

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

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION,
110TH INFANTRY (28TH INFANTRY DIVISION)
IN THE VICINITY OF HINERSCHEID AND MARNACH,
LUXEMBOURG, 16 - 18 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES - ALSACE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION IN THE
DEFENSE OF A WIDE FRONT.

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

A little over a month after the Allied invasion of Europe, Hitler called a meeting of his military aides. The site for this conclave was a barracks in East Prussia. Those attending this conference were, Field Marshal Keitel, Colonel General Jodl, Count Felix von Stauffenburg, Chief of Staff of the Replacement Army, and several other high Nazi officials. (1)

As Count von Stauffenburg entered, he placed a brief case which he was carrying under the conference table. A few minutes later he received a call and retired from the room. (2)

Just after leaving the building, a bomb, which had been concealed in his briefcase, turned the barracks into a mass of fire and wreckage, but it did not accomplish the mission for which it had been intended: To kill Adolph Hitler. It did, however, inflict wounds on its intended victim, causing him to be confined to his bed for a period of over a month. (3)

Although physically incapacitated during this time, Der Fuehrer was not idle. He was energetically formulating a plan whereby his forces could regain the offensive they had been forced to abandon when the Allied Armies landed

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

on the beaches of Normandy. (4)

After a detailed study of the plan and thorough consideration of all aspects of the existing situation, he finally arrived at his decision. This plan was later to be known throughout the world as the "Battle of the Bulge".

(5)

This monograph describes the operations of the 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, a part of the 28th United States Infantry Division, during the first three days of this campaign.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The events leading to the formulation of Hitler's plan must be considered in order to understand the part played by this unit in the defeat of the German counteroffensive.

After continuous, fierce fighting, the First United States Army, commanded by General Omar N. Bradley, initiated the breakout at St. Lo, which was accomplished just forty nine days after the assault troops landed on the beaches of Normandy. The success of this breakout surpassed the wildest expectations of the Allied military leaders. After running rampant over France, Belgium and Luxembourg, on 11 September 1944, advance elements of the First Army crossed the border of Germany. (6)

In spite of the fact that this penetration was a major victory, numerous difficulties were encountered, one of which was the long supply lines that were stretched almost

(4) A-1, p. 3; (5) A-1, p. 1; (6) A-1, p. 49, 51; A-2, p. 43.

to the breaking point. In addition the troops were very tired as they had been attacking continuously for over three months. Therefore the advance came to a halt before the fortifications of Germany, known as the "West Wall".

(7) (See Map B)

In order to continue the attack on the German defenses it was necessary to concentrate most of the available forces in the areas in which the offensive was to take place. Other sectors of the front were lightly defended. In the First United States Army area, the Ardennes sector, held by the VIII Corps, was selected as the sector to be lightly manned, while the First Army offensive was to be made to the north to capture Duren, reach the Rhine River and take Cologne. (8) (See Map B)

28TH DIVISION

On 20 November 1944, the 28th Division, composed of the 109th, 110th, and 112th Infantry Regiments, completed the exchange of sectors with the 8th United States Infantry Division, and was relieved from the V Corps and assigned to the VIII Corps, a part of the First United States Army. (9)

Not shown on map
The main north-south road in the area, designated the "Red Ball Highway", was about one mile west of the Our River facing the Siegfried Line. The 28th Division was in position generally parallel with this road. Due to the excessive frontage of this sector, 25 miles, all three regiments

(7) A-2, p. 46, 47; (8) A-2, p. 54; (9) A-2, p. 78.

were on line. The 112th on the north and the 109th on the south. (10)

110TH INFANTRY

On 1 December the 110th Infantry with the 32d Cavalry Squadron, 109th and 687th Field Artillery Battalions, Company B and two reconnaissance platoons of the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion attached, occupied the center of the division sector. The Regimental Front extended from Kalborn on the north to Bastendorf on the south, a distance of approximately fifteen miles. The regiment was disposed approximately a mile west of and parallel to the Our River. The 32d Cavalry on the north, the 2d Battalion on the south, with the 1st Battalion in mobile division reserve in Feuhren, Luxembourg. (11) (See Map B)

1ST BATTALION, 110TH INFANTRY

From 16 November to 2 December 1944, the 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry, in division reserve, initiated a program of intensive training and rehabilitation. This training included a problem which consisted of moving a battalion tactically across wooded terrain. This problem was particularly appropriate due to the fact that the battalion had just experienced the worst type of winter warfare in the dense Hurtgen Forest, suffering approximately 80% casualties as a result of both enemy action and the elements. It was felt that the replacements which had joined the unit

(10) Personal knowledge; (11) A-3, p. 47.

upon its relief from the V Corps to the north, would benefit materially from this problem in view of the fact that additional combat of this type was imminent. Replacements included the battalion commander and three rifle company commanders. (12)

On 9 December 1944, the 2d Battalion relieved the 32d Cavalry in the northern portion of the regimental sector. The area previously held by the 2d Battalion was taken over by the 109th Infantry. On this date the cavalry unit reverted to its parent organization.

On 10 December 1944, the 1st Battalion relieved the 2d Battalion which became the division reserve. The 1st Battalion then began to carry out its part of the Regimental Mission, which was in effect, to "patrol the sector and keep the enemy east of the Our River". (13)

The battalion front at this time extended from a road junction 2,000 yards north of Hinercheid, to and including, Marburg on the south, a distance of approximately ten miles. (14) (See Map C)

The plan of operation of the battalion was one of offensive-defense, consisting of company strong points from which patrols would operate. It was to have units varying to platoon strength occupying villages along the "Red Ball Highway", with outposts of squad size on the Our River. These outposts were equipped with SCR 300 radios which were netted with the companies. In addition, wire lines were constructed for telephone communication. Patrols were to

(12) Personal knowledge; (13) A-3, p. 47; Personal knowledge; (14) Personal knowledge.

operate between the company strongpoints and smaller units along the highway. The area in which the patrolling was to be conducted had been extensively booby trapped by a unit previously occupying the area. No record of the location of these booby traps was given to the battalion, consequently several of the patrols suffered casualties. (15)

On 15 December 1944, the 1st Battalion was disposed along the "Red Ball Highway" from north to south as follows: Company A (-) in Hinercheid, with one platoon at a road junction 2,000 yards north of Hinercheid, one squad at Kalborn, and one squad at Fischbach. Company B (-) in Marnach, with one platoon at Roder and one squad at Marburg. Company C in battalion reserve at Reuler, conducting training. The battalion plan was to rotate the line units so that each company would have an opportunity to continue the training that was begun in November. Company D (-) in Grindhausen, with one section of the 81 mm mortar platoon at Marnach, attached to Company B, one section in Hinercheid, attached to Company A, and the remaining section at Grindhausen. One machine gun platoon of D Company was attached to Company A and one to Company B.

Battalion Headquarters Company and the Battalion Command Post were in Ursphelt.

One section of 57 mm guns from the Battalion Anti-Tank Platoon was employed on the road between Marnach and Dasburg. The second section was at Hinercheid covering the roads to the east and north. (16) (See Map C)

(15) A-3, p. 47; Personal knowledge; (16) Personal knowledge.

THE GERMAN PLAN OF ATTACK

Hitler had concluded that in order to maintain the German morale, it was necessary to resume the offensive. The principal question was; where could this offensive best be launched? After a thorough study of all combat areas the western front was selected. Then after further study, it was decided that the lightly manned Ardennes sector was the area in which this offensive was most likely to succeed.

This area was not new to the Germans as they had successfully attacked here on three previous occasions. First in 1870, then in 1914 and the more recently in 1940 during the height of the German Blitzkrieg. (17)

The overall plan of the German High Command was to employ three armies to cross the Meuse River, capture Bruxelles and Antwerp. The Sixth S. S. Panzer Army on the north was to reduce Leige and Antwerp. The Fifth Panzer Army in the center attacking toward Namur and on to seize Bruxelles while the Seventh German Army on the south would be employed in a diversionary attack to seize Luxembourg and block any force to the south. (18) (See Map A)

The German commander assumed that this attack would trap from twenty to thirty United States divisions, which in turn would deal a devastating blow to the American forces as there were less than fifty divisions in Europe at this time. (19)

The German counteroffensive was launched at 0530, 16

(17) A-1, p. 7, 10, 11; A-5, p. 1; (18) A-2, p. 103;
(19) A-1, p. 8, 9.

December 1944 as out of the cold, overcast sky came the German artillery while simultaneously over the equally cold, snowcovered ground the German infantry and tanks attacked. "The Battle of the Bulge" had begun.

THE TERRAIN

In the sector of the 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry the terrain was a series of ridges and valleys running parallel with the front. These terrain features formed several cross compartments. The Our River was a narrow stream which ran north and south. The terrain sloped gently upward for about a mile west forming a ridge parallel to the river. This ridge was the route of the main north-south road, an excellent all purpose road previously referred to as the "Red Ball Highway". All along this road were villages and towns. The ridge fell off gently to the west forming another valley. From the Our River, west, the ridges and valleys were heavily wooded with the exception of the villages and several fields. The main east-west road connected Marnach and Dasburg. There were secondary roads running east from Hinercheid, Grindhausen and Fischbach. This was the Ardennes Forest. (20) (See Map C)

OPERATIONS OF 1ST BATTALION, 110TH INFANTRY

On 15 December 1944, the Intelligence Report received by the 1st Battalion S-2, stated that the enemy capabilities

(20) Personal knowledge.

were (1) to defend in present positions and (2) make small scale raids across the Our River. (21)

Early after dark the night of 15 - 16 December, outposts and patrols from Company B, operating near the Our River east of Marnach, reported the movement of armor across the River. However, after these initial reports all further reports were negative. Nothing unusual was happening in the area. (22)

At 0545 16 December, the entire Battalion front was subjected to a very heavy artillery barrage. The barrage continued until 0630, decreased in intensity for a short period and then became more intense at 0700. At 0730 the artillery lifted from the completely dazed Battalion. Wire communication was out from the Battalion Command Post to all three rifle companies. However, the Battalion radio nets were operating effeciently.

All units of the Battalion had been hard hit by the artillery, which seemed to search ^{out} our command posts with uncanny ability.

Company A at Hinercheid reported that it had received heavy artillery concentrations but that there was no sign of an attack on their position by infantry. Elements of Company A at Fischbach and at the Road Junction to the north reported the situation unchanged.

Company B at Marnach was hit ^{sp} partically hard. Many of the buildings were destroyed and the town was a mass of wreckage. The platoon of Company B at Roder and the squad

(21) (22) Personal knowledge.

at Marbourg was also heavily shelled.

The Battalion Headquarters Company and Battalion Command Post at Ursphelt were also shelled. However, there were no casualties at Ursphelt.

At 0730 the platoon of Company B at Roder was attacked by an enemy force estimated at a Battalion, necessitating the withdrawal of the platoon to Marnach. The attack continued and as the enemy advanced over the open ground to the east of the town, Company B and its attached and supporting weapons opened fire inflicting very heavy casualties on the attacking force. The force was disorganized and withdrew.

The Battalion situation was reported to Regiment. The order received from Regiment was; "Hold At All Cost".

(23)

At 0830 Company A was attacked by enemy infantry supported by tanks. This attack was broken up by the company. The 57 MM guns of the anti tank platoon knocked out two of the hostile tanks. The Company Commander reported that Infantry was bypassing Hinercheid to the north and to the south, and asked permission to return the platoon at the Road Junction to the company area to strengthen his position, and to keep the platoon from being completely cut off. The Battalion Commander refused this request. (24)

At 1130 the Company Commander of A Company reported that his position was surrounded and again requested permission to bring the platoon to Hinercheid. He stated

(23) (24) Personal knowledge.

that his position was under fire but that the company was not being attacked at the moment but apparently the enemy was keeping him under fire to prevent him from interfering with the movements of troops to the north and south. He also reported tanks in the area and requested tank support. He stated that possibly with tanks he could stop the movement of the enemy to his north. The Battalion Commander again refused to grant permission to move the platoon from the road junction to the company area. He did, however, request tanks from the Regiment. (25)

At 1300 the entire Battalion front again was attacked. Company B at Marnach was attacked by infantry supported by tanks. This assault succeeded in penetrating Marnach and the Company was forced to execute a delaying action from house to house. In several instances fighting took place from floor to floor.

Company C was committed to retake Marnach supported by a platoon of medium tanks from Company B, 707th Tank Battalion which had been attached in response to the request of the Battalion Commander.

The plan for this attack was for Company C to move east from Ruler on the Clerf-Marnach Road to a road that ran southeast, proceed on this road to the Marnach-Munchausen Road, attack up this road to Marnach. At the same time eight light tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion were to attack south from Fischbach on the Red Ball Highway and strike

(25) Personal knowledge.

the enemy on his flank from the north. (26)

Company C moved out of Ruler at 1330 and as it reached the road that connected the Marnach-Munchausen Road they were subjected to heavy mortar and small arms fire from the woods to the south. This fire wounded the Company Commander and either wounded or killed all except one of the officers of the Company. Company C was completely disorganized, but under the one remaining officer deployed north of the Clerf-Marnach Road. (27)

The medium tanks opened fire with their 76 MM and machine guns and the enemy withdrew. The Battalion S-3 organized the remnants of the Company, which consisted of about one and one-half platoons, and moved east on the Clerf-Marnach Road, proceeded by the medium tanks and entered Marnach at approximately 1730. When Company C and the tanks entered Marnach the enemy withdrew. During the engagement Company B captured thirty prisoners. (28)

The light tanks reached Fischbach and started south on the Red Ball Highway. They were just south of Fischbach when they encountered fire from enemy infantry using their "Panzer Faust", the German equivalent of our Bazooka. This fire stopped the advance of the light tanks and only two of them got away. These two came back to Ursphelt and went in position to protect the Battalion Command Post. (29)

At 1430 a platoon of medium tanks from the 707th Tank Battalion was sent to Hinercheid to relieve the pressure on

(26) (27) (28) (29) Personal knowledge.

A Company which was now being attacked vigorously.

These tanks reached Hinercheid but upon entering the town were taken under fire by German Tiger Tanks. In this action two of the friendly tanks were disabled. (30)

About 1630 a platoon leader of Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion reported that a battery of the 109th Field Artillery Battalion in Hupperdinger had been overrun. He had been able to withdraw a section of his three inch guns from the town and had gone into position on the high ground on the south edge of Ursphelt where he could cover the draw to the east and northeast. (31)

The Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon prepared positions on the east of Ursphelt. (32)

During the night of 16-17 December the enemy sent patrols into Marnach and Hinercheid but when fired on withdrew. These patrols harassed the Battalion continuously throughout the night. (33)

At 0800 17 December the Battalion did not have contact with Companies B and C at Marnach or with Company A at Hinercheid. (34)

The Battalion S-2, S-4 and Battalion Anti Tank Platoon leader went to Hupperdinger and recovered a 105 MM Howitzer and a truck load of ammunition returning both to Ursphelt. This gun and ammunition had been abandoned by the artillery unit when it was overrun on the 16th.

The gun was put in position so it could cover the draw to the east. (35)

(30) (31) (32) (33) (34) (35) Personal knowledge.

The Battalion was no longer operating as a unit, but was now fighting as small individual groups which were separated and surrounded. The Battalion did not have contact with either of the units on the right or left. Neither did elements of the Battalion have contact with each other, all wires having been severed and the batteries of the radios exhausted. (36)

not shown maps
The 109th Infantry on the south was holding at Diekirch, but their left flank had fallen back leaving the right flank of the 110th completely exposed. (37)

The 112th Infantry on the left flank pulled back and was attached to the 106th Division leaving the left flank open. (38)

The enemy attacked Ursphelt at 1100 17 December with Infantry and tanks, advancing up the draw and through the woods to the east. All available artillery fire was placed on this route of advance. The section of guns of Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion, knocked out eight of the hostile tanks. (39)

The 105 Howitzer, maned by the Battalion S-2, S-4 and Battalion Anti Tank Platoon leader, and the two light tanks fired direct fire into the advancing Infantry. The Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon opened fire with small arms when the enemy was within 200 yards of their position. (40)

Under this fire the enemy was disorganized and began to withdraw. During their withdrawal the fire of friendly

(36) Personal knowledge; (37) A-2, p. 113; (38) A-2, p. 113; (39) Statement of Capt. R. C. Hutchinson on 18 Dec. 1948, (Former CO, Co. B, 630th TD Bn.); Personal knowledge; (40) Personal knowledge.

riflemen and artillery inflicted very heavy casualties on the hostile force. (41)

No enemy succeeded in penetrating the village in this attack, and the only casualty suffered by the force at Ursphelt was the loss of one of the light tanks which suffered a direct hit from a German tank. (42)

The little force checked its ammunition and prepared for another attack. The ammunition was alarmingly short.

They did not have long to wait as the Germans attacked again at 1600. This assault was met by the fire of every weapon in the village. The enemy continued the attack and by 1700 succeeded in taking Ursphelt. (43)

The group withdrew toward Clerf, which was the Regimental Command Post, and at 1800 the Battalion S-3, S-2 and about twenty men entered the town. The men went into position with the force defending the town, and the S-3 and S-2 reported to the Regimental Commander. (44)

Although surrounded and under heavy tank, artillery, mortar and small arms fire, the 1st Battalion continued to fight in scattered groups, until late on 18 December and then with ammunition gone, approximately fifty survivors of the Battalion succeeded in getting through the enemy lines to the rear. The 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division was a unit in name only. (45)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The Battalion suffered casualties and used up valuable

(41) (42) (43) (44) Personal knowledge; (45) A-3,
p. 86.

time in locating, removing, and charting booby traps and mine fields which had been placed by a unit previously occupying the area. Had the relieved unit transferred accurate charts of the mined areas, this situation would not have existed.

The Battalion did not prepare defensive positions according to the accepted principals of defense, but depended on aggressive action, supported by planned artillery and mortar fire.

Wire communication functioned properly until enemy artillery concentrations cut the circuits. All available personnel and means were employed to remedy the situation, but due to the excessive frontage of the unit, and shortage of communication personnel, wire communication was never restored between the Battalion Command Post and Companys A and B. This proved disastrous as the enemy readily and easily moved between units all along the entire front and encircled all front line elements.

The Battalion Commander refused to accept the advice and to honor requests of his unit commanders and staff, which resulted in reducing the effectiveness and tactical integrity of his northern force.

The Germans very successfully employed one of the major principals of attack; surprise. They initially employed two Infantry Divisions followed by three Armored Divisions. When resistance was met they contained the areas of resistance permitting other units to bypass these pockets and continue the attack.

More definite statements supported by more analysis, needed.

One principal of defense was adhered to - that of withholding a reserve. In this case a rifle Company was withheld and was able to eject the enemy from Marnach, thereby retarding his advance and inflicting heavy casualties on him.

This reserve was not centrally located. However, it was located in the most likely area of attack and had access to a road net which provided good routes of approach to any area within the Battalion sector.

more direct wording needed
The Division organized the Division reserve from the Regiment which had the greatest frontage, thereby permitting the center of the area to be more inadequately defended than the excessive frontage dictated.

The 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry remained in position in compliance with the Regimental order, until all ammunition was expended, thereby accounting for a large portion of the 2000 dead Germans that later reports revealed were buried in the area.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. In defending a wide front, strongpoints should be properly organized, positions prepared and improved continuously.

2. Without communication there is no control, therefore, every effort should be made to install, operate, and maintain all available channels.

3. Reports from patrols should be evaluated promptly and properly, and intelligence disseminated immediately. Intelligence is of no value unless it is in the hands of the troops needing the information.

4. When necessary, machine guns may be effectively employed singly, and when so employed, will give automatic fire over the maximum frontage.

5. A Commander must have confidence in his staff and subordinate Commanders, and should consider their recommendations and requests.

6. Infantry personnel should be instructed in the firing of all weapons within the Division, including artillery pieces.

7. When a unit is relieved, all mines and booby traps should be removed or accurately charted and the charts transferred to the relieving unit.

8. Realistic and comprehensive training in defense is essential in the preparation of a unit for combat.

9. 81 MM Mortar platoons can be split and employed effectively when the frontage is excessive.

10. If the Tank-Infantry team is to be effective, they must be trained together in order to learn the capabilities and limitations of each, and how to best overcome the limitations.

11. If an attack has surprise, its chances of success, with the minimum casualties, ^{are} is greatly increased.