

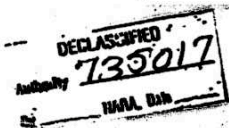


HEADQUARTERS III U. S. CORPS
APO 303 U. S. ARMY

18 January 1945

VILLERS LA BONNE EAU ACTION
3rd Battalion, 137th Infantry Regiment
28 to 30 December 1944

The original written attack order from the 137th Infantry Regiment gave its 3rd Battalion the initial mission of taking the high ground northeast of VILLERS LA BONNE EAU (), including LUTREMANGE (). Since the tank battalion (737th) normally attached to the 35th Infantry Division had been detached, the 3rd Bn was without tank support. A platoon of the 654th Tank Destroyer Bn had been attached, but these had been put out of action before the assault on the town. One hit a mine, another was mechanically deficient with a jammed turret, and two were knocked out at 567480 by German tanks. Thus, the Battalion was without tank or tank destroyer support. In addition, a directive from higher headquarters (above division) ordered no artillery on towns that possibly were unoccupied by the enemy. Apparently it had to be known beyond a doubt that the enemy held a town before the artillery could fire. However, a platoon of 4.2 mortars (Co D, 3rd Chemical Bn) was in



support of the Battalion.

On the 27th of December, the 3rd Bn jumped off from PERLE () and proceeded to LIVARCHAMPS (). With Cos K and L abreast and C1 I in reserve, the Bn proceeded northward along the draw, and swinging to the right, pushed up the high ground to a position at 565494-569493. There the night of the 27th was spent. An enemy pillbox at 570494 effectively pinned down the battalion, interdicting further advance. It was decided to outflank the enemy obstruction by maneuvering the assault companies back through the woods, then to the right up a draw at 568490, into a wood at 572495, thereby enveloping the pillbox from the rear. The companies jumped off at daylight on the 28th. Cos I and K were in column, with Co L echeloned to the right guarding the right flank. The pillbox was grenaded and the companies pushed forward in the formation indicated. The clearing of the woods was an arduous and time-consuming process.

On the night of the 28th, German tanks were heard north of the crossroad (570503), but they apparently withdrew.

On the 29th, it became apparent that the enemy held the woods at 575499 in strength. Attempts to push in that direction were blocked. Therefore, Co I, followed by Co K, was moved to the left to a position along the eastern side of the road at 566509. Before dawn, Lt Casey, S-2, assumed command of Co I. Co K tied in with Co G of the 134th Infantry Regiment on the left, but a considerable gap existed between the 3rd and 1st Bns of the 137th Infantry Regiment on the right flank. This gap was along a valley commanded by the high ground on the left which was occupied by the 3rd Bn, and on the right by a ridge partially held by the 1st Bn.



Two patrols had gone into VILLERS LA BONNE EAU (P5750) and reported that the town was held by the Germans. Tanks had been reported north of the crossroad (570503), and also at LUTREMANGE (P5851), and along the LUTREMANGE-VILLERS LA BONNE EAU road.

The fire plan of the Battalion was as follows:

One heavy machine gun section positioned at 564486 firing interdiction fire on woods at 576504 and along the VILLERS-LUTREMANGE road.

Two heavy machine gun sections accompanying the rifle companies.

Heavy mortars in LIVARCHAMPS () fired heavy concentrations on 576504 and 578504.

The 4.2 Mortars in LIVARCHAMPS fired on LUTREMANGE and along the high ground west of that town.

At 569504 an observation post was set up to direct fires.

The high ground in the vicinity of LA TANNERIE (P575507) was smoked. 800 rounds of smoke were fired by the 81-mm mortars. However, no smoke was fired during the night attack on the town.

The Battalion's plan of attack was as follows:

It was decided to make a night attack on VILLERS LA BONNE EAU, with the mission of laying mines in the town.

Co K was to work its way down the road from its position at 566510.

Co L was to move from 572497 northward to the road junction at 570502, leaving one platoon to hold the right flank at 572497.

Co I was to remain at 567507 and tie in with Co G 134th Infantry Regiment.



The attack jumped off at 292200 and at midnight Co K under Lt Casey and Co L commanded by Capt Long were occupying the first two buildings in the town. It was a bright, moonlight night and thus far no trouble had been encountered. At 0200 a call for more bazooka ammunition was made by radio.

On the morning of the 30th, the Germans hit the elements in town with seven tanks accompanied by Infantry from LUTREMANGE (). The houses were encircled and the tanks fired directly into the buildings.

At 0845, Lt Casey called by radio for a concentration of High explosive and smoke, using the houses they occupied as the center of fire. Casey stated that they were going to make a run for it under cover of smoke, since the enemy was "burning the houses". Communications went out before adjustment could be completed or effectiveness of fire could be indicated. Sgt. Webster Phillips of Co K was commissioned to take the information of the counterattack to the Co I CP. He ran across open ground for 200 yards, and accomplished his mission. Lt Dees of Co I, spoke with Phillips who told of a Sgt Scott knocking out two enemy self-propelled guns or tanks by bazooka fire at close to pointblank range.

Some of the encircled men made a try to get back but were mowed down by machine gun fire. Sgt. Phillips was the only man who got out.

169 men went into town (including 17 men and 1 officer from Co M* a heavy machine gun section). It has been verified that 9 of these were killed in action. 159 are carried as missing in action and 1 escaped.



A prisoner stated that a small number (a company) of German engineers had occupied the town, but that a number of tanks with some infantrymen had been sent from LUTREMANGE () on the morning of the 30th. He also stated that 100 Americans had been captured.

The remainder of the battalion was spread along the forest on the night of the 30th when 50 to 60 Germans came out of VILLERS LA BONNE EUA () along the road to the east. The battalion didnot know who they were, and some thought that they could be the elements that had been encircled inside the town. At a range of 400 yards the Germans were identified as such, and the battalion fired down the 12-yards-wide road scattering the detail.

The next morning the 2nd Bn reinforced the 3rd.

The strength of the companies on 27 December, including replacements was a s follows:

Co K 174 EM (70 replacements)	5 Officers (2 replacements)
Co L 163 EM (72 replacements)	4 Officers (2 replacements)
Co I 162 EM (42 replacements)	5 Officers (3 replacements)

These replacements wer former Tank Destroyer and Anitaircraft men.

Sources:- Lt Col Albert Butler, CO, 3rd Bn; Capt Quentin A. Donnellan, S-3; Capt Clifford G Decker, CO, Co M; Lt Robert W. Hites, Liaison Officer, from 219th Field Artillery Bn.

Interviewer - T/Sgt. C. J. Angulo.

Date of Interview - 14 January 1945.

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