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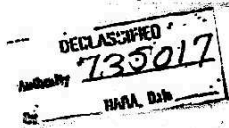
HEADQUARTERS III U. S. CORPS
APO 303 U. S. ARMY

18 January 1945

ARDENNES CAMPAIGN
2nd Battalion, 137th Infantry Regiment
27 December 1944 to 12 January 1945

The Battalion left METZ (U85) with the Regiment and arrived at HOLTZ (P6035) at noon on the 26th of December. Orders arrived in the afternoon directing a move to TINTANGE (P5744) to relieve the 25th Cavalry Squadron (it is believed that the interviewed officers confused this unit with the 28th Cavalry Squadron, but they insisted that it was the 25th). The move from HOLTZ to TINTANGE on the night of the 26th^{was} by trucks behind the 25th (?) Cavalry screen. The Battalion de-trucked at WARNACH (P5542) and marched to TINTANGE, the forward assembly area.

The next morning there was a short road march to the SURBACH River which was to be the Line of Departure. The move to the river (protected by the Cavalry screen) was made in a column of companies with Co E in the lead, followed by Co G, elements of Co H, Headquarters Co, and Co F in reserve. The initial objective was SURRE (P5946).



Elements of the 60th Engineer Combat Bn put in a treadway bridge at (P576454). Co E crossed the Line of Departure at 270700 and advanced northeast to the high ground overlooking SURRE (P5946) where it was pinned down by enemy machine gun and small arms fire. Lt Col George T. O'Connell ordered Co G around the high ground on the right to attack SURRE from the south.

At this time the Bn CP was at the Bn OP north of TINTANGE (P5744) where the higher ground afforded good observation of the surrounding terrain. Co H's mortars were in battery in the draw back of the OP, and the machine gun sections were attached to the rifle companies. (This was standard operating procedure throughout the operation). A platoon of the 3rd Chemical Bn attached to the Bn fired various missions from TINTANGE.

Moving north toward SURRE, Co G got two platoons into the town before the enemy small arms and mortar fire began. The remaining rifle platoon and the weapons platoon got into town around noon. Co F was committed in the afternoon and reached town about 1400. Co E remained pinned down by the same enemy fire.

By 271700, SURRE had been cleared of the enemy. Fifty-eight prisoners had been taken and about the same number of Germans had been killed. Six 120-mm mortars had been captured north of the river that morning. (Lt Col O'Connell said these were turned into Ordnance and that he thought they were very poor weapons. As much as he would have liked more mortars, these German weapons, he felt, were more dangerous than they were worth. With the same increment they might fire anywhere from 30 to 3000 yards.)



By night fall of the 27th, the Battalion had not quite reached its first phase line. The town of SURRE (P5946) had been cleared but Co E was still held up in the woods to the northwest of town.

On the left flank of the Battalion, the 3rd Bn had reached LIVARCHAMPS (P5648) by evening of the 27th without resistance. On the right flank of the 2nd Bn, the 320th Infantry Regt had not been contacted, Except for one liaison party. The right flank of the 2nd Bn was exposed during this entire operation.

At 280800 the attack was continued, but not much progress was made during the day. Co E encountered considerable difficulty from both the terrain and the enemy as it went through the woods. Co G swung northwest to the river where it waited for Co E to come up on line. Co F went up the draw toward the west and helped Co E clear the woods.

The main difficulty encountered by Co E in the woods was the heavy netted brush and very heavy low-growing vines. It was found that grenades, anti-tank weapons and bazookas were ineffective due to the fact that the projectiles were exploded by the brush before reaching the enemy.

The night of the 28th was spent south of the west tributary of the HARLANGE River with Cos F and G on line and Co E in reserve. Co H remained in its original position until the next day when the mortars, in battery, were brought forward to where Cos F and G had spent the



night of the 28th. The Bn CP was then in SURRE (P5946). One platoon of heavy machine guns was put on the right for flank protection.

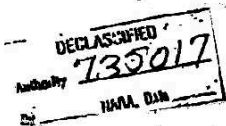
There were four mined road blocks on the road to HARLANGE (P6049) in the vicinity of (P599487), and another four in the vicinity of (P588481). The 60th Engineer Combat Bn worked on these during the night.

The attack toward the second phase line started at 290800 with Co G on the right and Co F on the left. Co E remained in reserve, and Co H supported from its same position. By nightfall the Battalion had advanced to near the second phase line (I hope you are following this on the attached map).

On the 30th of December, the Battalion was ordered to take the high ground west of HARLANGE. The Battalion Commanding Officer requested permission from the 320th Infantry Regt on the right to attack through the left (west) half of the town (which was outside of the 2nd Bn's zone.)

This permission was granted and Co E passed through Co G, and made a run for the town down the northwest edge of the woods. (These woods at (P5949) extend into the town although this fact is not shown on the map. See comments at the end of this report for the value of aerial photographs for correcting map errors.)

Co E was stopped by "Kraut" machine gun fire and the usual German tactic of following this with mortar fire prevailed.



At about this same time on the 30th, the left flank of the Bn was hit by a counter-attack of approximately company strength. The counter-attack was accompanied by the first enemy artillery fire of this operation. There was also Nebelwerfer fire. Between 1400 and 1500 on the 30th Co F stopped this counter-attack. Until dark, efforts were made to push back the enemy on the left flank. Co E was pulled back and assembled in the rear area for the night (P592478).

On the 31st of December the Battalion was ordered to remain in position while the 1st and 3rd Bns attacked northeast across the 2nd Bn front. Later in the morning, orders to move Co E around to relieve one company of the 1st Bn which had been covering mine fields on the roads south of LIVARCHAMPS (P5648) were received, and At 311100 orders to move the Battalion (less Co G) into LIVARCHAMPS were received. Co G was to cover the previous Battalion front. The Battalion closed at LIVARCHAMPS at 311600.

At 312200 the Battalion was ordered to organize and defend the line shown on the map. Co F was in LIVARCHAMPS at the time in mobile reserve. Co E was in an assembly area northeast of the town. Co G was still southwest of HARLANGE (P6049) and Co H was in position south of LIVARCHAMPS.

At 010130 January the order to defend was changed and the Battalion was told to attack and clear the woods, the center of which was at (P570499). This was for the purpose of securing a line of departure

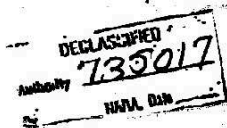


which could be used to launch an attack against the enemy in VILLERS LA BONNE EAU (P5750). In this village the 3rd Bn had become involved with some German Engineers who had been reinforced by some 1st SS soldiers who had attacked the 3rd Bn with tanks and six assault guns. Cos K and L had been wiped out. Only 85 men and one officer of the entire battalion were said to have escaped.

The attack jumped off at 011430. Co F with one platoon of machine guns from Co H moved north from LIVARCHAMPS (P5648) toward the road junction at (P570502) where they were met by resistance from German machine gun fire coming from the road junctions and infiltration around the left flank. The day was spent in capturing prisoners ("about a truck load") and digging in for the night. Co E moved north about dark on 1 January to relieve the remnants of Co I of the 2nd Bn south of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU. The 6th Cavalry Squadron moved up on the right flank of Co E and tied in for the night. ("Best outfit we've run into. First Cavalry I've seen to get down and fight like infantry," - Lt Col O'Connell)

The actions of the 2nd Bn during the ensuing few days were closely allied with the other battalions. During the morning of the 2nd of January Co F worked with Co I to clear the woods south of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU. Co E moved around and tied in with Co F at the edge of the woods (P573500).

The road junction developed into an enemy strong point. Co F continued to fight for it with little success. The terrain was mountainous and difficult. Artillery fire could not reach the road junction from



the positions of the Field Artillery Bns with two exceptions, the 127th Field Artillery Bn with 155-mm howitzers at (P587461) and the 219th Field Artillery Bn with 105-mm howitzers at (P573436). These two battalions could fire accurately up the draw because they were shooting at right angles to the Bn front. The first German tank destroyed during this operation of the 2nd Bn was hit at this road junction by artillery fire. Of the four tanks that approached this road junction, the three that were not hit went ^{back} up the road to LUTREMANGE (P5850).

By 4 January, Co F had securely tied in with Co E, and the road junction had been taken along with fifteen prisoners, and the loss of two company commanders and approximately forty enlisted men.

During the 5th, 6th and 7th of January, pressure was maintained against the enemy ("mortared hell out of them, especially with 4.2 mortars; and took a lot of mortar and nebelwerfer fire ourselves" - Capt H. J. Moran)

On the 8th of January Co G was relieved by the 6th Cavalry Squadron and returned to the Battalion. The battalion had slipped to the north because of the pressure on the Regiment's right flank, and by the 9th, was facing to the east. The 1st Bn was on the left (north) flank and the 3rd Bn was on the right (south) flank. At 091000 the Battalion attacked with Cos E and F abreast and Co G in reserve. The Battalion had a tank company attached (nine tanks). The Battalion's mission was to cross the canyon to the high ground on the east taking LA TANNERIE (P5750) (a mill with three buildings)

The Battalion ran into its first direct fire at this point, in addition to the usual nebelwerfer, 120-mm mortars and machine gun fire.



Cos E and F got down as far as the mill and were stopped. There were as many as six German machine guns firing at one time. The 2nd Bn's tanks could not get into position and their fire was not accurate but it did result in killing a considerable number of the enemy. Cos E and F were never able to get out of the woods west of LA TANNERIE (P5750).

At 091200 Co G and the tanks were used to envelop the right flank by going around through VILLERS LA BONNE EAU (P5750) and proceeding north toward LA TANNERIE. However Co G was held up in the woods south of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU because the tanks could not get into position on the steep ground.

The 9th of January ended with Cos E and F in LA TANNERIE and Co G and the tanks south of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU. Sixty-five officers and men had been killed and wounded during the day, the highest casualty day for the Battalion since it came to France. (Rationing of artillery ammunition began this day, as well as 81-mm mortar shells - 10 rounds per mortar per day)

At 100900 January the attack was again continued. Co E was brought around to the right flank and attacked with Co G. The eight remaining tanks were split into two groups, four on each of the outer flanks of Cos E and G, just outside the woods. The direction of the attack was toward the north of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU. The mission of the Cos was to clear the woods south of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU, to take the town itself to clear two patches of woods to the northeast of the town, and to take ridge to the west of LUTREMANGE (P5850). Co F remained in position west of LA TANNERIE.



The new attack met some opposition south of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU (P5750) but the tanks forced the attack and one enemy officer and ten men were captured in the first house in the town. Co G dropped one platoon to work through the town from the south while Co F moved in from the north. Cos E and G pushed on through the woods meeting only small arms fire. Two concrete pillboxes at (P578504) and (P582506) held up the attack until a direct hit by a bazooka at 200 yards cleared the north one and two Germans surrendered in the south one. The tanks took up positions east of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU and had a "field day shooting up the enemy." The Corps artillery also adjusted on the Germans pulling east on the other side of the ridge.

At 110800 January one platoon from each company went into LUTRE MANGE (P5851) and secured the ground to the east.

Miscellaneous Comments

Winter Firing device - (See special report.)

Aerial Photographs - Lt Col O'Connell showed the interviewer examples of aerial photographs which had been used during the campaign by his battalion. The Col felt that aerial photographs, even though very old, were very valuable if they had been taken in the same season of the year. They are not used for stereo to show depth but just to give the correct extent of wooded areas and locations of buildings in towns. More photographs ^{were} _{ed} need to be issued to company commanders and if possible to platoon leaders. They satisfactorily correct map errors. The Battalion has also used them to adjust artillery fire ^{to} within ten yards.



New Mortar Organization - On the theory that the company commanders are too busy on the front line to properly handle their 60-mm mortars in rear areas, Lt Col O'Connell has organized a light mortar platoon with his nine 60-mm mortars formerly in his weapons platoons. One weapons platoon officer has been taken from a rifle company to handle the platoon in battalion headquarters, composed of three section Sgts and the three mortar squads. The 60-mm mortars fire in battery and their fire is tied in with the 81-mm mortars' fire direction center. The platoon is equipped with two SCR 300 radios and six spud power telephones from the rifle companies (the total T/G!) The biggest problem is transportation because noone wants to give up a vehicle. For "close in fire" (1800 to 1900 yards) these 60-mm's are as good as the 81's.

Strength - The strength of the Battalion when leaving METZ averaged 160 men per rifle company. On 15 January this average had dropped to 110. Fifty men per company had been killed or wounded between 27 December and 12 January.

Training - Lt Col O'Connell said the Battalion needed time to regroup and train. He hadn't seen the whole Battalion together since it was at ORLEANS in August. The Battalion on 16 January was spread over three towns in order to provide a maximum of shelter for the men. The company commanders need time to take their companies out for three or four days.

Replacements - Haven't received many replacements since October. The first ones in Normandy were good. Didn't lose a company commander from 6 June until 4 October. Now the new replacements were actually getting killed before they could be gotten up to the line.



Adaptation to Winter Living - There are very few cases of trench foot or frozen feet. The men each have a sleeping bag and get into them every night. They have been taught how to dig a two-man sheltered foxhole. Each man gets a can of Sterno Heat every day which helps to heat the foxhole. The men get hot food once a day because the headquarters saves a part of its "B" rations by eating only two meals daily. Effort is made to rotate the companies in reserve so that men can be inside every three days.

Sources - Lt Col George T. O'Connell, CO; Capt Harry Parker, Executive Officer; Capt H. J. Moran, S-3.

Interviewer - 1st Lt Wm. J. Dunkerley.

Date of Interview - 15 January 1945.

Map Reference - GSGS 4041-Sheets 21 N. E. and 21 S.E.-1:25,000.



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WINTER TRIGGER DEVICE

The drawing on the following page is a schematic diagram of a German winter firing mechanism. It was found on a German rifle, Model 98, picked up by a soldier of the 2nd Bn 137th Infantry Regiment 35th Infantry Division in the vicinity of LUTREBOIS^(P5653) during the ARDENNES CAMPAIGN in the first part of January 1945. The purpose of the device is to permit the firing of a rifle without the exposure of a trigger finger.

The device was crudely manufactured. Two metal plates (1) which had been screwed into the stock of the rifle covered the trigger group. A hinged mechanism (2) was fastened to the trigger guard, and to this attachment was fastened another piece of metal (3) which extended outside of and around the metal plates (1). This rod (3) terminated in a knurled ball of metal (4). Upward and backward pressure on the knurled ball caused the "rocker arm" (2) ^{to} force the trigger back and thus fire the rifle.