



INTERVIEW NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

Unit: 1st Battalion, 137th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division.

Action: 8 November to 21 November 1944.

Source: Interview with Major Robert Louis Stephenson, Battalion Executive Officer.

Interviewer: Capt Jacob Goldman.

Place and Date of Interview: Battalion CP at Bottrop, Germany, on 28 May 1945.

Maps: Series 4471, Sheets: XXXV-13 and 14; XXXVII-12 and 13; XXXVI-12, 13, 14 and 15; XXXIII-13; XXXIV-14.

Journals: After Action Report.

Comments: Person interviewed expressed difficulty in remembering detailed events because of the lapse of time. The After Action reports were used as a guide and to refresh his recollection.



137th Infantry Regiment  
1st Battalion

Interview with Major Robert L<sup>ts</sup> Stephenson, Executive Officer, at the Battalion CP at Bottrop, Germany, on 28 May.

8 November We had been on sustained, active defense in the Foret de Gremercy sector from 003-261 to 042-263 and along the contour of the forward edge of the forest. The battalion was approximately at full strength at the time of the jump off, and the men were in good condition. The casualties had not been heavy, since the struggle had been completed for the greater part of the forest. We patrolled aggressively and constantly and received much enemy artillery. The enemy forces immediately in contact with us were centered in the Jure woods (02-27) and in Jallaucourt (01-27).

At 0600, after a heavy artillery preparation, the battalion jumped off with the mission of seizing Jallaucourt and continuing the attack to seize an objective line running generally through Lemoncourt (01-30), Oriocourt (03-30) and Laneuveville (04-30). The plan was to cross the Rau d'Osson River, a tributary of the La Seille River, bridge it, and thus allow GCA of the 4th Armored Division to shake loose and exploit a breakthrough if the situation warranted it. The battalion plan was to commit Company C frontally at Jallaucourt with Company A following initially. Company B was to wait and be prepared to ride a company of tanks as soon as the prefabricated bridge could be placed into position at 998-271 by the 35th Infantry Division Engineers. The 4th Armored Division was not to cross until the objective line was seized, that is, until a bridgehead was established. By 0720 one platoon of Company C was in Jallaucourt while the other two platoons were pinned down west of the town by heavy enemy fire. Company A was committed to assist Company C in securing the town, only a part of which had been cleared by the platoon of Company C.

The nature of the ground told by Companies A and C committed the

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bridging of the river. The ground gained was across the river, and the enemy had no observation of the bridge site. Company B, riding tanks, rapidly closed in to the town. The enemy froze in their positions at the presence of the armor. The mopping up operation lasted to 1500 and approximately 200 IIs were taken. The company commander and a platoon leader of Company C were evacuated. Company A was then committed to clear the Jurre woods. The plan involved putting the infantry on a company of tanks and moving them toward the woods, firing as they approached it. The tanks halted 50 yards short of the woods proper. The infantry dismounted and, covered by the tank fire, entered the woods. The enemy resistance in the Jurre Woods, consisting of organized small arms fire from dug in positions, continued until after midnight.

In the afternoon Company K had been dispatched to defend the town of Jallaucourt so that the 1st Battalion could continue the attack the following morning to seize Oriocourt.

9 November The attack moved out in the morning with Company B on the right and Company C on the left in platoon column astride the road Jallaucourt to Oriocourt. The attack made good progress. The 4th Armored Division elements were following behind as we approached our objective, awaiting the opportunity to exploit a breakthrough. Several enemy positions were cleared up by marching fire with few casualties. By 1400 Oriocourt had been secured and 150 PWs, including an enemy battery of field artillery intact, together with its personnel, were taken.

The advance continued toward Laneuveville, and the town was secured against scatter~~ed~~ small arms resistance. An enemy battalion commander and his staff were captured. The advance continued, and the high ground in the vicinity of coordinates C65-319 overlooking Fonteny was soon reached without resistance.



10 November The battalion jumped off at 0700 to seize Fonteny (07-32) with two companies abreast, Company B on the right and Company A on the left. The plan was for Company B to make a holding effort on the right flank of the battalion, where we were getting much enemy 20mm, machine gun and SP fire from the Chateau Salins Woods, and to pass Company C, mounted on a company of tanks, through the foot elements of Company A, which was holding a line from 062-321 to 065-315, and attack Fonteny. Company A was then to follow Company C when passed through. Armored infantry elements of the 4th Armored Division were still in contact with our infantry units, with the bulk of the armor assembled in and about Lanoueville, waiting for the opportunity of a breakthrough. Mud was our greatest enemy. The tanks had to be winched into position for the jump off, because they were mired deep in the mud. Heavy enemy artillery and the vigorous enemy defense of the area frustrated us from taking Fonteny during the day, and at 1800 we were ordered to hold our positions on the ridge west of Fonteny and patrol the town during the night.

11 - 12 November An early morning patrol reported that the enemy was still in Fonteny in considerable strength and dug in on the high ground northeast of Fonteny (Hill 281), the woods southwest of the town and along an anti-tank ditch north of the town. We attacked in early morning with two companies abreast as in the previous day and with the same plan. Companies A and C succeeded in getting in to Fonteny by 1330 and by 1500 had cleared almost the entire town. Heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire was streaming in. Our casualties while entering Fonteny were very heavy. The company commander of Company C, Capt Harry C. Simpson, was evacuated.

Almost immediately thereafter, CCA of the 4th Armored Division sensed a breakthrough. They started forward, using the main road between Lanoueville and Fonteny. Actually the road at 067-315 to 068-319 was still under enemy anti-tank fire from the Chateau Salins woods. We had avoided the fire by

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winching our tanks through the cover of the basin northwest of the road. Knowing the danger, I tried to head off the advancing column of CCA, but before I could reach them, they were taken under this exact enemy fire and stopped cold. The commanding officer of CCA and the artillery commanding officer were killed, and approximately 20 tracked vehicles were disabled. The entire column was immobilized.

The 3d Battalion was ordered to relieve us before daylight the following morning. The relief was accomplished without incident during the darkness. The remaining Germans had withdrawn from Ponteny prior to daylight. We assembled in Lan<sup>du</sup>veville with the mission of protecting the still vulnerable right flank of the regiment. The rifle companies were now reduced to a strength of 100 men each.

13-17 November At 0600 the 3d Battalion continued the advance to Chateau Brehain (11-34) across country, and we displaced behind them west of the Chateau Salins Woods. In Chateau Brehain we encountered the first civilians who had not been evacuated. The enemy resistance had dropped considerably. By approximately 1300 CCB of the 4th Armored Division and our regimental troops were advancing north and east in the zones assigned to us. We were still reserve and at 1600 displaced from Chateau Brehain to Marthille (14-37).

It was very cold and during the night a heavy snowfall covered the ground to a depth of three inches. Casualties were very low, and there were indications of a breakthrough. The 2d and 3d Battalions were to resume the attack the following morning. We were to remain in reserve. By 1700, 14 November, the 3d Battalion had reached Barenville. By now the 2d Battalion and CCA had cleared Destry (16-39). We were still in reserve at Marthille making reconnaissances for possible employment and remained in reserve during 15, 16 and 17 November..



18 November The 1st Battalion made a night march from Marthille to Baronville (17-37). In the morning it jumped off on the right of the 3d Battalion from a line of departure at the railroad track in the vicinity of coordinates 210-383, with Companies B and C abreast, Company C on the right, advanced around the right of the Et de Mutche, and seized Harprich (21-41) against slight opposition.

We then continued the attack through the woods to the north and east, and in a flanking action, seized the town of Berig-Vintrange (24-42). The enemy had prepared defenses along the road, entering from the south. We entered from almost due west, surprised them and secured the town with little opposition, taking 75 PWs. When the reserve company, Company A, started to displace from Harprich to Berig-Vintrange, the enemy, realizing what had happened, threw a tremendous barrage of mortar and artillery fire into the column and pinned down the company in the Le Haut Bois for more than three hours. No fire fell in Berig-Vintrange. Company A was able to complete its displacement by dusk, and at 1800 the battalion was ordered to hold up in the town for the night.

19 November Elements of CCB of the 6th Armored Division moved into the regimental zone at 0900 and moved through us toward Bertring (26-42). They were stopped cold, short of the town, by heavy enemy anti-tank fire and an anti-tank ditch south and west of the town, which could not be by-passed. CCB deployed to the left of the road running from Berig-Vintrange to Bertring. Our battalion, whose mission was to clear Bertring, very quickly caught up with the leading armored elements of CCB and was subjected to the same fire.

After being stopped for most of the day, the following plan of attack was coordinated with CCB. The battalion was to jump off at 1630 with the mission of seizing Bertring and Gros Tenquin (27-43). At the same time, 6th Armored Division air support was to bomb Gros Tenquin and strafe the

road leading northeast of the town and the west edge of the Bois de Freyhouse. Our division artillery and the 6th Armored Division artillery and attached corps artillery, totalling 19 battalions, were to place a TOT on Gros Tenquin at the same time as the air strike and continue to plaster the roads leading out of Gros Tenquin. The 81mm mortars of the 2d Battalion which had displaced to Berig-Vintrange were to be used in conjunction with the 81mm mortars of our own battalion to throw a tremendous WP mortar barrage into Bertring proper. The battalion of medium tanks of the 6th Armored Division was to pull out of its defiladed positions left of the road, deliver direct fire into the forward edge of Bertring and continue this fire until masked by our infantry. The entire plan was coordinated in 45 minutes. All fire was to start at the time of the jump-off.

We jumped off on time, seized Bertring and Gros Tenquin with almost no opposition and suffered only two casualties. Much enemy equipment and many PWs, shaking with fear, were captured. The coordination was so perfect, that civilians and PWs stated that the air strike bombs had hit at exactly the same instant that the TOT hit Gros Tenquin. Defensive positions were set up. During the night we were relieved by the 2d Battalion.

20 - 21 November We followed the 2d Battalion as they attacked toward Hellimer (33-44) and in the evening of 21 November followed them into the town under heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. We suffered heavy casualties.

22 November This battalion attacked from Hellimer with a battalion of medium tanks of CCB, 6th Armored Division, to seize Leyviller (35-48), surrounded the town by 1100 and secured it by 1400 against heavy artillery fire and scattered small arms fire. The battalion then continued due east in an attempt to outflank St Jean Rohrbach (38-48), and seized <sup>it</sup> by 1800 against heavy artillery and tank fire. The enemy troops had pulled out of the town





before we reached it but started to shell the town.

23 November At approximately 0900 the battalion attacked with Company A on the right and Company C on the left to seize Hilsprich (40-46). No armor was attached.

When the forward elements reached the high ground southeast of St Jean Rohrbach, five enemy tanks and numerous anti-tank weapons could be observed in and around Hilsprich. It was obvious that the Germans had massed their anti-tank means to stop a possible drive of our armor. Four TDs were sent up to us by regiment, and they tried to cope with the enemy tanks but were compelled to withdraw. The enemy, evidently expecting armor, pulled back into the town all of its infantry, an estimated battalion, and approximately 25 tanks which supported them. The battalion and companies knew what was in the town but were ordered by regiment to make the move. Battalion did not crowd the forward companies, but allowed them time to make the move on their own initiative. The two leading infantry companies, Companies A and C, both understrength each with about 75 to 80 men and without armor or effective anti-tank weapons, jumped off on their own initiative, crossed 800 yards of open ground and entered the northeast edge of Hilsprich. Casualties were very heavy. The company commander of Company A was killed and the company commander of Company C was wounded and captured. All of the remaining officers of Company C were captured and only one officer of Company A, 1st Lt Lyon, survived. He reorganized the remnants of the two companies, altogether about 60 men, and led them out back to St Jean Rohrbach under cover of darkness. During the entire action we lost four men killed, 26 wounded and 39 MIA. No new estimate of the situation was made by higher headquarters. The suspected enemy strength was confirmed by the losses sustained.

24 November The enemy withdrew from Hilsprich during the night, and the 134th Infantry entered the town without opposition. The battalion



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remained with the regiment in reserve at St. Jean Rohrbach until 30 November when it moved to Harprich where it remained with the regiment in corps reserve until 6 December. On that day it moved to a forward assembly area in Hoving (44-46). The 134th and 320th Infantry Regiments were attacking, and the 137th Infantry Regiment was in division reserve. On 8 December we moved by foot to an assembly area at Hambach (46-52) and on 9 December to Sarreguemines (51-57). The regiment was still in reserve. The portion of this town east of the river had never been taken. Artillery and small arms fire from the eastern bank streamed into our sector.

On 10 December the 2d Battalion captured that part of Sarreguemines east of the Sarre River. We followed behind in support and on 11 December took up defensive positions therein while the 2d Battalion continued to mop up. We remained there until 15 December when we crossed the Blies River behind the 3d Battalion which was heading for the woods at 57-60. We defended the division left flank from Sarreguemines along the Blies River until relieved on 16 December at 1725 by the 2d Cavalry Group. On the same day we moved into an assembly area in Neunkirchen (53-58) and remained there until the 17th at 2200 when we relieved the 3d Battalion across the Blies River at 570-610. The 3d Battalion had been trying to take the Bieterwald Woods (56-62). Actually there were only 40 men left in the 3d Battalion area. Attached to us at the time was a platoon of five tanks and three TDs.

18 December At 0730 we jumped off to seize and secure the Bieterwald Woods. We knew at the time that the woods were being defended by approximately 200 enemy troops supported by several tanks. We also knew that we would have to take the woods quickly and have prearranged fires ready to put down as soon as we got in or else we would never be able to hold it. The 3d Battalion had previously been thrown out of the woods several times.

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The infantry moved forward supported by the tank fire until that fire was masked by the infantry. The tanks then followed the infantry at 200 yards. The woods was secured within 50 minutes with few casualties. No sooner had the far edge of the woods been reached when the enemy counterattacked with an estimated 200 infantry supported by tanks and SPs. We opened up with our prearranged artillery and mortar fire, and brought the tanks up to fire point blank at the few enemy soldiers that managed to close in on us. The TDs pushed out to the edge of the woods and silenced the fires of several of the SP guns. Without the tanks and TDs we could never have been able to hold the ground, since our strength was depleted. Each rifle company had a strength of 50 to 60 men. The prearranged fires also helped us to hold the ground and repulse the enemy.

During the remainder of the day several small enemy counterattacks were repulsed. Roadblocks were set up at all entrances to the woods and logical approaches into the woods for armor were mined. Positions and emplacements were improved and our troops had an opportunity to place overhead cover on foxholes. Machine guns were placed in positions to permit final protective lines, and all our defensive fires were zeroed in. Enemy armor continued to place direct fire on our positions throughout the day, but each time our TDs would pull up and fire, and the German armor would withdraw. We continued to hold these positions until 21 December, repelling small enemy counterattacks.

At about 0900, 21 December, the enemy opened up with an intense artillery barrage which was so heavy that although the ground was muddy, it raised smoke 100 feet into the air, completely blanketing the Bieterwald Woods. Our artillery liaison officer directed the counter battery fire of 23 battalions of artillery in an endeavor to stop the barrage, which continued relentlessly for two and one-half hours. Our 81mm mortars fired



1,800 rounds of mortar ammunition on likely jump-off positions, including the Buckholz Woods (56-63), the deep ravine at 572-622 and other positions that could not be reached by the artillery.

When the enemy infantry started to come, all our fires were shifted to close-in prearranged targets. The five tanks and three TDs, which had been withdrawn temporarily, were ordered back to the woods and arrived in time to assist in repelling the enemy infantry, who, although not accompanied by armor, were supported by direct fire from the enemy armor to the rear. We could hear men screaming and horses squealing and knew that heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy. I believe it was an enemy attack in force. However, it was completely repulsed. We were not counterattacked again in that position. During the period of the enemy barrage and counterattack only two casualties were suffered. The 324th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Division, relieved us at 2255 and the battalion assembled in Felpersviller (550-585).