion area. With guides from each section the men were led to the section areas. The 1st Section was located in E Company and fired across the front of the company to tie in with another section of HMGs from the 2nd Platoon of H Company which was located in G Company area. The 2nd Section was located
(39) Personal knowledge; (40) Personal knowledge; (41) Personal knowledge.

in the F Company area. From a supplementary position it could cover part of the gap that existed between the two companies. Here the relieved squad leaders led the relieving squads to their respective positions, men were exchanged and oriented man for man, position for position. Non-commissioned officers were oriented on the routine problems within the respective areas, sectors of fire, final protective lines, mine fields, the enemy activity to be expected and precautions to be observed. In general we were responsible for as far as we could see to the front, flanks, rear and beyond. Because of the vastness of the sectors and areas of responsibilities, troops were unable to cover the many dangerous gaps and routes of approach to our positions. It was a matter of doing the best with what was available. Ammunition for MGs and tripods which had been sand-bagged were exchanged. The instrument corporal of the relieved unit remained at the platoon CP until the next morning. (42)

The MG positions and rifle strong points were constructed with overhead cover of timbers and earth. Communication trenches connected one to the other; however, seepage, resulting from the snow and rain, made many of these untenable. This necessitated building the bunkers above the ground. The rifle strong points all had supplementary positions to be occupied if certain localities or gaps should be threatened. By this method almost the entire front was covered with prepared installations. (43)

The relief was accomplished without any difficulties and the men quickly adjusted to the routine of troops on the line. Each squad was organized into reliefs to be at the gun at all times. During the night two men were always at the gun positions; a new man would take his watch every hour. The rest of the men were in a bunker just to the rear of the position. In the daytime one man was always at the position while the rest of the squad improved positions, camouflaged and built new bunkers. (42) Personal knowledge; (43) Personal knowledge.

We had guide wires running to the positions so that men could find their way at night. Protective wire with AP mines had been put around all the installations. (44)

During the night the Germans would occasionally move out in front of our outposts, fire MGs into our positions or drop mortar and artillery into our area. Observation planes would make several trips over our positions in the course of the night. Then to add to the variety buzz bombs occasionally skimmed the tree tops to startle a dozing GI. (45)

The days following the relief were quiet and uneventful as far as the platoon was concerned. Men settled down to the daily foot and weapons inspections, letter writing and began speculating as to the time when we would be ordered to move forward. (46)

In anticipation of such a move the platoon leader had spent several hours at each of the outposts in front of E and F Companies to look over the terrain to the front and to become familiar with the gaps through our mine fields. Plans had been made to have each of the section leaders do the same, but future developments prevented their completion. (47)

The battalion sent patrols into the gap to the left of our positions and to our front. On 14-15 December they reported increased numbers of enemy patrols operating in this gap and also that they reacted more aggressively to our reconnaissance into their rear areas. Patrols were unable to penetrate as deep as they had on previous days. (48)

Enemy activity opposite our sector appeared to be routine except that a large amount of vehicular traffic was reported by our outpost on the nights of 14-15 December. When this activity was reported it was termed to be routine change of German garrisons on the line. (49)

(44) Personal knowledge; (45) Personal knowledge; (46) Personal knowledge; (47) Personal knowledge; (48) Personal knowledge; (49) Personal knowledge.

DEFENSE

During the night of 15-16 December everything seemed quiet along our front except that the outposts reported continued vehicular traffic, tanks to the front and an occasional mortar fire falling in our area. Since the mortar ammunition we had available was very limited very little counter mortar fire was carried on. Requests for artillery fire were countered with the statement, "You fellows are new troops. There ^{is} nothing going on up there". (50)

It was 0500 hours 16 December when the first German patrol engaged the G Company outpost. The outpost held them until reinforcements from the company area and mortar fire were able to drive them off. (51)

It was at this time that the company commander called the platoon leader and ordered all men to their alert positions to stand by for a dawn attack in our sector. The enemy started shelling regimental CP at Schlaussenbach and the 589th FA Battalion which was supporting the regiment. Radio silence was ordered. (52)

At 0700 hours another German patrol hit F Company. Since it was foggy and still dark the first reports were rather vague. The platoon leader, who had wire contact with the 2nd Section which was located in the F Company area, checked to be sure they were on the alert, notified them not to fire the FPL unless instructions came from battalion headquarters, then he started toward 2nd Section positions. Instead of going by way of the battalion rear areas he took the usual route across the gap. The fog made visibility from 50 to 75 yards. About two thirds of the way through the gap he ran into a patrol of four or five Germans. The Germans opened fire and the platoon leader plunged into a trench partially filled with icy water. The first and only attempt to stick his head from the trench was met by a splatter of mud resulting from

(50) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lt. Elmer Lange, 81 MM Section Leader in Mortar Outpost 16 December 1944; (51) Personal knowledge; (52) A-26, p. 6.

ricochet. F Company, hearing the firing, sent a rifle squad out to investigate the shooting and to occupy prepared positions in the gap. The German patrol started withdrawing, but was caught between the outpost positions and the main line of resistance; one was killed, one wounded and three were captured. The attack from in front of the position was repulsed, one outpost that had been knocked out was reestablished, a rifle platoon leader and several other wounded and six prisoners were sent to the rear. (53)

During the time that these attacks were taking place in the 2nd Battalion, similar attacks were being launched all along the regimental front by units ranging from rifle squads to reenforced companies. (54)

At 1030 hours Captain Keilmeyer of G Company on the battalion left flank reported hearing enemy gathering in the woods in front of the outpost positions. Efforts were made to get mortar and artillery fire into the area. The 1st MG Section, which covered part of the threatened area, was alerted to be ready to fire the FPL should the order be given. Suddenly the woods seemed alive with Jerries shouting and yelling, charging towards the main battle positions. Rifle fire from the main line of resistance and the outposts broke up the initial assault. MGs all along the left sector were alerted to stand by for FPL fire. Just as Germans were completing their reorganizing and starting a second assault the 81 MM and artillery put several concentrations in their assault area. A number of the Germans got in between the outpost positions where they were either captured or killed. Some of the wounded and captured were carrying demolition charges and engineer equipment. The rest of the Germans withdrew while the mortars and artillery kept placing concentrations in the area. Later in the day a patrol moving through the area reported 50 to 75 German dead in front of the positions. (55)

(53) Personal knowledge; (54) Personal knowledge; (55) Personal knowledge; Statement by Lt. Emmitt Harman, Leader of Patrol 16 December 1944.

NIGHT WITHDRAWAL

At about 1300 hours men from the 1st MG Platoon joined a 50 man combat patrol sent by the regimental commander to check enemy activity and dispositions in the gap to our left. The enemy had penetrated deeply into the wooded hills north of our sector to the high ground held by reconnaissance and engineer units. Based on the reports given by this patrol and the failure of service vehicles and ambulances to get through to the rear the regimental commander planned his next move. The Germans had gone through the gaps and reached the high ground to the north of regimental CP. There they dug in and began placing direct fire into the CP area. Because of this threat to the CP and reports of enemy already to his rear the regimental commander decided to pull the 2nd Battalion from its prepared positions to a location further to the rear where it would tie in with the 1st Battalion and extend to the northwest and cover the exposed left flank. (56)

It was in conjunction with this plan that the platoon leader was called to the CP at 1600 hours and alerted for a probable move from the positions during the night. Plans were prepared for getting our units out should the order come. However, we were cautioned not to alert the men. The battalion commander, his staff and the company commanders went to reconnoiter the area. At 2000 hours we were told definitely that we would withdraw during the night, but the time had not been set. (57)

Despite the fact that the company commander had cautioned the platoon leader not to alert the men he felt that, because his two sections were spread so far apart, he would be justified in alerting the 2nd Section. This the platoon leader did. He briefed the platoon and section sergeants and told them to be ready to move with combat equipment should the orders come. (58)

(56) A-21, p. 7; (57) Personal knowledge; (58) Personal knowledge.

The platoon leader then returned to his CP in E Company area near the 1st Section; here he issued no alert instructions since he believed his personal supervision would compensate for prior preparation. (59)

At midnight word was received that we would put the proposed plan into effect and to be at the Company CP at 0100 hours. The 1st Section was notified to get ready to pull out of the positions and be at the platoon CP at 0030 hours. The platoon leader then tried to call the 2nd Section by telephone and discovered that the wires were dead. He later learned that the company switchboard had been removed as soon as the order to withdraw had been given. When the platoon leader checked for his messenger he discovered that he had been taken as a guide to lead the platoon into the new area. No one was available that knew the location of the other position in the daytime much less at night. The platoon leader was forced to go to the 2nd Section. (60)

Prior to leaving he had told the section sergeant of the 1st Section to carry out the instructions should the platoon leader fail to return in time. When he arrived at the 2nd Section area he discovered that both the section and F Company had already moved to the rear. (61)

The platoon leader then returned to his CP and found that everything seemed to be under control and the 1st Section was moving to the company CP. There the platoon leader discovered that personal supervision, especially during the night, would not compensate for prior planning. The 2nd Section had arrived with all personnel and the required equipment. With the 1st Section the men were all there but equipment -- that was a different story. He discovered that one MG had come out without the tripod, the other without spare barrels and spare parts. The tripod had been left behind because the men had been unable to remove it from the frozen sand bags. The platoon leader took the squad leaders and responsible individuals and returned to the positions (59) Personal knowledge; (60) Personal knowledge; (61) Personal knowledge.

to gather the equipment that had been left behind. (62)

At about 0200 hours the battalion moved to the new area. The 2nd Section was attached to F Company and was to be the rear guard for the battalion. The 1st Section moved with H Company. The units moved in a column of twos along roads and trails until we met our guide who led us to the assembly area which we were to occupy for the rest of the night prior to the organization of the defense at dawn. (63)

At 0400 hours the platoon leader was called to the CP to receive instructions about the location of MGs. No maps were available. The instructions consisted of, "Go down this road until you get to the edge of the woods. Set up your sections so they will cover the open field. Select positions so that you can fire to the front and rear. The enemy to our rear may attempt to come back through our area. Tie in with G Company's MGs to the left." (64)

With the approach of daylight reconnaissance was made and the sections were emplaced. The 1st Section was forced to change its initial position when German fire directed at the location forced them to take an alternate position. The 2nd Section took up positions near an area where there were a number of old German shelters which we utilized for our personnel. We prepared range cards and FPL fire to meet an attack from front and rear. (65)

On 17 December the battalion area was quiet with little activity except straffing of our positions by two German fighters and occasional shelling during the night. To the platoon leader's knowledge there was no patrolling and very little contact with the enemy. All attempts to get information were vain. Nobody knew anything about the enemy and no one made attempts to find out. During the entire day not one representative of the battalion nor H Company came down to the positions to supervise

(62) Personal knowledge; (63) Personal knowledge; (64) Personal knowledge; (65) Personal knowledge.

or coordinate in any capacity. The platoon leader believes and represents the opinion of the men that this personal supervision should have been conducted by the battalion commander, his staff or at least by the company commander. (66)

Now let us take a brief look at what the enemy had accomplished. By early morning on the 17 December the 66th German Corps had driven a wedge between the 423rd and 424th. (See Map B) The 424th was pushed south as they brushed by and the thrust swung north and met the one that came through the 14th Cavalry Sector, closed the pincers at Schonberg and continued on west toward St. Vith. This completed the isolation of the Schnee Eifel. The maneuver took out the 589th FA and Service Company which left the regiment with no FA support and practically no transportation for ammunition and weapons. The Germans had achieved their first objective. (67)

This was the situation on the evening of 17 December as the men were notified to be easy on the rations and take care of the limited supply of ammunition. D Company, having retained their kitchen, prepared hot coffee for the men. Our kitchen, because no transportation was available, was abandoned in the old positions. (68)

ATTACK ON SCHONBERG

At about 1100 hours on 18 December the regiment received orders to attack and seize Schonberg held by what was believed to be elements of one panzer and one infantry division and thereby break out of the encirclement and make contact with the 7th Armored Division that was to come to our relief. As an added incentive the men were told that elements of the 331st Medical Battalion and Americans were being held prisoners at the objective. At 1300 hours the platoon leader issued the instructions to the platoon and cautioned them to travel light. For the first time (66) Personal knowledge; (67) A-21, p. 7; (68) Personal knowledge

the men expressed the opinion, "Why all the running and no fighting". They hadn't been driven from a single position. Most of them hadn't seen an enemy or fired a shot and with the little information available at the time they could see no reason for attacking to the rear. (69)

Initial instructions had been to attack Schonberg before dark. The regiment moved out at 1400 hours toward Schonberg seven miles to the northwest with the battalions in column, the 2nd Battalion leading. (See Map D) Because of the wooded terrain and the heavy fog the battalion was also in a column with F Company leading. The 2nd MG Section was attached. The 1st MG Section initially remained under company control. Visibility was poor, sometimes not over 100 yards, ground was muddy and slippery, up hill, down hill, with all the little gullies flowing with water; all this made the hard job of hand carrying the MGs and ammunition without transportation a difficult task. Kitchen crews, that were now without a kitchen, were split up to help carry the ammunition for the MG and the mortar platoons. The mud and slippery grass often caused the tired crews to fall to the ground unable to rise. Occasionally riflemen aided in carrying the MGs. Everybody took turns handling the heavy loads. This helped keep the MGs up with the riflemen who were setting a rugged pace. (70)

Only twice during the move was the column stopped, both times by small arms fire. Men hit the ground and MGs were set up to return fire at an enemy no one could see or locate. (71)

At 1700 hours F Company, still in the lead, noticed the 423rd to our left advancing in the same direction. (See Map E) Three thousand yards from our objective, directly south of Laudesfeld, the 423rd passed between F Company and E Company which was about 400 yards to our rear. The company commander, realizing that we had been cut off by the 423rd from the rest (69) Personal knowledge; (70) Personal knowledge; (71) Personal knowledge.

of the battalion, returned to regain contact. (72)

The rest of the 2nd Battalion turned off to the right of the leading elements of the 423rd. It was getting dark and long range MG and small arms fire opened up on the leading elements of F Company from the vicinity of "B". The company moved forward into the woods northwest of "B" and took up firing positions. The 423rd kept moving by and went to the assembly area. Some elements in woods at "A", others near "C". Some of their mortars were set up in the valley and had begun firing in the direction of Schonberg. The rest of 2nd Battalion and the 422nd went into assembly area near Laudesfeld. The 1st MG Section was at this time still under company control.

In checking the 2nd Section the platoon leader discovered that two of the cooks and one other man had been unable to keep up the pace. The men were tired and fatigued. It was practically impossible to get them to move. The F Company Commander returned and notified the company that he had not gained contact with the battalion and that we would be attached to the 423rd until such contact could be made. (73)

The units which had moved into the woods without prior reconnaissance were thoroughly confused in the assembly area during the night. It is doubtful whether anybody knew where anybody else was located. It was about 2100 hours that the 2nd Section finally reached the area in which it dug in for the night. (74)

Many of the men were so tired that it took close supervision to get them to dig in. There was entirely too much noise in the woods; shouting, chopping and digging. All seemed to have thrown away the caution that troops should have when in close contact with the enemy. Had the Germans decided they could certainly have given us plenty of shelling in those woods during the night. (75)

(72) Personal knowledge; (73) Personal knowledge; (74) Personal knowledge;
(75) Personal knowledge.

At 2300 hours the F Company Commander asked the platoon leader to attempt to find the 2nd Battalion. The platoon leader spent the next three hours going from unit to unit in the woods. He discovered that local security was very lax, he also found that some elements had not received the new password, that units had gone into the woods without digging in and still others spending most of the night moving from one place to another in order to get into the proper position for the attack the next morning. (76)

Approximately 0300 hours 19 December the platoon leader returned to the F Company CP without having made contact with any elements of the 422nd. He learned that plans had been completed for a dawn attack on Schonberg. F Company, with the 2nd MG Section, was assigned to be the rear guard of the 423rd Infantry. (77)

At 0500 hours the company moved out in total darkness to set up a reverse slope defense on "B". The men moved in single file to an assembly area at the foot of the hill; there they waited while the company commander and platoon leaders made a reconnaissance. In the course of the reconnaissance there was a great deal of discussion about setting up the defense on the forward slope of the hill, but we soon learned that instructions of the regimental commander had been to set up on the reverse slope of the hill. We had come across the same area the day before and knew that the fields of fire were better on the forward slope. On the reverse slope we were able to make use of the hill mostly for cover, but were unable to use the woods for concealment since other units were already located in the same area. (78)

The company was spread across the area with MGs emplaced and tied in with the LMGs of F Company as shown on the map. Riflemen were put on top of the hill to observe. The men dug in and camouflaged their positions. The area was littered with vehicles, some burned, others damaged and

(76) Personal knowledge; (77) Personal knowledge; (78) Personal knowledge.

still others intact. It was in this area that the Germans caught the artillery and some elements of Service Company on 17 December. (79)

At 0730 hours, through the rising mist, we could see troops stirring in the valley below and to our rear. They were moving out in the direction of Schonberg. In the distance we could hear small arms fire. Suddenly it sounded like the sky and valley below were filled with artillery. As the artillery passed overhead the men debated whether it was going out or coming in. After about five minutes of shelling everything was quiet. Our positions had received no shelling. The men completed their positions and ate what little rations they were able to muster among themselves. (80)

While the initial shelling, directed at the 423rd, was taking place the 422nd was also advancing toward Schonberg, two battalions abreast, 2nd Battalion on the right, 3rd Battalion on the left and the 1st Battalion guarding the right rear flank. The 2nd Battalion had E and G Companies abreast and Battalion Headquarters and elements of H Company bringing up the rear. The 1st MG Section was now attached to G Company. The two companies were moving toward the Andler Schonberg Road. The road was lined with American vehicles which the troops believed to be 423rd vehicles. After a large portion of the regiment had crossed Ridge "A" tanks opened fire from behind the vehicles placing fire on the crest of the ridge and concentrations among the troops in the flats approaching Schonberg. Most of the fire was directed at the troops trying to cross the open ridge or attempting to move forward in the flat fields below. It seemed that every time troops moved the Germans shelled them. Troops did not dig in nor did small unit leaders attempt to get the troops out of the shelled areas. The elements of the 2nd Battalion were shot up. G Company, which was on the right with the 1st MG Section attached, split up in small groups and succeeded in getting out of the

(79) Personal knowledge; (80) Personal knowledge; Statement by Captain Montague Jacobs, H Company Commander, March 1944.

area during the night. (81)

At about 1030 hours some of our men spotted six German tanks in position on the nose at "O" overlooking the valley. These were causing most of the damage to the troops in the valley and keeping fire on the ridge. There was no artillery and to the platoon leader's knowledge no AT weapons except a few rocket launchers. The few vehicles towing AT weapons were bogged in the mud toward Schlaussenbach. (82)

It was some time later that the enemy started shelling the woods to the rear of our positions and directing small arms fire at us from the woods to our right flank. No one seemed able to detect the exact location. A rifle squad was sent out to investigate the woods. They never did return. The enemy started shelling our positions and puffs of artillery showed up all over the valley. Intermingled with this was small arms fire. This concentration was the longest in duration. When the firing ceased there was a big commotion, shouting and yelling in the woods to our right rear. The situation was confused and the platoon leader took off to the F Company CP and tried to get some information as to what was going on. On the way he went through the woods and found the troops there hadn't dug in and as a result had taken a terrific beating. Many were wounded and killed. (83)

When the platoon leader reached the CP he discovered that the Germans had sent in the second group to get the regiment to surrender and that it was very likely the regiment would do so. The regimental commander considered the casualties, inability to evacuate wounded, the failure of small unit leaders to move troops from open areas, shortage of ammunition and believing the situation hopeless decided, in the interest of saving lives, to surrender the regiment. Word was passed around that if individuals wished to remain behind they should stay in the woods when the rest moved

(81) Personal knowledge; Statement by Captain Montague Jacobs, H Company Commander. March 1944; (82) A-19, p. 86; (83) Personal knowledge.

out. With this information the platoon leader returned to the section.

(84)

While the platoon leader was at the CP the Germans cut off a segment of troops in the woods and drove them to the top of the hill. When they came to the top of Hill "C", 400 yards away, it was hard to tell whether they were Germans or Americans. The section leader had ordered the MGs to fire bursts over their heads. The men hit the ground with their hands still in the air. At the same time from out of the woods to our rear came several Germans, one of them shouting in plain English, "Give up, you are surrounded, much bloodshed, your countrymen have been killed, you can't get away. Throw your weapons down, go down there your countrymen have all surrendered. We will take good care of you." It was at this time the platoon leader arrived on the scene. Some of the men had already come out of their foxholes, others shouted for them to get back in that it was a trap. There was a great deal of confusion and milling around. It was about this time that the executive officer of F Company salvaged about a platoon and started off to the southeast. Some of the MG personnel joined this group. The Germans that had come in realized that some of the men were not thoroughly convinced. They signaled somebody on the hill and dived for cover under the vehicles. It was a matter of seconds and artillery again fell on the positions. One of the Germans was shot while he plunged for cover. Several Americans that were caught outside of the positions were wounded. (85)

After the concentration the same German reappeared and started his song all over again. This time many more troops came out of their foxholes, started breaking up their weapons and went down to the draw below where other troops were being disarmed and searched. (86)

It was at this point that the platoon leader failed his men. While there were some men who were willing to surrender many were not.

(84) Personal knowledge; (85) Personal knowledge; (86) Personal knowledge.

They were bewildered. They hadn't thrown away their weapons. They were looking for a leader. Some personally asked the platoon leader, "What are we going to do?" Had he chosen to do so he could have lead the majority of the men to the cover of the woods near by and perhaps to a few more days of combat. The men were reluctant to give up. Many hadn't fired their weapons; the only fire the MGs had delivered was over the heads of their own surrendering troops. The platoon leader suggested to the men that if they wished they could pair up in small groups and move into the woods, wait for night and try to get back to American lines. The platoon leader and section sergeant then moved into the woods. This ended the action of the 2nd Section of the 1st MG Platoon. The 1st Section, which was attached to G Company, continued to fight with small elements until 21 December. (87)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The writer is of the opinion that there were many mistakes made. They were emphasised because of the price they had to pay and because most of them could have been avoided had they employed the principles that should have been learned during training. Despite these mistakes the units, by the small parts they played, succeeded in delaying the advance of the enemy and caused him to divert troops to eliminate them that he could have used very effectively to gain his initial objectives. *for what?*

The disposition of the troops and weapons, the ground they covered, as dictated by the overall picture were justified even though the dispositions, distances and requirements were greater than those prescribed by current doctrine. The operation depicted the failure by commanders to employ the principle of flexibility in adjusting the location of troops and the employment of weapons to meet a precarious situation. *not well stated*

Surprise on the higher levels resulted in their failure to support
(87) Personal knowledge.

subordinate troops. They were unwilling to admit that the Germans were doing what front line troops reported. For this reason the high commanders were cautious in giving support to troops on the line. The enemy had employed the old reliable principle, "hit where he doesn't expect you to hit". By this time we should have known that the German does not always attack according to the book.

Even though the estimate of the situation led commanders to believe that the enemy would not attack in the sector they were not justified in leading the men to believe that the enemy would not attack. Nor were they justified in permitting troops on the line with a shortage of ammunition and supplies to cope with an attack. Faulty estimate of the situation resulted in the troops being committed in the final action into the open fields without proper security or information.

Leadership from the top on down lacked aggressiveness. It was not aggressive because of the lack of information. Leaders were incapable or unwilling to make decisions without the information. Commanders should have ordered and demanded more reconnaissance to obtain information. Leaders and staff members did not pass on information that was available to them. This negligence resulted in the platoon leader seldom knowing anything about the situation outside of the immediate area. Many leaders seemed to be satisfied to let things ^{be} as they were ^{remain as they are} and made little effort to do anything about it.

The state of mind of the troops has a very important bearing upon their reaction. It seems that everybody was convinced we were in a "quiet sector". When the sector suddenly ceased to be quiet we were not adjusted to receive the shock. We underestimated the enemy's ability to carry on a large scale offensive. Because of this faulty estimation the enemy caught us short of supplies, rations and ammunition.

The unit had a low priority for artillery, mortar and AT ammunition. These shortages proved to be the key in the final hours of the operation

when the unit was forced to fight tanks and artillery with rifles and machine guns. No resupply of initial ammunition allotments were made because supply routes were cut off.

Orders and instructions were too vague. Plans for the organization and coordination of fires in most cases were left up to small unit leaders. There was little or no supervision by the battalion commander, his staff or the company commander.

The failure of the two regiments to coordinate their movement to contact at Schonberg resulted in a great deal of confusion in the assembly area, all of which could have been avoided had the proper reconnaissance been made of the assembly area prior to darkness and had they utilized guides to move the units to an organized assembly area. This confusion broke down the confidence of the men and must have aided the enemy in locating our units and allowed them to make preparations to meet our attack.

On the morning of 19 December the units were caught in the open because they failed to push out their security after they occupied the assembly area and during early phases of the attack. When the attack started the enemy held the key features and from them were able to direct maximum ~~of~~ fire on our troops.

*Some of the
at 10:00
10:00*

The field manuals state that heavy machine guns can be hand carried effectively up to 500 yards. In this operation the machine guns and all ammunition were carried cross country approximately six miles. Even though all available personnel was used the men reached the objective in poor condition to fight.

Communication is vital to any type of operation, but its importance is magnified in a fluid operation where troops are spread over a wide area and information is scant. Messenger service is too slow in fast moving situations. Radio silence forced units to rely almost entirely on messengers.

Troops are most vulnerable when confused and disorganized. The

platoon leader should not leave his platoon while it is engaged with the enemy. By doing so the platoon leader permitted his platoon to get out of control and then failed to take aggressive action to salvage many of the troops in the last minutes of the action.

The action of the men was typical of American youth in a desperate situation. Eighty per-cent of the men had been assigned to the platoon as we had one foot on the gang plank. The men were good men. They were a mixture of QM, MP and ASTP. They were not infantrymen. They just hadn't had time to learn to be infantrymen, to gain confidence in their weapons, their officers and non-commissioned officers. Qualifying men on paper to meet a shipping date does not qualify them for combat.

The platoon leader did not make the proper use of his subordinates. On one occasion he was pinned down by enemy fire, on another he was playing the role of messenger when he should have been supervising the preparation for a withdrawal. Finally he was away from his platoon during a critical phase of the action when he should have employed a messenger to get the desired information.

The operation, to say the least, resulted in almost complete annihilation of the platoon in wounded, killed and captured. Known enemy casualties resulting from platoon action was one killed. The 1st Section continued to fight with small elements until 21 December. They played a small part in the first five days of the counteroffensive which delayed the enemy's advance. The delay gave the troops to the rear time to get ready for the German onslaught and decided the fate of the German counter-offensive.

Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges, First Army Commanders said: "No troops in the world, disposed as your division had to be, could have withstood the impact of the German attack which had its greatest weight in your sector. Please tell these men for me what a grand job they did."

By the delay they effected they definitely upset Von Rundstedt's timetable". (88)

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. Surprise is one of the most important principles of warfare.
2. The key to proper preparation for battle is ^{the} correct estimate of the situation.
3. To take decisive action leaders must have information; to get information patrolling must be aggressive and continuous.
4. Ground reconnaissance is ^{if you want} essential to ^{get} current and verified information. All echelons of command must participate in collecting and disseminating this information.
5. The failure of high commanders to inform troops of the true situation effects their fighting efficiency.
6. Units must have the supplies and equipment to do the job. Tanks and artillery cannot be fought with small arms.
7. Units should not rely on one means of communication. Foot messenger is too slow and difficult between widely separated units and during a fluid situation.
8. A unit ^{which becomes} separated from its parent organization ^{is attached} and fights with another until it can join its own organization.
9. Troops are most vulnerable when confused and disorganized and only aggressive leadership will compensate. ^{if you want}
10. The platoon leader should not leave his platoon while it is engaged with the enemy.
11. Infantrymen should be trained as such prior to combat.
12. To hand carry heavy machine guns ^{over 500 yards} over 500 yards cross country use must be made of all personnel available to get the guns to the

(88) A-17, p. 75.

objective at the same time that the riflemen reach it.

13. To hand carry the heavy machine guns a distance of six miles will result in undue fatigue and handicap their ability to participate in combat when they reach the objective.

14. Units should not be moved into a forward assembly area after darkness without prior reconnaissance and planning.

15. Leaders should make use of the chain of command and available personnel.

16. The key to a successful relief is prior preparation.