

INTERVIEW NUMBER _____

Unit: 320th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division.

Action: 12 November 1944 to 17 January 1945.

Source: Interview with Colonel Bernard A. Byrne, Commanding Officer of the 320th Infantry Regiment.

Interviewer: Capt Jacob Goldman

Place and Date of Interview: Regimental CP at Munster, Germany, on 21 May 1945.

Maps: Series 4040, Sheets: 106, 121, 122, 137 and 152. Series 4471, Sheets: XXXV-13 and ~~14~~, XXXVII-12 and 13; XXXVI-12, 13, 14 and 15; XXXIII-13; XXXIV-14.

Journals: ¹⁴Regimental Journal and After Action report.

Comments: Person interviewed expressed difficulty in remembering the events because of the lapse of time. He stated that he did remember, clearly, the reasons for some decisions made and problems encountered, all of which are contained herein.

320th Infantry Regiment

Interview with Colonel Bernard A. Byrne, Commanding Officer, at the Regimental CP at Munster, Germany on 21 May 1945.

PERIOD: 8 - 17 JANUARY

Morning of 15 January, 1st Battalion Attack on Oubeurcy

The town was expected to be strongly held, not only because of its location on the ground, which compelled the Germans to hold it or give up the valley which it controlled, including the town of Michamps, but also because the approaches to it were almost a mile of absolutely flat snow-covered and frozen plain, making it extremely difficult for the attackers.

The build-up nature for the area dictated the wisdom of using armor which was available in limited quantities. Approaches for armor, however, had the added complication of extremely effective observed anti-tank fires from across the railroad to the northwest. These in turn, came from an area of a neighboring unit and his whereabouts could never be well enough known to permit us to fire on these German anti-tank weapons. Good concealment made it impossible for us to take them out by point fire. All of these hostile guns were mobile, seldom firing long from one exact position. Because of the foregoing factor, it was decided to attack before dawn without preparatory fires and in total silence, in order to permit the infantry to come quickly to close quarters with the enemy and then permit their supporting armor to traverse the ground controlled by German anti-tank fire at high speed.

The success of this tactic was indicated by the facts: (1) that the town of Oubeurcy was entered half an hour before the enemy

manned the daylight defensive positions on his perimeter:

(2) that one German SP gun crew was destroyed in the act of mounting its vehicle and the gun captured intact without firing; (3) that a machine gun crew on the edge of town, nested back of the haystack beside its weapons, ^{which were} ~~were~~ emplaced to control the entire route of approach, was captured; and (4) that the entire battalion staff with all but one of its company commanders were killed or captured during a predawn conference in the command post building, their telephone ^{wire} ~~were~~ to the rear being cut from the outside while ^{the} the telephone in building could be heard ringing. It is doubted that any other means of assault could have been made without losses disproportionate to the value of the objective. It is also noteworthy, that the next town, Michamps, defended at that time, was thereafter hastily evacuated by the enemy.

It was found, time and again, that the enemy defended ineffectually, even in his next position and showed throughout the balance of the action an overall deterioration in quality that marked contrast with his previous stubborn and skillful resistance in that sector.

PERIOD 8 NOVEMBER TO MIDDLE OF DECEMBER

Attack 8 November

Whenever possible, disposition of battalions for the attack was made with consideration to former defensive positions occupied by these battalions, in order to achieve maximum familiarity with the ground over which advancing forces must pass. Even with this selection, it is felt, that the initial movement of the attacking battalions would have been greatly facilitated, had occupancy of

the areas of departure at least 24 hours prior to the attack been possible. Such occupancy would have assured greater familiarity with friendly engineering works through which these troops were required to pass, and would have permitted patrolling by key groups in that area prior to the attack.

The plan as executed, necessitated a feet movement in darkness and in a heavy rain of over five hours duration prior to the attack and in deep mud, in order to bring attacking troops to their line of departure. This precluded rest that the troops might well have gained and the cohesion and self-confidence that ordinarily results from final orientation in the departure area.

Furthermore, in spite of agreement with the troops previously holding the line of departure, regarding the removal of explosive engineer devices and the opening of lines through barbed wire, this clearance had by no means been fully accomplished with the result that several elements were initially entangled in our own wire, and friendly trip flares were discharged. At minimum, it served to cause delays and temporary disorganization, and from the nature of the ground it may be safely presumed that the enemy was to some extent alerted by these visible signs of activity.

The plan by which the attack was preceded ^{by} ~~the~~ prolonged artillery bombardment was regarded as an indispensable tactic in this instance. This belief is based upon the fact that the enemy positions attacked, had been subjected to varied and intensive bombardment as well as several aerial attacks throughout a period of one month preceding the attack, and had not only so prepared their positions that maximum immunity from shell fire might be expected, but were sufficiently accustomed to bombardment at any time either day or night. To have allowed destructive

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fires delivered well before H-Hour would have caused such injury as was practicable without serving as an alert. However, it was felt that the preparatory fire immediately preceding this attack at least served to awaken all enemy in the area and that by its nature was probably interpreted as being a preparatory fire.

Initial objective areas both in the town of Fresnes and the western edge of the Forêt de Château de Salins were known to be of such nature that armor would offer great assistance to foot troops. It is felt that the single route of advance, which route in turn was effectively blocked by mines may well have been the overall deciding factor between a rapid success and the slow difficult action that actually took place. It was hoped that with maximum success available, armor could proceed on the only usable route through the town of Fresnes, assist in its clearing, and then continue on this route arriving near the forest in time to assist in subduing resistance there. Due to the afore-mentioned difficulties, it was found that even after passing the intervening mine fields near Fresnes, that in some locations armor could not move for even short distances in the support of troops attempting to clear the town. My belief that armor would be effective at the edge of the forest was well substantiated when at the time much later than had been decided, a small number of tanks were able to proceed under the plan discussed, and that their entry into action at the edge of the forest immediately and finally disposed of resistance that up to that time still prevented the entry of some foot elements into their assigned objective areas.

Commitment of the reserve battalion on 8 November on the left of the 2d Battalion was made, due to the long period of time required to capture the town of Fresnes. It had been my initial hope to have this area handled by the 3d Battalion. I feel that the overall cause for this change of plan lies in the single factor of mud as an impediment to armor.

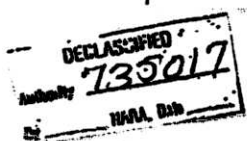
9 to 12 ~~9 November to 12~~

I believe it wise to comment upon the desirability of employing troops in considerable depth when practicable, in the clearance of these woods. Action during this period served to further support beliefs already established in this respect that the by-passing of enemy groups in woods where visibility is poor is not practicable, unless the attacking formation possesses sufficient depth to quickly overcome any resurgent by-passed group. If such depth can not be created, the only alternative, it is felt, would be an increase in the density of initial formations, or if this is also impossible, movement sufficiently slow to insure the progressive and total clearing of the area as the troops progress. One successful and costly attack made by by-passed enemy on the rear of the left (1st Battalion) on 10 November, as well as considerable lesser casualties inflicted from flank and rear positions throughout the attack, served to well support this belief. In this action the enemy had regrouped in the battalion's rear in sufficient numbers to successfully overrun the CP of ^{Company} ~~Com~~ B, kill the ~~Company~~ Commander, disrupt the organization of the company for a time, and themselves occupy the ~~the~~ ^B Company sector, the positions of which ~~were~~ ^{were} vital to our troops and to the

continued success of our action. The net result of the activity of these by-passed groups was to halt for a time the entire advance of the regiment, since the whole of the 1st Battalion was temporarily involved in destroying this force and a portion of the battalion on its right diverted by necessity to assist in this action.

18-25 November

During this period in the regiment's attack east to Morhange, the terrain was characterized by an almost complete lack of routes of communication which resulted in the hand-carrying^{and hand-} of all supply, the evacuation of all casualties by hand, laying of all communication wire. Requests were made for 20 weasels. Inability to obtain more than two of these vehicles at any time and to obtain any during a considerable part of this operation not only created tangible deficiencies in supply which in turn delayed the progress of the action, but necessitated carrying parties^{with} ~~was~~ considerable numbers of men, whose services might better have been used for other tasks. It is felt that in ^{planning} ~~finishing~~ for an ^{initial} ~~initial~~ operation on routes unsuitable for^{provision} the 1/4 ton truck due to the afore-mentioned reasons, for weasels be included.



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Source: Interview with Major Thomas P. McElroy, Regimental S-3.

Interviewer: Capt Jacob Goldman

Place and Date of Interview: Regimental CP at Munster, Germany on 21 May 1945.

Maps: Series 4040, Sheets: 106, 121, 122, 137 and 152. Series 4471, Sheets: XXXV-13 and 14; XXXVII-12 and 13; XXXVI-12, 13, 14 and 15; XXXIII-13

Journals: XXXIV-14.

Regimental Journal and After Action Reports employed.

Comments: Person interviewed expressed difficulty in remembering the events because of the lapse of time. Reference to and frequent study of the Regimental Journal and After Action reports were made.



320th Infantry Regiment

Interview with Major Thomas P. McElroy, Regimental S-3, at the Regimental CP at Munster, Germany, on 21 May 1945.

8 January to 17 January

On the morning of 8 January the 1st Battalion of this regiment was attached to the 134th Infantry, and the balance of the regiment was fighting in the Harlange sector (599-499). That morning the remainder of the regiment was attached to the 6th Armored Division, which at that time was in the vicinity of Bastogne. The 3d Battalion was attached to CCB of the 6th Armored Division, and the 2d Battalion and Cannon Company were dispatched separately to CCA just south of Bastogne. The regimental headquarters and the Anti-tank Company moved to Martelange (565-389). From that time until midnight of 10 January, the regimental headquarters had no troops under its command except the Anti-tank Company and remained in Martelange while all of its battalions were fighting, the 2d and 3d Battalions fighting under the 6th Armored Division and the 1st Battalion fighting under the 134th Infantry.

About midnight 10 January, the regiment less the 3d Battalion reverted to the 35th Infantry Division control. At the same time the 2d Battalion and Cannon Company were attached to the 134th Infantry. Thus our 1st and 2d Battalions and Cannon Company were attached to the 134th Infantry. The 3d Battalion remained attached to the 6th Armored Division. We were still without any troops.

On the afternoon of the 12th the regiment was again attached to the 6th Armored Division. The 2d Battalion became division reserve of the 6th Armored Division, and the remainder of the regiment assembled in the north-east section of Bastogne and was organized into Combat Team Byrne, consisting of the regiment less the 2d Battalion, the 68th Tank Battalion, Company C of the 603d TD Battalion, Troop A of the 86th Cavalry Squadron, the 212th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, the 216th Field Artillery Battalion and

the 775th Field Artillery Battalion.

The snow on the ground was approximately one foot deep. The visibility was fair, although the weather was cold. Some slush was beginning to form.

At 0830, 13 January, CT Byrne attacked northeast toward Michamps (617-622). The attack was made on a relatively narrow front compared to our former actions. The 101st Airborne Division was on our left, and the 6th Armored Division on our right. Our left ^{FLANK} rested on a railroad which ran from Bastogne to Bourcy, and our right ^{FLANK} ran along a trail which ran generally two kilometers south of the railroad. We met very determined resistance from the German 5th Paratroop Division, and by mid-morning the two assault platoons of the 3d Battalion reached the north edge of their objective, the woods at 602-602, where they were forced to withdraw by enemy infantry supported by tanks and SP guns. Our tanks were of little help. As rapidly as they approached an attacking position, they were destroyed by fire from the German tanks and SP guns. During this operation, the tank company commander of the tanks, supporting the 3d Battalion, was killed, and tank support was disrupted.

By the time darkness fell, we were able to secure a favorable position along the edge of the woods through the assistance of the 502d Airborne Regiment, and the 3d Battalion was dug in at 597-607 to 589-597.

It was determined that about the only way we could reduce the resistance of the Germans within those woods was to get an air strike on it. Therefore, during the night I made the necessary plans and arrangements with the 6th Armored Air Support Officer to have an air strike with fighter planes, using Napalm bombs and strafing the woods immediately to the front of the 3d Battalion.

During the following morning on 14 January, 1st Lt Sidney Silverman, acting as regimental air officer, accompanied an air support party to a position in defilade east of Bastogne, where they were on line with the target.

From a nearby hill they could observe the target, and Lt Silverman and the air party from that position guided the planes to the target. The strike was delivered at 0925 in the morning, but the napalm bombs did not have the effect in the woods which had been anticipated and desired. We had hoped to burn the woods down, but either because of the snow or defects in the bombs, the woods did not burn. There were, however, numerous explosions in the woods, and when the 1st and 3d Battalions attacked through it, they found numerous enemy dead, several destroyed German tanks, an abandoned German Command Post and a high frequency radio station. The woods was secured by 1430.

On the morning of the 15th the 1st Battalion attacked before dawn without any artillery preparation to seize the town of Oubourcy. Company A, the leading company, cleared the town after an all-day house-to-house fight and captured an entire enemy battalion, including the battalion commander and his staff. The battalion commander admitted the enemy in the town were taken completely by surprise. We got his diary. It had the following entries made before dawn: "I think I hear the Americans coming, but I am ready." His last entry was, "Soon I shall be a prisoner."

The 2d Battalion, which was returned to our control during the day, was committed on the left of the 1st Battalion, where they rapidly drove the enemy from the woods immediately west of the town of Oubourcy. The 3d Battalion, on the right of the other two battalions, also made limited gains.

On the morning of 16 January we again attacked after an artillery preparation to seize the town of Michamps, and by mid-morning we had secured the town against light opposition, taking numerous prisoners.

We were then ordered to continue the attack and seize the woods and road south of Bourcy. That particular road was essential to the Germans as a supply route in order to maintain their resistance in front of the 26th Division. Our orders were to seize the road and cut the enemy off. At

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1145 we began the attack with the 1st and 2d Battalions with a company of medium tanks attached to each of them. The 101st Airbourne had requested an airstrike on the town of Bourcy. Something happened to that strike, because one or two bombs hit the center of the town of Michamps, and while it did not hurt any of our personnel, it did disrupt the attack and caused a two hour delay in the jump-off. The attack continued throughout the afternoon and night, and by mid-morning of the following day, 17 January, positions which dominated the Bourcy-Longvilly road were gained.

On 18 January the regiment was released from the control of the 6th Armored Division and relieved by the 134th Infantry, after which it moved back to the vicinity of Sainleze in 35th Infantry Division reserve. During this entire period, enemy artillery fire was generally heavier than any other period in our combat experience, especially in the enemy use of SP guns. In our attack on Oubourcy, the Germans fired openly on marked ambulances and peeps flying the Geneva Convention insignia.

8 November to 26 December

The regiment attacked from the edge of the Gremecy Forest through the 134th Infantry on 080600 November with the 3d Battalion on the left, the 2d Battalion on the right and the 1st Battalion in reserve, to seize the town of Fresnes. The attack was preceded by a one-hour artillery preparation. The mission of the 3d Battalion was to seize Fresnes and that of the 2d Battalion to take the enemy positions on the western edge of Foret de Chateau Salins.

The 3d Battalion seized the town of Fresnes by 1000 after a house-to-house fight. The 2d Battalion entered the edge of the Chateau Salins Forest in the afternoon after a bitter fight across an open, bare field. The town of Fresnes had been a sore spot in our action in the Gremecy Forest area during the preceding month. It was a focal point for the supply of German

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troops in that area and was exceedingly well defended by excellent artillery, numerous mortars and by a determined enemy, deeply dug in. I estimate that Fresnes, at the time it was attacked, was held by a German battalion. Each day during the month preceding the attack, Fresnes had been heavily shelled by our own artillery, and after we had seized the town there was nothing left but a shell. It was almost totally razed.

After a bitter fight across an open field, the leading elements of the 2d Battalion entered the edge of the Chateau Salins Forest by afternoon. Almost immediately, the enemy opened up with very heavy artillery and mortar concentrations and enfilade machine gun and small arms fire and compelled them to withdraw from the woods with heavy losses. Another effort was made by the battalion during the afternoon to re-enter the woods, but it was unsuccessful, and the battalion took up positions along a railroad cut and embankment in the open field and held those positions throughout the day. Regiment then ordered the 1st Battalion up in order to block the gap between the 2d and 3d Battalions.

The attack was resumed on the 9th of November with the 2d Battalion attacking in the southern sector and the 1st Battalion in the north sector of the western edge of the forest. The 3d Battalion, in regimental reserve, was still busy mopping up Fresnes. By the end of the day the 1st and 2d Battalions after much heavy fighting were able to reach our phase line "Victor", extending generally from 064-305 to 070-297 and then southeast to 085-288.

The attack through the heavy woods continued the following day, 10 November. The 3d Battalion passed through the 2d Battalion. The fighting was very heavy, and by darkness both battalions had reached a line extending from 083-294 to 091-297. The attack continued on 11 November, and by the morning of 12 November the 2d and 3d Battalions had reached the regimental

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objective, the eastern edge of the forest. This forest had been well prepared by the enemy for a period of some six weeks. Enemy defensive installations were deeply entrenched and had excellent artillery support. The trees were very heavy, and our casualties from tree bursts were heavy. There were only a few foot paths through the woods, and supply was difficult. It rained continuously, and the weather was cold. The snow had disappeared, and the ground was very muddy. The men had not yet been given shoe pacs.

Prior to the attack, 3d Army Headquarters ordered that no overshoes be worn in the attack, and that they be left in company supply piles. We requested permission for the men to retain their overshoes because of the mud and cold and the possible increase of trench foot. Permission was denied on the theory that the infantry could move faster and easier in the attack without the overshoes. This theory was partially born out by the 2d Battalion in its attack when it had to cross through a sector of enemy barbed wire. The men claimed that if they had had overshoes on, they would probably have been caught on the wire, whereas, without them they could move with relative ease. However, as a result there was a relatively high percentage of trench foot.

On 13 November the regiment was placed in division reserve in the vicinity of Vaxy where it remained until the 14th. On that day the 2d Battalion was made available as regimental reserve for the 134th Infantry and moved to Pevange.

On 17 November the regiment moved to the vicinity of Morhange and on 18 November resumed the attack in the sector of the 134th Infantry east of Morhange. The regimental objective was the area including the towns of Helling, Inshing and Kappelkingen. We attacked every day thereafter for seven days through cold and wet weather over terrain characterized by almost a total lack of routes of communication, which made hand carrying

of both food and ammunition normal.

On the 25th of November the regimental objective was reached. The town of Lenning, where our CP was, was located on the right boundary of the 35th Infantry Division. The railroad running through Lenning was the boundary between the 35th and 26th Infantry Divisions, and the town of Lenning was the only town as far as I know in the entire corps sector that was undamaged by fire of any kind. This was due to the fact that the line was so drawn that we thought it was in the 26th Division sector and the 26th Division thought it was in our sector. Consequently, nobody shot at it.

On 21 November the 2d Battalion was engaged in an effort to seize the town of Grening, situated in a hollow surrounded by a ridge. The battalion had surrounded the town from three sides on this ridge. Because of the very determined resistance by the enemy with heavy artillery, mortar and tank fire, they could not get into it. During the night a German tank began firing at the 2d Battalion from a nearby hill. We had no knowledge of a tank ever being there, since no tanks had been heard moving in that vicinity. When the town had been secured on 23 November, we found that the Germans had rigged up a block and tackle system, and by means of a winch had pulled the tank up on the hill and opened fire at us. Because of this, the tank could not be heard being moved into position. After firing a few rounds, the tank started its motor and backed down the hill.

On 27 November the regiment less the 1st Battalion moved to Pontpierre and assembled there as the division reserve. The 1st Battalion remained in place, attached to the 137th Infantry, and again joined the regiment on 28 November.

On 1 December the regiment moved to the vicinity of Kappelkingen and on 4 December forced a crossing of the Maderbach River with the mission of seizing the west bank of the Saar River. The 2d and 3d Battalions were in

the assault and the 1st Battalion in reserve. The regiment continued its advance over swampy ground and in rainy and wet weather and on 8 December reached the west bank of the Saar River, including the towns of Siltzheim and Wittring. The resistance of the enemy from the Maderbach River to the Saar was not overly severe but was characterized again by very poor routes of communication.

On the morning of 8 December the 1st and 2d Battalions effected by stealth a crossing of the Saar River and the canal which paralleled it. The crossing was made by engineer assault boats manned by our own infantry troops, and in one case the 1st Battalion crossed the canal by means of an under water tunnel which they had located. The enemy on the opposite bank was taken completely by surprise, and the greater part of the defending units were either captured or killed.

On 9 December the 3d Battalion crossed the Saar in the vicinity of Wittring by means of an engineer constructed foot bridge. No artillery preparation preceded this crossing, although the regiment, as in the prior crossing, had a great deal of artillery backing it up which was used on located targets after the assault had begun. The main bridge across the Saar at Wittring had been blown by the enemy and the river at that time was flowing very rapidly. The river at that point was about 75 yards wide. But the actual span of the bridge was some 200 yards because of the width of the channel in which the river flowed. The east bank of the river held by the enemy was a precipitous cliff spotted with numerous concrete pill boxes with excellent fields of fire upon all approaches to the river line. However, most of these pill boxes were discovered to be unoccupied.

By 12 December the regiment had advanced to the south bank of the Blies River. From this position they could fire into the town of Bliesbruck (57-59). In the afternoon the first members of the regiment reached the Blies

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River and crossed the international boundary into Germany. The 3d Battalion crossed the Elbes River again by stealth and caught the enemy completely by surprise. The enemy positions were circumvented and attacked from the rear. German soldiers in their foxholes with their rifles aimed at the bank where our troops had been were found asleep. The 3d Battalion advanced north, and on 16 December took the town of Reinheim against scattered resistance. The 2d Battalion, meanwhile, had patrolled into the town of Niedergailbach, Germany and on the 18th seized this town, the first town the regiment captured in the German Reich.

On the 21st of December the regimental staff was contacted early in the morning by a representative of the 346th Infantry Regiment, 87th Infantry Division, and advised that the 346th Infantry was to relieve the regiment. We had no knowledge of a relief and after frantic calls to division, were authorized to be relieved in the sector. By nightfall the 346th Infantry had relieved all of our elements, and this regiment had moved into an assembly area in the vicinity of Holving.

On 23 December we began a movement to Metz over a route which was changed three different times after its original issue by division headquarters, the changes being necessitated by German air attacks on Allied convoys. The regiment moved into an old German barracks at Metz on 25 December.