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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 320TH INFANTRY REGIMENT  
(35TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE BATTLE OF ST. LO, FRANCE,  
9 JULY - 19 JULY 1944. (NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 320th Infantry Regiment, 35th U.S. Division in the battle of St-Lo, France, 9 July - 19 July 1944.

Since this is a historical account of the actions of one of the many First Army units that fought their way across the hedgerows of Normandy in the battle of St-Lo, it will be necessary to give the reader the "big picture" of the battle in order that he may better understand and appreciate this account of the operations of the 320th Infantry.

With the capture of Cherbourg on 26 June, any hopes that the Germans had for pushing the Allies back into the sea, faded. Field Marshall Rommel, in command of the German Army in Normandy, as records show, was convinced that with Cherbourg in our hands elimination of the beachhead was no longer possible. (1) The First U.S. Army had accomplished its mission, it had secured a lodgement area on the continent from which further offensive operations could be developed. (2)

At the end of June Hitler decided that the present positions of the German Seventh Army were to be held, at all cost, and any breakthrough prevented by tenacious defense and local counterattacks. An Allied attack was expected along the entire front. (3) (Map A)

Hitler's expectation, based on an estimate of the situation by the German Army's High Command, was correct, for with the lodgement area now secure, preparations were being made to carry out General Eisenhower's plans for eruption from the lodgement zone. Fresh troops, new units and supplies were brought in across the beaches. But the lodgement

(1) A-3, p. 32; (2) A-2, p. 126; (3) A-1, p. 7.

area was insufficient in size to contain the build-up of the powerful striking force to effect a breakthrough. Also the terrain south of the First Army's lines was unfavorable for maneuver, and every feature of the terrain favored the enemy, an enemy who had skillfully organized that terrain to his utmost advantage. Even the weather was against the First Army. Thus the stage was set for a most difficult and bloody phase of the Campaign of Normandy: the "Battle of the Hedgerows" during the first three weeks of July 1944. (4)

#### PRELUDE TO THE - "BATTLE OF THE HEDGEROWS"

On July 44 the First U.S. Army's front (Map A) of 25 miles extended northwest from Caumont on the left (east) to Carentan, and from Carentan west across the Cherbourg peninsula to the Atlantic. Four Corps, V, XIX, VII, and VIII, totalling twelve divisions were poised for the attack against the German Seventh Army.

The objectives of Lt. General Bradley's First U.S. Army were:

1. To seize the high ground along the Coutances, St. Gillis and St. Lo road.
2. To capture St. Lo and the high ground to the east.

The First Army was in dire need of more elbow room, <sup>with</sup> lateral road nets leading southward to launch a great breakthrough effort to the south. The plans for Operation "Cobra", the breakthrough effort, had already been made. The "Battle of the Hedgerows" was only a preliminary to the main effort.

The high ground along the Coutances-St. Lo road would provide the First Army with ground that could be used for <sup>the</sup> jump-off on attack into country that was favorable for tank operations and tactical maneuver. Furthermore it brought them nearer to the exit from the Bocage country, beyond which lie the flat plains stretching east toward the Seine River and south toward the Loire River. (5)

(4) A-1, p. 2, (5) A-1, p. 2.

A map shows that St. Lo's military importance is derived from being a hub of main roads that lead in every direction of the Bocage country. This road net provided the Germans with good connections east or west of the Vire River. The German Seventh Army realized that this communication center was the keystone of its defense of its sector and assigned the 11 Parachute Corps, consisting of elements of the 3rd Parachute Division, elements of four other regiments and a weak battle group remnant of the 352nd Division, to defend the sector. (6)

These same roads animating out off or leading into St. Lo were needed by the First Army to provide communications within its own sector and for the breakthrough which was to be mounted.

The attack was to begin on the right then widened progressively eastward with each corps attacking on Army Order. The whole line was to pivot on V Corps <sup>located</sup> on the left. (7)

On 3 July Maj. General Troy H. Middleton's VIII Corps opened the attack with its three divisions abreast. The corps was stopped by heavy enemy resistance along the line le Plessis-Mont Castré Forest-la Haye-du-Puits after three days of fighting ~~the~~ enemy counterattacks with armor, showed his intentions of holding at all cost. (8)

On 4 July Maj. General J. Lawton Collins VII Corps opened its drive along the Carenton - Periers road. Its attack by the untried 83rd Infantry Division was confined along the road, on a front of about three miles, by the Taute River bottomlands and the swamps of Seves River. (Prairies Marecageuses) Three days of heavy fighting had netted a little more than 2,000 yards. The Germans had organized in great depth the narrow strip of land along the road. (9)

The XLX Corps, Maj. General Charles H. Corlett commanding, launched its attack on 7 July toward its objective: the high ground east and

(6) A-1, p.5; (7) A-1, p. 2; (8) A-1 p. 4; (9) A-1, p. 5.

west of St. Lo. At this time the Corps had two divisions in line, the 30th and 29th, <sup>with 1st</sup> and 3rd Armored Division in reserve, the 35th Infantry Division on its way from the beaches was to reinforce the attack. In order to straighten out the Corps line, the 30th Infantry Division was committed on the west of the Vire River. The 30th crossed the Taute-Vire Canal and the swamps and marshland in the vicinity, and continued the attack across typical hedgerow terrain and by the end of 8 July had reached le Desert. Combat Command "B", 3rd Armored Division in Corps Reserve was committed on 8 July for an immediate attack in direction of St. Gilles west of St. Lo, through the zone of the 30th Division. The next day a near breakthrough by an Engineer Battalion of the 2nd S.S. Panzer Division supported by infantry was stopped with the aid of heavy artillery fire. By 10 July the 30th Division held the line running from about 200 yards north of Pont-Hébert on the Vire River west to le Desert. The advance south along the Vire River toward Pont-Hébert was slowed considerably by enemy fire from across the Vire River. The dangerous salient south of la Meauffe was a constant threat to Maj. General Hobbs' left flank. (10)

The First Army's attack east of the Vire River against St. Lo was to be delivered on a 10 mile front, with the 29th Division, making the main effort along the St. Lo - Bayeux highway and then at St. Lo itself. The 35th Division was to push south in its zone between the Vire River and the Isigny - St. Lo highway, and take the north bank of the Vire River in the elbow just northwest of St. Lo. This advance was also to protect the left flank of the 30th Division in its drive to the west of the Vire. The 2nd Division of V Corps was to capture the dominating observation point, Hill 192, east of St. Lo. The attack was scheduled

(10) A-1, p. 9-36.

for 9 July but was postponed until 11 July to allow the 35th Division, who had taken over the defensive position held by the 29th Division between la Meauffe and Villiers-Fossard, one day to orient itself on the terrain. (See Map "A") (11)

#### THE 35th INFANTRY DIVISION ENTERS THE COMBAT ZONE

The 35th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Paul W. Baade, landed at Omaha Beach during the period of 5-7 July. The division moved to a concentration area two miles west of Colombieres. During the night of 9-10 July, the division moved from its assembly area into its sector east of the Vire River. General Baade issued Field Order number 2, 9 July, ordering the 134th Infantry, 137th Infantry, and the 320th Infantry to enter the battle positions relieving elements of the 29th and 30th Infantry Divisions. (Map B) The 134th Infantry relieved the 2nd Battalion 120th Infantry Regiment, 30th Division and reverted to corps reserve. (12)

The 29th Division had assaulted the beaches on D Day, 6 June 44 and had fought its way inland to its present position, about 3 miles north of St. Lo. Here the 29th was forced by sheer exhaustion and a lack of replacements, to take up a defense position which it held until relieved by the 35th Division. (13) The 115th Infantry, 29th Division remained in position on the left flank of the 35th.

The relief by the 35th was accomplished without the benefit of any reconnaissance beforehand. No unit was permitted to send a reconnaissance party forward to contact the units being relieved and to reconnoiter its zone by daylight. (14)

The 35th Division entered the front lines on the night of 9-10 July 44, an untried but well trained division, well trained in everything but "hedgerow" warfare. The morale of the unit and men was high, and they were ready for the battle test. (15)

(11) A-1, p. 51; (12) A-4, Chapter 111; (13) Statement of Colonel Bernard A. Byrne, then Regimental Commander of 320th Infantry, on 14 January 48. (14) Statement of Colonel B.A. Byrne, then Regimental Commander of 320th Infantry, on 14 January 48; (15) A-5, p.1; Personal knowledge.



The 35th Infantry Division, National Guard, was ordered into Federal Service in December 1940. Its units of the Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri National Guard assembled at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, in January, 1941, for training. After participating in the Louisiana Maneuvers of that year, the division took over the defense of the Southern California Sector of the Western Defense Command. Early in 194<sup>3</sup>, the units of the now triangularized division, assembled at Camp San Luis Obispo, California for further training and reorganization. Here the 320th Infantry Regiment was activated and assigned to the 35th. (16)

The entire division moved to Camp Rucker, Alabama in April 1943. After months of rigorous and thorough training on the combat ranges and battle courses, the unit was considered sufficiently trained to participate in the Tennessee Maneuvers, November 43 - January 44. After two months of training in realistic combat problems, the division was welded into an efficient combat team. It moved to Camp Butner, North Carolina for its final polishing. Combat teams 134th and 137th went to West Virginia to take mountain training. Early in May 44 the 35th Division was declared ready for combat and sailed for England. During its stay in England, the division received no training in hedgerow warfare although higher headquarters was well aware that the division would soon be committed in the hedgerow country of Normandy. (17)

#### THE REGIMENTAL SITUATION

The 320th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division left its bivouac area in the vicinity of Bricqueville, France, headed toward the front on the morning of 9 July 44. (18) Late that evening just at dusk, about 2300 hours, the regiment arrived in an assembly area south of St. Claire sur-L'Elle. (Map A) Concurrently with the movement of the main body of troops, a quartering party left the regiment to reconnoiter routes to the assembly area and to the rear of the positions held by the 29th

(16) A-4; (17) Statement by Colonel Bernard A. Byrne, then Regimental Commander, 320th Infantry, on January 48; (18) A-5, p. 1.

Division. During the daylight hours of 10 July the regiment moved into position in rear of the line preparatory to occupying their positions under cover of darkness. Units were not permitted by the commanding officer of the 29th Division to send personnel forward to reconnoiter the battle positions during daylight. The reason given for this restriction was that the area was under observation and the presence of reconnoitering parties would bring German mortar and artillery fire on the position. (19)

The 320th relieved the 175th Infantry and the 29th Reconnaissance Troop, 29th Division at approximately 0400 hours, 10 July 44, and occupied the position extending generally along an "L" shaped line from the vicinity of la Nicollerie on the east to the vicinity of Mon Blanche, just north of le Carillon on the west (Map B). The 1st and 2nd Battalions moved into position, the 1st on the right (west). The 3rd Battalion, less 3rd Platoon, Company M (Mortars), was placed in reserve. The mortar platoon of Company M moved into position to reinforce the fire of Company H for the attack to be launched at 0600 hours the following morning.

The men of the two battalions took over the prepared positions of the 29th Division, but since the 29th was occupying an extended frontage with a reduced force, many of the men had to dig in upon arrival. Consequently the 88 mm artillery and mortar fire which greeted the newly arrived units inflicted many casualties. The Germans evidently knew that the 320th Infantry had moved into position for they shouted across the lines to tell the newly arrived men that they were facing a hopeless task. The heavy shelling continued throughout the day. Evidently the Germans were trying to break the moral of the green and untried men of the 320th.

During the time that the 3rd Platoon of Company M was preparing

(19) Statement of Colonel B.A. Byrne, then Regimental Commander, 320th Infantry, on 14 January 48.

its mortar positions an intense concentration of mortar and artillery fire was placed upon it, followed by a limited attack by a strong combat patrol. However the platoon had carefully provided for its own local security and the patrol was beaten off. One section of mortars was rendered wholly ineffective by this attack but was reorganized later that day.(20)

Orders were issued that radios would not be used in the area until ordered otherwise. The basis for this imposed radio silence was that XIX Corps Intelligence had reason to believe that the Germans had electronic radio locator equipment which they had carried back from the coastal defenses. This imposed radio silence contributed to the failure of the first attack the following day. The assumption that the enemy to our front had these radio locators was entirely fantastic. (21) The Germans merely had excellent observation and upon spotting a radio would bring observed fire down upon it. This is evidently why the men of the 175th Infantry told us not to use radios. These rumors and unfounded beliefs were very demoralizing to our radio operators and seriously impeded the efficiency of the regimental and battalion communications for days. Colonel Byrne ordered the use of radios after the first attack. Also the men were told by the members of 175th Infantry that as long as they didn't fire at the Germans the Germans wouldn't fire at them. This factor was detrimental to the morale of the men for they of course wanted to let well enough alone and were reluctant to fire. Rumors have an adverse effect on troops and must be curtailed. The troops must be constantly oriented and informed.

The 35th Division was to take part in a coordinated attack to be launched by all three divisions, 35th, 29th, 30th, of XIX Corps at 110600 July. The objective for the Division was the high ground along the north bank of the Vire River between St. Lo and the bend in the river (Map B). General Baade planned the attack with two regiments abreast; the 320th on

(20) Statement by Captain Victor English, then commanding M Company, on 14 January 48; (21) Statement by Colonel B.A. Byrne, on 14 January 48.

the left was to execute a difficult wheel in the course of attacking the German main line of resistance. This tactical problem and the terrain, the hedgerows, were to complicate the first days of battle for the 320th Infantry. The 320th was to learn the hard way, in its opening battle that hedgerow terrain demanded tactical skill and know-how which they, as green troops, did not possess.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE TERRAIN AND THE GERMAN DEFENSE

The most dominating terrain feature in the zone of operations of the 320th is a large flat topped hill or plateau extending south to St-Lo and the Vire River. (Map B) This high ground, 125 meters at the highest point, gave the Germans an excellent point of vantage from which they had excellent observation of the 320th area. Hill 108, on the northern nose, was the only high ground in the hands of the 320th. It is a gentle rolling country, with numerous orchards and trees and three small north-south streams, two of which flank the regimental sector. The streams are obstacles to vehicles but the stream beds serve as excellent avenues of approach into our position.

One secondary two way road cuts through the zone from the north to the south. All other roads or farm trails are narrow defiles lined on both sides by hedgerows. The enemy has several favorable road nets.

Generally the country is a succession of farm fields bounded by ditches, small trees and hedgerows. An aerial photo showing terrain and hedgerow characteristics of Normandy with the caption-"Birdman's View of Hell"-very amply describes the terrain in the area of operations of the 320th Infantry. The farm lands are cut into numerous small fields, approximately 75 by 100 yards, by hedgerows. The hedgerows are grass covered mounds of dirt and stone ranging in height from three to five feet, and varying in width at the base from four to six feet. The roots of the trees and

hedges that grow on top of most of them spread and intertwine throughout the hedgerow and bind it together into a formidable wall. The hedges are high enough to give excellent concealment and routes of approach. The hedgerows form a wall completely around the fields. The entire area is compartmented by these hedgerows. These small closed fields and orchards are arranged in a helter-skelter manner and not corner to corner like the squares on a checkerboard. They follow no set pattern as to size or shape. Hedgerows border the roads and paths, which are barely wide enough for a vehicle to use. These numerous compartments covering the landscape favor the defense. This terrain dissolved the fighting into a series of little skirmishes by squads or platoons which made coordination and control extremely difficult and denied the 320th the use of its greatest asset - FIRE POWER. (22)

The enemy organized some of the fields into strongpoints which he would defend until forced back, and then fall back unseen to another previously prepared field. Their living quarters, practically bombproof, were dug down deep into and underneath the hedgerows with an overhead covering of lumber, logs, or tin piled high with brush and dirt. He was protected against anything but a direct hit by artillery or mortar fire. Near this position he dug a battle position which he manned when the artillery or mortar fire ceased. The German, a past master at camouflage, was further aided by the concealment afforded by the hedges and trees. To quote Julius Caesar who had written of this type of hedgerow, "They present a fortification like a wall through which it is not only impossible to enter but even to penetrate with the eye". A squad or less could defend a field against a superior force.

The pattern of defense encountered was a machine gun placed at each of the forward corners of the field to deliver murderous cross fire against

(22) Personal knowledge.

the attacker coming across the field. Guns were also sighted to fire down perpendicular hedgerows approaching the position. The machine guns were well concealed and dug-in and were difficult to locate or to knock-out. The machine gun fire forced the attacker to seek cover behind a hedgerow which the Krauts raked with pre-planned mortar fire or fire directed by observers in trees.

The enemy had organized this natural defensive terrain to the utmost advantage. The position was organized in depth, in contrast to the strong linear defense without which he had employed during the retreat from the beaches. The enemy had several weeks to prepare these positions.

On the nose of a hill south of la Meauffe, between le Carillon and la Mare the enemy organized a deliberate defense in depth which the G-2, XIX Corps later called the "school solution" to the problem of stopping the advance toward St. Lo. (23) This strongly organized position covering an area approximately 1000 yards by 1000 yards, served as a base for patrols, outposts and small groups that harassed the troops of the 35th Division. Both Regiments, 320th and 137th, of the Division also suffered severe losses from the fires of automatic weapons, mortars, and artillery from this position. Unfortunately for the 35th about one-third of the strong points was in the zone of the 320th and the remainder in the 137th's zone. This position was never taken until the German battalion withdrew when the left flank of the German line was pushed back.

The enemy force in front of the 35th Division was the 352nd Infantry Division. Battle groups of the 266th and 353rd Divisions were included under its command. (24) The tactical order of battle of the 352nd was; Battle Group 352 on the left, Battle Group 266 in the center, and Battle Group 352 on the right opposing the 320th Infantry.

*should be in Regt B*

(23) A-6, A-1, p. 84.  
(24) A-1, p. 70.

The 352nd Division had been stationed near St. Lo in January 1944. (25) They had maneuvered in this area and prepared many of the positions which they were now occupying at that time. The division was conducting maneuver excersises near Omaha Beach when the Allies struck. It had been badly mauled by the 29th and 2nd U.S. Infantry Divisions and had been pushed back to its present position by the 29th Division.

#### THE ATTACK

Colonel Bernard A. Byrne, commanding the 320th, issued the attack order at 1800 hours on 10 July. The regiment was to attack the following morning. The plan of attack was to push south, astride <sup>Tan</sup> Road #4 (See map B) and seize the high ground between the bend in the Vire River and St. Lo. (For boundaries, objective, and line of departure see Map B). The 1st Battalion on the right was to execute a difficult turning movement, while attacking a tough salient. The 2nd Battalion on the left was to make the main effort. The 3rd Battalion was placed in reserve. Company C, 60th Engineer Battalion and the 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion were attached to the regiment. (26)

At 0500, 11 July, 200 guns of the Division and supporting Corps artillery smashed at the German positions along the Division front for one hour. At 0600 the 1st and 2nd Battalions went over the hedgerows.

The 2nd Battalion advanced one or two hedgerows but all the ground gained had to be relinquished before dark because of threatened encirclement and exposed flanks due to the failure of the 1st Battalion on the right to push forward. All the machine guns of "H" Company were knocked-out by enemy mortar fire just as the battalion started the attack. The enemy had evidently located the machine gun positions prior to the attack. The machine guns were placed in the same positions used by the 29th Division. The enemy had them "zeroed in" and merely held his fire until the opportune time. (27)

(25) A-7, p. 245; (26) Statement of Colonel B.A. Byrne on 14 January 48; (27) Statement of Captain Dwight D. Bonham, then commanding H Company, on 20 January 48.

Strong enemy fire from the organized strong point in the vicinity of le Carillon plus lack of leadership and aggressiveness on the part of the Battalion Commander contributed to the failure of the 1st Battalion to move forward on the right flank.

During the night of 11-12 July the 3rd Battalion was ordered to relieve the 2nd Battalion on the line. The battalion commander upon receiving orders at about 2100 to effect the relief of the 2nd Battalion that night interpreted the order too literally and ordered the Battalion Executive Officer to march the battalion down Road #4 to the 2nd Battalion sector to effect the relief. At about 2300 hours there was still enough daylight remaining to read newsprint, but in spite of the statement of the battalion executive officer that the road was under observation and directed 88 mm fire, ~~there~~ we were marching <sup>off</sup> toward the enemy under full observation. The Battalion S-3, Captain Albert Fredrickson, on his way back from the front line met the column about 900 yards from the front positions, and he agreed that movement into position until after dark would be costly. Contacting the battalion commander, Lt. Col. O.W. Docka, he persuaded him not to move the unit into position at the present time, even if the battalion did get up the road without severe losses they would never be able to effect the relief on the position. The battalion was finally stopped about 700 yards from the enemy and deployed in the hedgerows along both sides of the road. During the hours of darkness the relief was made without any losses. (28)

Lt. Col. Docka, against the recommendations of his staff, moved his command post to a position located about 100 yards behind his own front line. As expected by the executive officer this position proved untenable because all movement in or out of the command post brought down artillery and mortar fire and occasionally small-arms fire for the area was under direct observation, also enemy mortar fire continually

(26) Personal knowledge.



out the telephone wires leading into the command post. This location was abandoned early that morning in favor of a much better one in a stone farm house 700 yards to the rear of the front lines. Here unlike the restricted quarters in the dugout, the staff and staff sections had plenty of room and were not continually harassed by enemy fire. (29)

The attack launched at 0600 hours 12 July gained no ground. The enemy machine gun and mortar fire was too much for our inexperienced troops. The enemy line was only one field away, about 75 yards, and the enemy machine guns could not be knocked out by our artillery or mortar fire because the fire would endanger our own troops. Also our own machine guns lacked effective fields of fire and provided no fire support for the attacking infantry. The hedgerows made control and coordination very difficult and the attack broke down into a series of skirmishes by platoons and squads.

At about 0500 on 12 July the expected counterattack against the exposed flank of the 3rd Battalion materialized. Company K was pushed back one hedgerow, but Captain Trossen stopped a threatened panic among his men, rallied them and regained the lost ground and pushed forward about 100 yards.

Around 1200 hours especially heavy artillery fire followed by strong patrol action dislodged the left platoon of Company L. The other platoons also pulled back accompanied by some of the men from I Company on their right. The withdrawal of the 2nd Platoon of Company L left the 2nd Platoon of Company M unprotected and they also pulled out. T/Sgt Edward Clark personally covered the withdrawal with heavy machine gun fire, using the "Clark Gable" method. The machine gun platoon went directly back to Capt. V. English at the company command post and he disposed the platoon along the hedgerow in rear of the command post. The riflemen, in withdrawing

(29) Personal knowledge.

\* *Clark Gable*

got confused in the heavy wooded area and were pinned down by artillery fire. Capt. English ordered Lt. Remley the company executive officer to go back to the battalion command post to report the situation. Lt. Col. Docka sent his S-3, Capt. Frederickson forward who upon seizing up the situation said "Let's get the h--- out of here". The 2nd Platoon of Company M was moved back in an orderly fashion across the road and placed in position behind the hedgerow. Artillery and mortar fire was falling throughout the area, Capt. Fredrickson went back to report the situation to the regimental commander. (30)

The battalion executive officer arrived at the scene with a group of riflemen that he had intercepted as they were moving to the rear. The officers began to gather the men together and with the assistance of the non-commissioned officers the position was well organized; no enemy appeared. This force of 200 men and two complete HMG platoons were split and moved up along each side of the road to take back the lost ground. Despite severe shelling and a few skirmishes the line was finally restored. The Germans had failed to exploit their breakthrough.

The 1st Battalion jumped off at 0600 12 July in another unsuccessful effort. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Harry A. Beckley, was relieved, and under the command of the regimental executive officer, Lt. Col, William F. Northam, the battalion pushed forward to about 200 yards north of le Carillon where strong enemy resistance and heavy fire from the "school solution" defense was encountered.

The regimental commander ordered the 2nd Battalion to move into position between the 1st and 3rd Battalion to shorten the frontage of each battalion. The 1st Battalion on the right was placed in a "wing back" reserve position. In view of the counterattack against K Company in the center of the line, the regimental commander believed that the enemy was

(30) Personal knowledge; Statement of Capt. V. English, then commanding M Company, on January 48, 14th.

attempting to expand his la Carillon position. (31)

The varied terrain pattern presented by the hedgerows created some difficulty in the effective direction of artillery fire. The 3rd Battalion Executive Officer and the 216th Artillery Liaison Officer devised a scheme of fire direction by using aerial photographs with all the fields in the sector numbered. With a numbered photograph at the battalion command post and one at the 216th Field Artillery Battalion it was a simple matter to call for a concentration on a designated or numbered field. After this simple device was prepared, a much greater effect from artillery fire was achieved in a minimum amount of time. (32)

Early in the fight, it was found that HE light ammunition for the 81 mm mortar was ineffective against the deeply dug-in enemy positions. The use of HE heavy was instituted on 13 July with gratifying results. In the attack that day two sections of mortars actually leveled a complete section of hedgerow 125 yards in length. Behind this fire support "K" Company moved forward about 150 yards. (33)

Several patrols were sent out that night to feel out the enemy position. From the reports brought back the battalion commander estimated that it was a very strongly organized position. This fact was verified by the fierce enemy resistance encountered the following day in the attack on le Carillon. The town was taken despite the severe flanking fires from the enemy strongpoint.

Since the 2nd Battalion, 137th Infantry, on the right had suffered severe losses attacking the position during the past three days, Col. Byrne decided that the boundaries between the two regiments passed through the strongpoint. He realized that two units were making uncoordinated attacks against the same strongpoint, and neither was hitting it squarely. He

(31) Statement of Col. B.A. Byrne, then regimental commander, on Jan. 14, 48; (32) Personal knowledge; (33) Personal knowledge; statement of Capt. V. English, then commanding M Company, on 14 Jan. 48.

requested the Division Commander to rearrange the boundary so that the strongpoint could be attacked by the coordinated efforts of one regiment. The request was turned down. The decision of the Brig. General Baade was that the boundary would not be moved one inch. (34) As a result the enemy position remained a thorn in the side of the 320th for on 14th July the 157th was ordered to press the attack in the right battalion sector along the Vire River. The flanking mortar fires and counterattacks by strong enemy groups coming from the enemy position continued to harass the 1st Battalion, 320th Infantry. The enemy position held up the two attacking regiments.

Heavy mortar fire continually pounded the 1st and 3rd Battalion sector. The artillery liaison plane would locate the mortars but the artillery fire brought down upon the mortar position would have no effect for when the artillery fire ceased the mortars would start firing again. A messenger from one of the enemy mortar companies was captured. He revealed upon being questioned that the Germans fired their mortars from positions up and down stream beds in the area, firing a limited mission from each position. Consequently by the time the artillery plane could direct fire upon them they were in another of their prepared mortar positions. (35)

The artillery also pounded 88 mm gun positions located from the artillery plane but not a single damaged 88 mm gun was found in the enemy area after he retreated.

During this period extensive patrol activities were instituted by the two front line battalions in an attempt to find a weakness in the enemy defenses. Some interesting patrol actions occurred. I think that two of them are well worth relating because I believe lessons can be derived from these.

(34) Statement of Colonel B.A. Byrne then commanding 320th, on 14 Jan. 48.  
(35) Statement of Colonel B.A. Byrne then commanding 320th, on 14 Jan. 48.

A 1st Battalion Patrol was Captured intact during the early morning hours. The Germans took the prisoners back to Bois Andre 1000 yards south of les Ifs. Upon reaching the area, the party was caught in an American artillery concentration. During the confusion the Sergeant, patrol leader, reassembled his patrol and escaped from his captors. He led the patrol back to his own lines. The Regimental S-2 of course interrogated the Sergeant. He pointed out to the S-2 the route which the Germans had taken and stated that they carefully avoided gates leading into fields and certain roads. He believed them to be mined. He had noticed a headquarters of some kind in passing through les Ifs. This intelligence derived as a result of the Sergeants keen powers of observation and memory saved the regiment from suffering casualties from mines in the forthcoming move southward. (36)

Another night patrol returned to the 1st Battalion Command Post and reported that a concrete pillbox had been located about 100 yards southeast of le Carillon. The patrol augmented by a reduced platoon armed with bazookas was dispatched to eliminate the pillbox. The bazooka rounds hit what looked in the moonlight to be a pillbox but the shells did not detonate. The enemy was alerted and captured the entire patrol. Daylight observation revealed that the "pillbox" was a pile of decaying white sandbags which in the moonlight looked like a concrete wall. The hard nosed bazookas rounds were just buried in the soft sand. This patrol leader had failed to make a close inspection of the "pillbox" and as a result about 20 men were captured.

The tank destroyers attached to the regiment were of no help in any of the attacks. They were merely used as artillery. Tank destroyers are too vulnerable to anti-tank and mortar fire in hedgerow terrain such as that in our area. The company commander, Company C, in his first day of

(36) Statement of Col. Byrne, then commanding 320th, on 14 January 48

1. Inexperienced troops were thrown into battle against a well trained battle-hardened enemy.
2. The hedgerows divided the terrain into numerous small rectangular compartments which favored the defense. It was the military man's "dream terrain for defense". The enemy had several weeks, perhaps months to prepare this natural defensive terrain.
3. The lack of observation by the attacker because of the terrain.
4. The inability of the attacker to use the fire power of all his weapons to their maximum advantage.
5. The 320th was forced to execute one of the most difficult of all tactical maneuvers - to make a turning movement against a strongly organized defense in depth.
6. Hedgerow warfare is a special type operation that requires special training.

The fighting broken down into small unit actions and the lack of team work and the lack of aggressiveness on the part of small unit leaders, squad and platoon, became very evident. The constant change in personnel, with-in a unit, during training phase contributed heavily to this deficiency. The units had not been together long enough to develop into a smooth working team.

Control was made extremely difficult by the radio silence needlessly imposed upon the 320th during the first day of the attack. Control in the hedgerows was a problem, and the radio was the best means of communication.

The Regimental Commander had correctly estimated that a enemy strong point was in the zone of two adjacent regiments. His request to have his

right boundary adjusted was tactically sound. Boundaries must be flexible and must be so placed or adjusted that responsibility for the capture of a tactical objective is not divided between adjacent units.

As a result of this failure to adhere to this sound principle the position was never taken and the advance of two regiments was held-up or delayed and needless casualties were suffered.

The soundness of the principle of fire and movement was well proven. Fire support could not be utilized in direct support of an attack and as a result movement forward was very limited and exceedingly costly. The close proximity of the enemy main line of resistance would not permit the maximum utilization of the fire power of artillery, mortars and automatic weapons without endangering our own troops. Bazookas and hand grenades were ineffective against the well prepared enemy positions.

I believe the troops could have been moved back one hedgerow at night into previously prepared positions to allow the artillery to pound the enemy positions, this artillery to be followed by a well planned night attack. To the best of my knowledge no night attacks were made during this operation.

The 3rd Battalion Commander's plan to move into position to relieve the 2nd Battalion was tactically unsound. Daylight reliefs should not be made in an area that is under observation of the enemy as the 2nd Battalions position was. Even though the move was stopped in time the officers and men of the battalion lost confidence in their leader.

A command post must be so located as to facilitate the control of the unit. The 3rd Battalion's Command Post was placed with-in 100 yards of the front line where it was subjected to the same fires that the forward elements received. Of course the personnel were pinned down and unable to function. The communications were disrupted and the

commander had no control of his battalion that night.

The measures taken by the 3rd Platoon of M Company for its own security during its first night in position enabled it to successfully repel a strong enemy patrol. All units must provide for their own security.

The Infantryman must have a bold and aggressive spirit. He must possess the will to close with the enemy and kill him. The 1st Battalion Commander was not imbued with this spirit and was justly relieved from command.

Needless casualties were suffered by the 320th when it had to move into the front positions without prior reconnaissance of the area. This reconnaissance was not permitted by the commander of the 29th Division because of the enemy observation into the front positions. This reconnaissance could have been accomplished without attracting the attention of the enemy. Reconnaissance of an area into which a unit is to move at night is a fundamental doctrine of night relief.

#### LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. Unit boundaries must be flexible.
2. All units must be responsible for their own local security.
3. Newly committed troops which had not yet developed teamwork under fire will suffer disproportionately heavy losses.
4. Troops must be trained on the type of terrain they will have to fight on.
5. Reconnaissance of a position must be made prior to movement into it.
6. Artillery fire alone cannot rout a well dug-in enemy, the infantry must move in and dig him out with his bayonet.

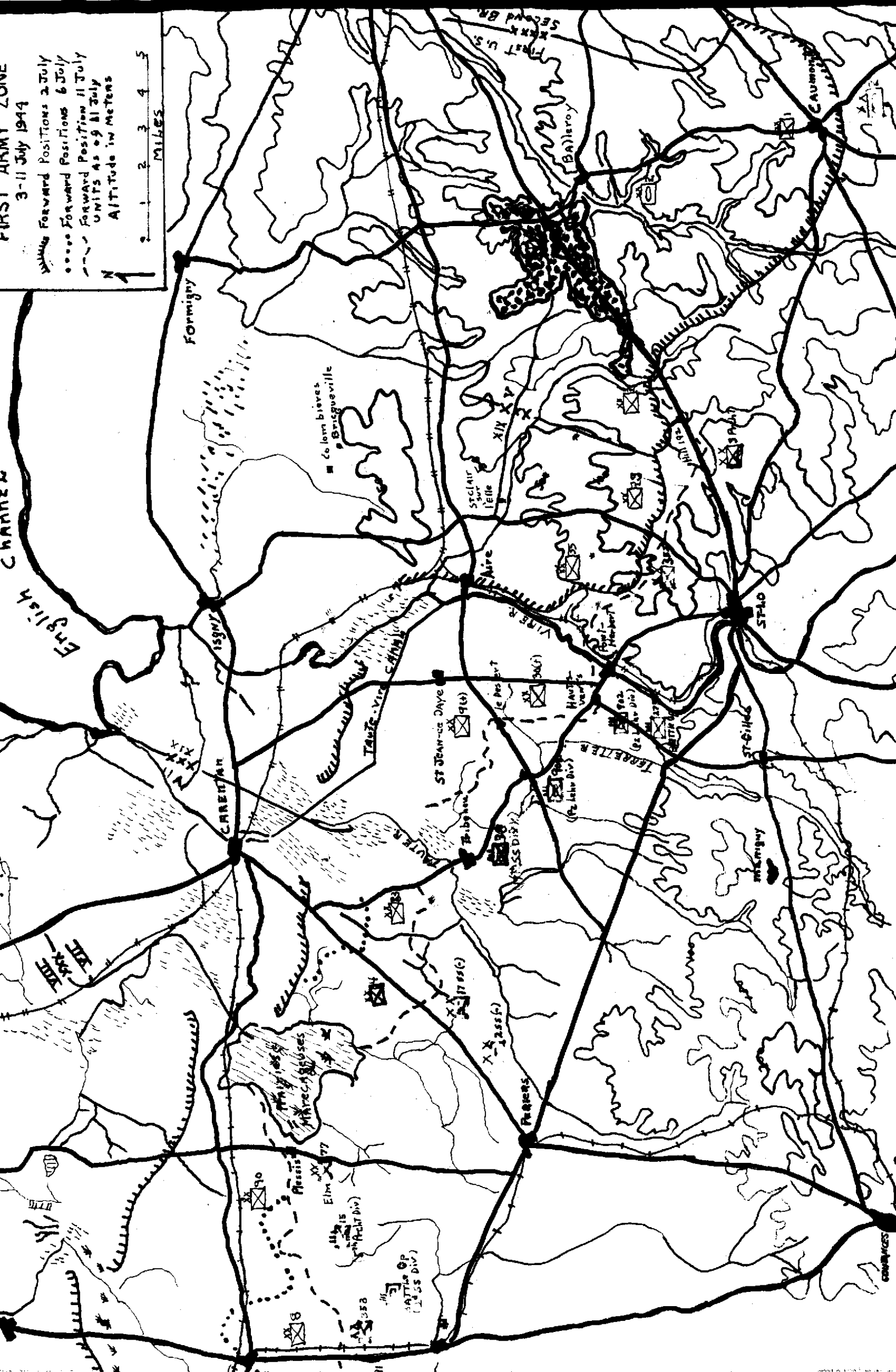
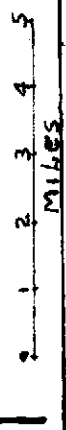


7. Observation and terrain greatly influence the outcome of an operation.
8. The proximity of the enemy main line of resistance will limit the effectiveness of artillery and mortar fires in close support.
9. Boundaries should be placed or adjusted so that key terrain or tactical objectives are entirely within the zone of one regiment. Responsibility for seizing tactical objectives cannot be divided.
10. Machine gun and mortar positions must be moved frequently.
11. A commander must utilize his staff.
12. Camouflage discipline must be maintained. If the enemy cannot see you he cannot fight you intelligently.
13. Troop movement in areas under enemy observation must be made under the cover of darkness.

FIRST ARMY ZONE

3-11 July 1944

- Forward Positions 2 July
- ..... Forward Positions 6 July
- - - - Forward Position 11 July
- UNITS AS OF 11 July
- ALTITUDE IN METERS



# MAP "B"

## 35th DIVISION ATTACK

Line 14 July  
Line 15 July

Contour Interval 10 meters

1000 0 1000  
YARDS

