

INTERVIEW NUMBER _____

Unit: 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division.

Action: 8 November 1944 to 23 January 1945.

Source: Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Dan E. Craig, Battalion Commander during the action.

Interviewer: Capt Jacob Goldman

Place and Date of Interview: 134th Infantry Regimental CP at Wadersloh, Germany on 25 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:

After Actions Reports.

Comments:

Person interviewed expressed difficulty in remembering the events because of the lapse of time. References were made very frequently to the After Action Report for the purpose of refreshing his recollection.

134th Infantry Regiment
1st Battalion

Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Dan E. Craig, at the Regimental CP at Wadersloh, Germany, on 25 May 1945.

On the 29th of December the 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry, following the 3d Infantry, advanced generally north on the right of the Arlon-Bastogne road from its assembly area at Sainlez (54-48) to an assembly area 1,000 meters due west of Lutrebois (58-53). The mission of the 1st Battalion was to make contact with elements of the 101st Airborne Division at Marvie (57-55) 3,000 meters south east of Bastogne (57-56). While we were in this assembly area we were shelled by enemy direct fire weapons. I am quite sure we were not observed moving into that area, but the fact that our 3d Battalion was engaged by our enemy around Lutrebois brought up that fire.

To move the battalion from the vicinity of grid coordinates 551-535 to Marvie meant going over considerable open ground covered with 12 to 18 inches of snow. The enemy were known to occupy the edge of the woods at 565-537 and were able to control the open ground to their west, northwest and north for a distance of 1,000 meters. After an extensive reconnaissance with the commanding officer of my Company A, it was decided that in order to get across this open ground prior to dark we would have to stay at least 1,000 yards away from the wooded area at 565-537 and follow the stream line, taking advantage of the little defilade available. A column of companies formation was selected, due to the very open terrain and the lack of cover. It was also decided that Company B, the second company, would not leave the assembly area until the leading company was at least 1200 meters from the edge of the woods that is approximately at coordinates 551-535.

The commanding officer of Company A launched his attack mid-afternoon,

using the defilade route selected and had very little difficulty until the company reached a small detail of enemy occupying the farm houses and buildings in the south end of Marvie. Company A spent one hour clearing this area and making contact with elements of the 101st Airborne Division. Company B, the second company following the same route as Company A, received direct small arms fire from 540-565 constantly until they closed into the woods at 554-563. Casualties in the rifle companies were light. The enemy had good observation from Hill 550 at 538-582. At 1600 this battalion was subjected to an intense artillery barrage which lasted almost three hours. Elements of the 101st Airborne left Marvie that night and rejoined the balance of their division in Bastogne. This was the initial contact with the German forces southeast of Bastogne. The 4th Armored Division was on our immediate left.

On 1 January the 1st Battalion reverted to regimental reserve and was ordered to remain in the vicinity of Marvie. The 2d and 3d Battalions were engaged with the Germans in the vicinity of Lutrebois. The Germans were using the trails going southwest and west from 552-587 to resupply and reinforce their troops opposing our 2d and 3d Battalions. The regimental commander thought if we could secure this network of trails, we would materially assist the action of the 2d and 3d Battalions. The attack was made on the afternoon of 1 January to accomplish this mission and at 1800 we had control of that area.

During the night of 1 and 2 January the Germans launched a counter-attack from the vicinity of Warden (563-599) with the mission of cutting off my battalion from its communication with the source of supply at Marvie. Throughout the night the situation became more involved. We were not able to keep our wire communications in. We could not resupply or evacuate. At 0400 I brought this situation to the attention of the

regimental commander and recommended that unless we could be reinforced it was advisable to fight our battalion back out of there and assemble in the vicinity of Marvie.

At 1200 on the following day, the order was issued to move the battalion back into Marvie and prepare to make an attack on the German flank at 540-566. Using the wooded area at 554-563 as an assembly area, this attack was to be launched at a time chosen by me. After a discussion with the company commanders, it was decided that 0700 4 January was the best time to launch this attack. My S-3, the company commanders and I went on reconnaissance to select the route to the assembly area and the terrain over which to make the attack and set down phase lines to help control the action. Because of the intense cold, approximately 11 below zero, every effort was made to get dry clothes for every man, serve a hot meal that evening and a hot breakfast at 0200 the next morning. The supply officer was directed to bring up dry socks for every man and all the over-shoes that he could procure.

At 0500 4 January the companies moved to the line of departure and at 0700 they launched the attack. In the first hour they captured three German officers, one a battalion commander, and about 100 men of the 1st Battalion, 331st Regiment. Company C was on the right and Company B on the left. It was snowing and still dark. The snow on the ground was 12 to 20 inches in depth. Visibility was about 20 yards. Due to the lack of visibility and the snow hanging on the bushes and trees and terrain, Company C overshot its objective about 800 yards, and by daylight were cut off from the rest of the battalion by the Germans. At about 1900 Company A was committed to accomplish the mission that Company C had been assigned. Company B was on its objective which was Hill 540 at 538-572. Meanwhile during the morning the Germans committed their regimental

headquarters and anti-tank company as infantry. The balance of the day was devoted to trying to keep Companies A and B out of trouble. The left flank of Company B was constantly under fire by the Germans. It was almost impossible to evacuate wounded due to sniper and automatic fire. Since all of the forces of the battalion had been committed during the day's action no rifle troops of this battalion were available to protect the left flank of Company B. At 1800 I directed the Battalion Headquarters Company Commander to use his A & P platoon as a base and organize a force of 30 men under an officer and attach it to Company B at 2000. This was necessary because Company C, although not lost, was of no real value to the battalion. During the day Company A had lost about 30 men, and Company B 20 men, bringing each of the companies down to a strength of less than 100 men and no more than two officers.

The decision to use the A & P platoon may have been the one thing that we decided to do that saved Company B that night. The Germans, using a strong night raid, attacked the left flank of Company B and overran part of the A & P platoon but were driven off due to very aggressive action. For the next several days our primary job was cleaning up this wooded area. Only one company of infantry and a platoon of tanks were employed. On 8 January the area assigned to the 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, was completely cleared.

18 - 23 January

During this period the 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry, worked as a task force with both CCA and CCB of the 6th Armored Division. The German forces in the vicinity of Bastogne had started their withdrawal, and throughout this period the 6th Armored Division was in pursuit of the withdrawing enemy. The battalion displaced several miles each day, ordinarily by foot using villages and small towns as assembly areas. This was indispensable due to

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the adverse weather conditions. The only contact with the enemy during this period was the delaying groups which they left behind and which we drove off easily.

8 November to the Middle of December

On 8 November the 35th Infantry Division launched an attack against the Chateau Salins woods. The 134th Infantry was in division reserve. On 10 November the 134th Infantry was given a zone on the right of the 320th Infantry. The 1st Battalion was in regimental reserve initially. On 12 November the 1st Battalion, with tanks and TDs attached, was directed to clear the enemy from the town of Vaxy (115-295) and to be prepared to move to Vannecourt on orders. Little enemy resistance was encountered in Vaxy and immediate reconnaissance was made for routes to Vannecourt. The battalion closed into Vannecourt at about 1600 and remained there for the night. A hot meal and dry socks were provided for all of the men. The next day at 0800 (13 November) this task force, consisting of the 1st Battalion, tanks and TDs, moved toward the town of Jahoudange. Company A, commanded by Captain John W. Williams, surprised the enemy at Jahoudange and took the town, suffering only a few casualties. Our company captured a company of enemy and covered the remainder of the battalion as they closed into the town. At 1300 Company A with a company of tanks of the 654th Tank Battalion moved on to the town of Pevange. There again the enemy was caught unprepared. Eight casualties from enemy mortar and artillery fire were suffered and approximately 50 PWs were taken. Before dark Companies B and C closed into Pevange and all supporting weapons were placed in position to continue the attack on Hills 260 and 272. These two terrain features protected the approaches to Morhange.

On 14 November the 1st Battalion launched the attack against Hills 260 and 272 and after suffering heavy casualties secured both objectives

and dug in for the night.

On 15 November the 1st Battalion by-passed Morhange and launched an attack against Racrange, passing over open terrain, but meeting very little opposition. The entire battalion closed into Racrange by 1800, stayed there four or five days, reorganized, received some reinforcements, reconditioned its equipment and prepared for the advance on the enemy.

During the next eight days the 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry, made three river crossings. The first was the night attack across the river at Puttelange (416-506) at 0400, 4 December. An old blown-out flood control gate with improvised material to make a bridge out of it was employed. Company A crossed and assaulted the town of Puttelange from the south. Company C, on the other side of the main Puttelange road, assaulted the town from due west. We suffered only four casualties, one officer and two enlisted men wounded and one enlisted man killed. The enemy was completely surprised. Most of the German garrison were sleeping, and the German officers were found by our riflemen to be still in bed. As the riflemen described it to me, "the German officers tried to make a run from their sleeping quarters without shoes on and were shot down by our riflemen". That same day at 1600 our battalion advanced to the town of Ernestviller (434-520), capturing 19 or 20 Germans.

The following day, 5 December, at 0800 the Battalion moved from Ernestviller to Wouestviller (46-54), leading elements of Company A, the leading company, arriving at this location about 1000. Company B, who was directed to proceed without delay to the town of Roth, passed through Company A. No opposition was encountered. The entire battalion closed into Roth by 1700. Security was posted for the night on the high ground north, east and south of this village.

On 6 December the 1st Battalion moved from Roth to the Sarreguemines road and closed up to the Sarre River in the marshalling yards at 51-56 and reconnoitered the area preparatory to crossing the Sarre River on order.

Detailed plans for the crossing were prepared on 7 December, and in the evening company commanders were assembled, the plans discussed and final orders issued. It was decided to start the crossing of the Sarre River at 0500 with Company A leading, followed by Company B. Company C was to cover the crossing from the railroad work shops and mill near the crossing site (519-559). It was decided to cross on a blown or partially damaged railroad bridge rather than to employ assault boats. During the night the engineers made minor repairs to this bridge, making it available for foot elements and all supply carried by hand. An insane asylum on the opposite side of the Sarre River was our first objective, and we planned to reorganize under the protection of these buildings. It was known at the time that this group of buildings was defended by a mixed group of enemy consisting of navy, marines, Wehrmacht foot troops, and seemingly was a group of deserters gathered together under some officer to defend this area. There were tunnels running under ground from the various buildings.

The attack jumped off on time, and we surprised the enemy in this area. They kept running back and forth from one building to another, using these tunnels and making it very difficult to completely clear this area of all enemy. As soon as the German headquarters further to the east had discovered that we had overrun their positions in this locality, they laid in intense artillery fire, including some 240mm howitzer fire. One round came through the building in which the battalion CP was and exploded in the room next to the operations room. There were no casualties, however. The area was finally secured and defensive positions set up.

On 8 December we remained in this area and awaited completion of the vehicular bridge, being built at Sarreinsming. However, due to constant enemy artillery fire, the completion of this bridge was delayed, and we were ordered to continue the attack to the town of Felpersviller (55-58). The advance was made with Companies B and C abreast, using marching fire across the open ground into the wooded area at 53-56. The left company guided on the railroad tracks to the junction of the highway at the railroad tracks at 55-57. At this location both leading companies came under direct SP fire, causing some casualties. ^{to THE TWO ATTACKING COMPANIES,} Scouts were sent out from the attacking companies over the open ground to investigate the enemy position and strength but were immediately fired on and forced to return. Due to the lack of sufficient daylight hours to properly launch an attack, I decided to hold the positions gained and to attack Felpersviller at 0700 the following morning. Meanwhile, a reconnaissance patrol was sent into Felpersviller at 2100, and it reported back at 2400 with the information that most of these German forces were withdrawing.

The forward battalion command post was located in a railroad station away from its normal battalion command post security. Some security had been furnished by the rifle companies. During the night a German patrol consisting of eight men armed with machine pistols and rifles worked its way up to the railroad tracks from the east and captured two battalion wire men who were repairing the forward wire line approximately 15 yards outside this small station. The wire men, realizing that the command group might also be captured if they sought help, permitted themselves to be captured without trouble. When they were released by the Russians they wrote and told us of their experiences.

On the morning of 9 December we moved into Felpersviller and captured a depleted enemy company with little resistance. Patrols were immediately

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S went out to reconnoiter to the Blies River, but due to the presence of enemy and his accurate artillery fire, little reconnaissance was accomplished. During the evening the battalion moved into the town of Frauenberg with little opposition and reconnoitered for crossing sites in that area. The crossing sites of the Blies River were most treacherous. Artificial man-made banks had been filled to keep the water from working into the buildings of the town. Consequently, the stream was quite swift in the town. However, there was no cover outside of the town, so that the only possible place to assemble was in the protection of the buildings in Frauenberg. An engineer sergeant and I made a detailed reconnaissance of the river that night. It was so dark that we couldn't see the 35 or 40 yards across the stream, but it was easy to hear the German sentries on the opposite bank. Slow drizzling rain kept everything slick and wet, and when we pulled the assault boats down into the town, they came in as quietly as possible but the Germans still picked up the additional activity and shelled the town constantly. Evidently the enemy decided that insufficient time had elapsed for a river crossing there.

On the morning of 10 December at 0500, the 1st Battalion commenced the crossing of the Blies River to the town of Habkirchen (56-59). This was the first actual occupation of German soil by more than patrols within XII Corps. We did effect complete tactical surprise. In fact, the German outposts were just being relieved at the time of the attack, and both the man on duty and the outpost were captured. Then Company C moved right into Habkirchen.

The remainder of the period to the middle of December is adequately covered in the After Action Report.