

Lieutenant Colonel Alfred K. Clark, Commander (formerly Executive Officer) 137 Regiment, 35 Infantry Division, to Lt. H. B. Jones at Regimental CP near HERTEN, GERMANY on 30 May 1945.

On the first of November 1944, the 137th Infantry Regiment held a 4 mile wide sector of the American front, extending west along ridges from a point on the north edge of the FORET DE GREMECEY (Q0326) to a point north east of AJONCOURT (U9726) FRANCE. The Regimental sector was on the left (West) part of the 35th Division front. The 80th Infantry Division adjoined our sector on the left (West). The Germans held a line north of the RAU D' OSSON south of MALAUCOURT (U9928) and JALLAUCOURT (Q0128). The German outpost line was manned by riflemen dug in on the reverse slopes of high ground north of the river. Our outposts were entrenched on the reverse slopes of ridges south of the stream. The 35th Division had been holding defensive positions for five weeks, preparations were being completed for an American offensive.

The plan of attack, 35th Division Field Order 26, came down to the Regiment on November 7. XII~~1~~ Corps was to attack northeast to the Rhine River and seize a bridgehead east of the Rhine. Within the Corps, 26th Infantry Division would attack on the right (East), 35th Infantry Division in

the center, and 80th Infantry Division on the left (West). Sixth Armored Division was to operate in the zone of 80th Infantry Division while Fourth Armored Division operated in the zone of 35th Infantry Division, passing through the north and west front of the Division after it secured a bridgehead across the RAU D' OSSON. The armor was to be committed after the infantry secured a favorable jumping off place for the tanks. In 35th Division sector the 137th Regiment was to attack on the left (West) while the 320th Regiment attacked on the right (East). The 134th Regiment was initially in Division reserve. The 137th Regiment was supported by the 737th Tank Battalion, less one company; Company B of the 60th Engineer (C) Battalion; and Company A of the 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The attack jumped off at 0600 on 8 November 1944.

The G - 2 estimate was that the Germans in our sector held a line connected by AULNOIS (U9631), MALAUCOURT (U9928), and FRESNES (Q0528), with possible reserve units at LEMONCOURT (Q0131) and CLAINCOURT (U9632). We believed that the enemy lines were lightly held but well organized and that the enemy did not have too much in reserve. We did not believe that the Germans would be able to counter attack our forces in strength of more than one infantry company supported by a maximum of 5 tanks. This proved to be true. The Germans several small counter attacks with perhaps a platoon of infantry supported by two tanks. In the attack we expected

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to encounter some German armor, perhaps a company of German tanks with each German infantry regiment, broken into two tanks per infantry company. This also proved true, the Germans fought many local delaying actions using one or two tanks or self propelled guns in support of platoons of infantry.

The initial terrain obstacle to the advance was the RAU D' OSSON. This normally is a small fordable stream. Heavy rain had fallen in the area for several weeks. The La Seille River had risen. The Osson emptied into the La Seille near our sector. The La Seille is a slow running sluggish river, and water backed up rather than draining. As a result water backed up from the La Seille into the Osson and in many places it became too deep to ford. It was therefore necessary to bridge the Osson in order to get supply vehicles and armor across the stream.

The weather was bad all through the operation. It rained, sleeted, or snowed almost daily, and the ground became muddy and too soft to allow passage of vehicles anywhere except on the roads. The terrain was rolling with many patches of woods, and was dominated by numerous hills and high points which were used by the Germans as observation points for artillery fire direction. The cold weather and the soggy rain soaked terrain were important factors in planning the operation. Our armor was able to

operate successfully only on the roads, and supplies could be moved up only on the roads. It was necessary to advance along the roads in order to use the fire power of tanks and to have a way of bringing up supplies.

In this area all passable roads led through villages. The operation reduced itself to a fight from town to town along the roads. The Germans defended the area from the villages.

Instead of setting hills or ridges as objectives we used towns as objectives. The villages were usually in valleys or on low ground. We would swing one or two platoons behind a town, isolating it and knocking out mortar and artillery observers positions looking into the village, then enter the town as quickly as possible. This operation of fighting from town to town, forced upon us by the weather and the German method of defense, had several advantages. It opened the roads for supply routes. It gave the troops shelter for the nights. The harsh weather made living in the field impossible without greatly reducing the efficiency of the troops. The villages afforded shelter from the weather, a place to dry clothing, and cover from enemy shellfire. Our casualties in the villages from enemy shell fire were negligible. About ninety per cent of the men spent the nights inside the towns while ten per cent were placed

in outposts 100 yards to 500 yards outside the village. The 137th Regiment received commendation from General Patton for having the lowest rate of trench foot in the Third Army. It also resulted in the taking of many prisoners. When a town was surrounded and taken the German defenders became prisoners rather than being able to withdraw and continue the fight. It had the inherent disadvantage that in attacking the towns we were attacking the Germans in their strong point rather than in their weak points. The situation would have been different if the Germans had been known to have sufficient reserves to launch strong counter attacks. Upon the basis of the known factors of terrain, weather, and enemy strength the plan was adopted and it worked out well.

The 137th Regiment's part in the offensive resolved itself into three phases. From 8 November until 24 November the Regiment advanced northeast about 30 miles from MALAUCOURT - JALLAUCOURT to HELLIMER SAINT AVOID (Q3445) - ST. JEAN ROHRBACH (Q3848). During this time the Regiment captured 33 towns and took 1500 prisoners. We lost 76 killed, 573 wounded and 98 missing. The Regiment was in reserve from 25 November until 10 December. On 10 December we attacked across the SARRE RIVER into the edge of Germany and were in action until 21 December.

At the Osson River the Regiment attacked with two battalions abreast. The First Battalion was on the right (East) and the Second Battalion was on the left (West). The Third Battalion was initially in Regimental reserve at MANHOUT (U9726). Each battalion operated with two companies abreast and one company in reserve. There was a preparatory artillery barrage, centered on MALAUCOURT and JALLAUCOURT and on other known and suspected German positions. The stream crossing was quickly executed by the foot troops except for Company G of the Second Battalion. They were on the left (West) of the attack and ran into deep water and heavy German fire. At mid-morning a heavy fire fight was going on for MALAUCOURT and JALLAUCOURT, which were the centers of German resistance. During the morning engineers brought up prefabricated bridges and put them in place over the stream, suffering several casualties from German mortar fire during the process. After the bridges were in operation armor and vehicles with supplies and ammunition were brought across the river and the attack continued. During the afternoon the towns of MALAUCOURT and JALLAUCOURT were in our hands, although stiff fire fighting continued during the night. The Regimental Commander sent one rifle company from the reserve battalion to MALAUCOURT and one to JALLAUCOURT to relieve elements of First and Second Battalions in the town so they could prepare



to continue the advance. The towns were secured and outposted during the night.

On the morning of 9 November the attack continued and First Battalion took crossroads 284 north of JALLAUCOURT at Q024292, while Second Battalion secured the woods east of LEMONCOURT. Fourth Armored Division was then committed. The tanks went up with our own front elements to ORIONCOURT (Q0330) and LEMONCOURT (Q0231). The armor then turned east to VIVIERS (Q0533 and LANEUVEVILLE (Q0531) with our troops on either side of the tank column. The tanks moved out slowly and our infantry was able to keep up with them on foot. The tanks passed through our lines on the afternoon of 9 November near VIVIERS but did not clear out the town. During the night a considerable number of Germans came into VIVIERS from the west as a result of the operations of 80th Division further to the west. When our troops tried to enter VIVIERS a fierce fight took place, but by 1600 on 10 November the town had been taken. The First Battalion went from ORIOCCOURT to attack LANEUVEVILLE (Q0531). A good deal of enemy tank and self propelled gun fire came from the vicinity of FONTENY (Q0732) and the wooded area east of LANEUVEVILLE.

The Fourth Armored Division suffered heavy casualties

in the vicinity of LANEUVEVILLE and VIVIERS and did not succeed in making a breakthrough. Our First Battalion captured LANEUVEVILLE on 10 November but was unable to secure FONTENY before dark and was ordered to hold up for the night. The First Battalion was successful in taking FONTENY on 11 November. The operation then settled down into a series of fights for the villages along the roadnet.

The Regiment fought with two battalions abreast, rotating the battalions every two or three days in order to give each battalion a rest. Six days was the maximum continuous action for any battalion between breaks. Companies were rotated within the battalions. The men in the line battalions ate chiefly K rations, although every attempt was made to get kitchen trucks up after dark to give the men hot coffee, and where possible to give them hot cooked meals. The men slept in the houses in the villages. The weather was cold. Each man carried one blanket in his pack. They took advantage of whatever they could find in the houses in the way of blankets. Supplies were adequate. The men were equipped with overshoes, which were not altogether satisfactory because they were awkward to carry and made men foot-heavy on long hikes. The ammunition supply was adequate. A lot more artillery ammunition could have been used.

The Germans defended the villages by small arms and

automatic weapons fire from the houses themselves, and by fire from artillery and mortars emplaced behind the villages. The Germans had plenty of ammunition but seemed to have a limited number of artillery pieces. They used the tops of hills for artillery forward observers positions. These hilltops were a special nuisance to us because the 137th Regiment was almost always more advanced than the 80th Infantry Division front on our left. The 80th Division was advancing in an arc with the 137th Regimental sector on the inside of the arc. The result was that the Germans almost always held hilltops on our left which were outside our sector. This was no reflection upon the 80th Division, it was a thing inherent in the terrain and the plan of battle. We neutralized the enemy observers by placing fire on the high ground which could have been used by enemy observers. We advanced with the roads as an axis of approach, with troops from 300 to 500 yards on each side of the roads. We were not bothered by enemy aviation. German observation planes came over occasionally, and there were scattered ineffective straffings.

The Germans also used many tank - infantry teams in fighting delaying actions. In these teams they used one or two tanks or self propelled guns and about a platoon of

infantry. The tank would take up a defilade position on the reverse slope of a hill or behind some other abstacle and the infantry would deploy behind a roadblock, natural obstacle, or mine field. The German infantry would pin down our advancing troops the German tank would shell them and attempt to knock out any armored vehicles our people tried to use against the German infantry. The team would put up a short fight, inflict as many casualties as possible, then withdraw to another favorable position and repeat the performance. These teams were bold and well trained. We would try to spot the tank and place artillery fire on it, and also place artillery and mortar fire on the German infantry. These tactics were effective as a delaying action. If the weather had been favorable our aviation might have made these tactics impractical, but even on days when the weather was clear enough for planes to fly there was usually a ground mist which made spotting the tanks difficult from the air. The whole operation, from the German viewpoint, must have been considered a fairly successful delaying action. The Regiment went into reserve on 24 November.

At 0500 on 10 December the Regiment crossed the Sarre River on a railroad bridge south of SARREGUEMINES (25157) with the mission of attacking northeast into Germany. The Second and Third Battalions were to cross the river and jump

off at 0730. The 134th Regiment had already crossed the Sarre, so no trouble was anticipated in getting over the river. East of the River, the Second Battalion, on the left (north) was to swing north and clear the part of SARREGUEMINES east of the Sarre River, then go northeast and seize a bridge across the Blies River near FRAUENBERG (Q5560). Third Battalion was to advance east and seize high ground south of the Blies River. First Battalion was to remain initially west of the Sarre River and support the Second Battalion by fire. FRAUENBERG (Q5560) and HABKIRCHEN (Q5660) were then to be taken.

The battalions crossed the Sarre before daylight without difficulty and jumped off at 0730. Heavy fighting developed at daylight just after the jump off. The Germans had artillery north of the Blies River, and heavy fire came down upon our people as soon as it became daylight. Company F, advancing north through SARREGUEMINES, came upon a pottery factory and got into a fight with about three companies of German SS troops inside the buildings. The fight inside the factory lasted for several hours, and was bitter and at close quarters. The building was 75 yards wide by some 200 yards long and was full of kilns, racks, and stacks of pottery. The Germans fought with grenades and

machine pistols from kiln to kiln. The fight at SARREGUEMINES went on for two days, the Germans fighting from house to house and from underground bomb proof shelters. On 11 and 12 December NEUNKIRCH (Q5858) and FRAUENBERG (A5360) were taken. The Germans continued to throw heavy concentrations of artillery fire into SARREGUEMINES and FRAUENBERG from north of the BLIES RIVER.

In FRAUENBERG we set up mortars in gardens behind houses in such positions that the houses were between the mortars and the German positions. Ammunition was prepared and stacked in the houses where it was readily accessible to the mortars. The mortar crews stayed in the houses where they could run out quickly with prepared charges, fire 30 or 40 rounds swiftly, then duck back into the houses. The arrangement proved very effective because it gave the mortar crews cover, and made possible a readily accessible supply of ammunition. The mortar crews suffered no casualties while so set up. In one 15 minute period the First and Second Battalions fired 1100 rounds of 81mm mortar ammunition from these positions and broke up a determined German counter attack.

Before dawn on 13 December the Third Battalion crossed the Blies River in assault boats and FRAUENBERG and pushed north toward the BRIETERWALD forest. The fighting continued north of the Blies River in the vicinity of the BRIETERWALD

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woods until 20 December when the Regiment was withdrawn.

In discussing the experiences of the 137th Regiment in its operations against the Germans, Lieutenant Colonel Clark said that the most important single lesson that had been learned was the value of obtaining fire superiority over the enemy and maintaining that fire superiority. He said that having always plenty of artillery ammunition was the greatest single factor in successful operations - that if artillery fire could be maintained on enemy positions, particularly on actual or potential artillery observers positions, it is possible to disorganize the Germans with a great lessening of American casualties. As a specific case in point he referred to the experiences of the 784th Tank Battalion which saw its first action against the Germans in support of the 137th Regiment. When that tank battalion first went into action, possibly because its members were nervous over their first fighting, the tankers opened fire on everything in enemy territory that looked like an enemy position - clumps of trees, houses, haystacks, etc. The result was that many concealed enemy guns and emplacements were knocked out before the Germans had a chance to fire a shot, and American casualties were very light.