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GENERAL INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT
THE ARMORED SCHOOL
Fort Knox, Kentucky

ADVANCED OFFICERS CLASS #1

DATE 12 April 48

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE; Reinforced Armored Infantry Team In The Attack of A Town

SCOPE Organization and Employment of the typical tank armored Infantry team in the attack of a village. To include the basic principles of employment, supplemented by the good and bad in practical experience. It is intended to illustrate the faults found through improper employment as compared to the ultimate in success as found in proper employment.

41-146

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During World War II we find many fine combat examples which serve to illustrate the basic fundamentals of armored employment. When the armored division is attacking, normally we find that the division attacks with the various combat commands leading the division effort. The combat command fights the reinforced battalion; either a reinforced tank battalion or a reinforced armored infantry battalion. The combat commander in his estimate of the situation will normally assign missions for each of these battalions in accordance with their capabilities and limitations. It is with a typical employment of a mission frequently assigned to the reinforced armored infantry battalion that this paper will be formulated; that is the attack of a town or village.

In order that we might understand the basic principles of good and bad employment, there are two examples found in the history of World War II which serve to illustrate the major teaching principles to be covered in the attack of the reinforced armored infantry battalion. While the examination of past warfare does not and should not form a major basis in the adoption of methods and tactics to be considered in handling the new weapons and equipment of the armored division, historical examples based upon practical experience can serve to illustrate the methods of employment of new weapons. The basic principles of war do not change. Methods in applying these basic principles do change and are adapted to the improvements in weapons and material. In considering the method of attacking towns and villages with the reinforced armored infantry battalion, the attack of the town of Guebling, France, and the attack of the town of Gungwiler, France, by the same team illustrate the good and bad in armored employment.

THE ATTACK OF GUEBLING BY THE TEAM

In order to fully appreciate the situation as it pertained to the command of our team, a study of the terrain and weather is necessary. Guebling, France, a town of roughly 200 people, was situated in a valley between two small hills. The three good macadam roads which ran into the town formed the main streets for the forty odd buildings that made up Guebling. The town was a small farm village with the buildings being for the most part the European farm home. They were mainly constructed of stone which had been mortared and plastered several years before. The homes usually had a substantial family quarters area which ran into small court yards in the rear to house and collect the farm animals of the community. At the time of this story, the weather was a distinct disadvantage to our attacking team. It was November and the fall rains peculiar to France were falling in abundance. The fields and small orchards were a sea of mud and presented a constant obstacle to good cross country mobility on the part of our tanks and halftracks. The entire area around Guebling was cut by small intermittent streams usually dry or with little water; but at this time of the year were filled with water and generally unfordable.

The general situation at this time was one of an armored division attacking to the east in an attempt to drive on to the rich SAAR PALATINATE area. The division was attacking with two combat commands abreast. We find our team a part of Combat Command A, attacking to the east and capturing small towns and high ground along the axis of advance.

The combat command was attacking in multiple columns based on an armored infantry battalion and two medium tank battalions all reinforced. Within the combat command there were tank Destroyers, tank, armored Infantry, artillery, engineer and service units. The portion of the combat command with which this narrative deals is located southeast of Lidrezin, France, and is initially composed of the Battalion Headquarters of the armored infantry battalion, one medium tank company, one armored infantry rifle company, one platoon of armored engineers, and all of the heavy weapons of the armored infantry battalion found in the battalion headquarters company. For the order of march, initial dispositions of the team and for an understanding of the critical terrain features, see sketch #1.

On the 14 November 1944, our reinforced battalion commander received his orders to continue the attack to the east. The battalion was ordered to move from hill 337 and attack to secure the towns Guebling, Bourgal-treff, Bedestroff, and the large town of Bassing. Plans called for the battalion to then move beyond Bassing and occupy the high ground east of the town. The attack jumped off at 0930 in the morning with the medium tank company leading. It was a cloudy overcast day with a light drizzle of rain. In order to get the vehicles into an attack position, it was necessary to tow the halftracks and key wheeled vehicles with tanks.

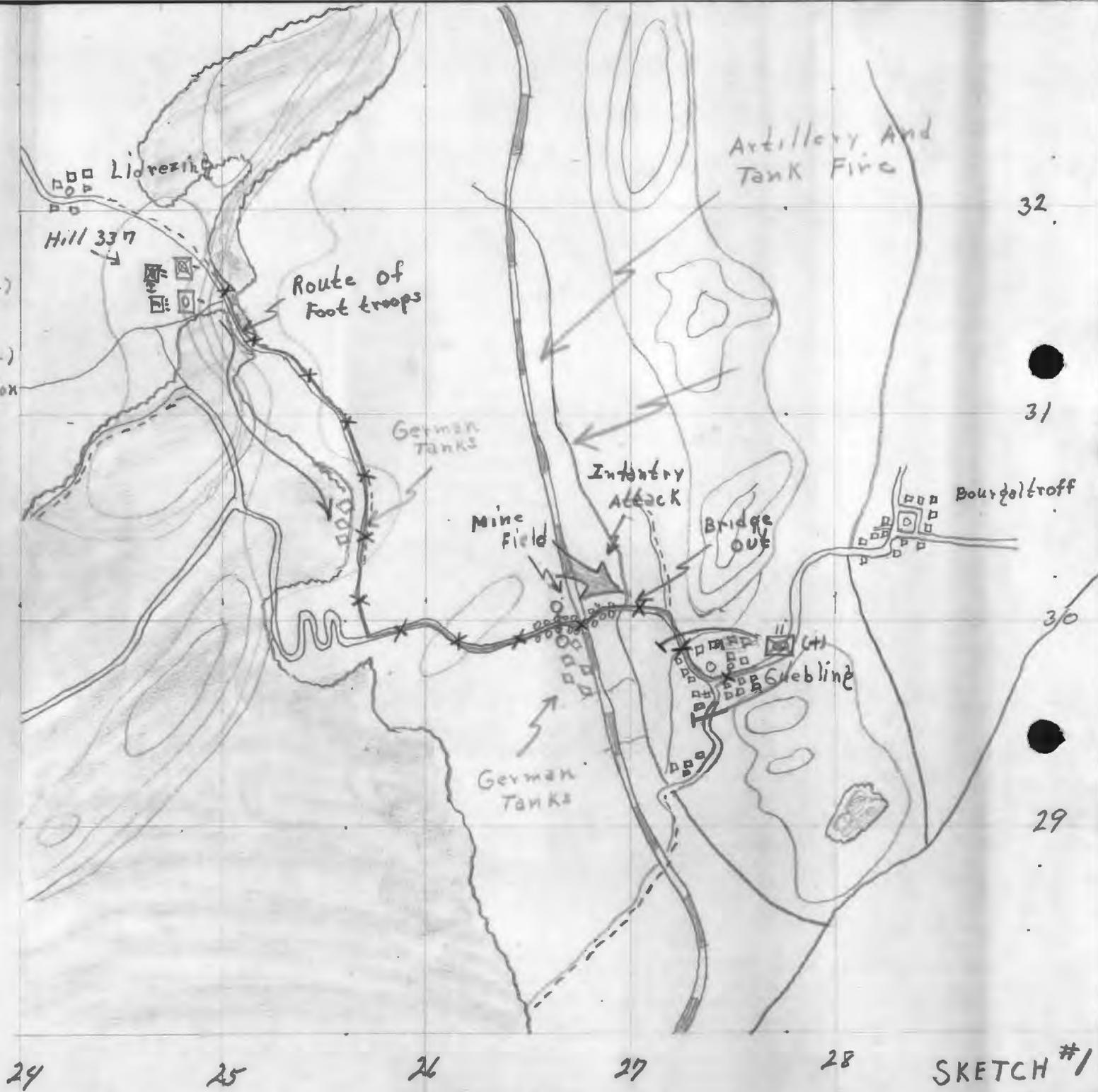
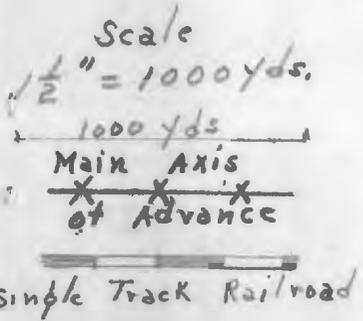
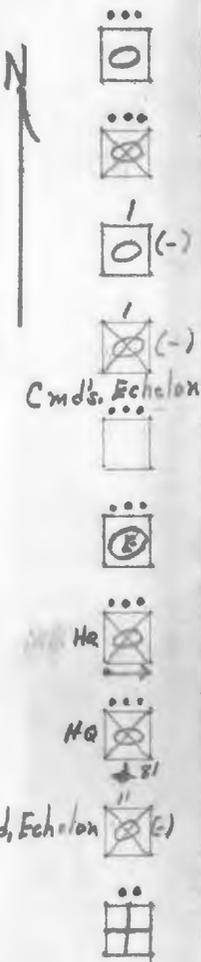
Heavy enemy artillery fire was falling in the area and as the lead tank started down the hill the tank company commander was seriously wounded by a shell burst. Very quickly the armored infantry battalion commander designated the senior tank platoon leader as the tank company commander and the attack continued. An artillery liaison plane at this time

reported a German armored car just ahead of our lead vehicle and requested that we hold up the column while he attacked it with the six bazookas (2.36 inch rocket) mounted on the wings of his plane. The battalion commander having knowledge of the exploits of the pilot held up the column and the German armored car was quickly destroyed on the second pass of the plane. Once again the column continued and had traveled but a few hundred yards when it was fired upon by three German tanks located in the woods west of the road (see sketch #1). They were immediately taken under fire by the lead tank which destroyed two of the German tanks before it in turn was knocked out. This was the second great loss to the tank company as this tank was a platoon leader's tank and the platoon leader was injured and evacuated. At this time the battalion commander ordered the armored infantry company commander to send some dismounted infantry through the woods to eliminate any German foot troops that may have accompanied the German tanks. While this was being accomplished the third German tank was destroyed by our tank fire. After the woods had been cleared, the attack continued under heavy enemy artillery fire and tank fire coming from the high ground north of Guebling (see sketch #1). This fire caused some casualties but due to the weather and poor observation no direct hits occurred at this time. Progress was slow and extreme difficulty was encountered by the column as it had to get off the improved road to go around the knocked out tank which was still exploding and burning. Some vehicles were mired in the mud and had to be towed by others. As the head of the column reached a point approximately eight hundred yards west of the railroad, the liaison plane reported five German tanks along the railroad on the South side of the macadam road (see sketch #1). The battalion commander crawled to a forward vantage point

to get the exact location of the tanks so he could better formulate his plan of attack. This was accomplished and after a very brief discussion with the artillery liaison officer and the tank company commander, a plan of attack was issued. This consisted of the liaison pilot adjusting the medium artillery, one gun at a time, on the tanks until all guns were adjusted, then the battalion fired a concentration while our tanks moved in. This plan worked very well as the five tanks were destroyed without loss to our column.

Once the enemy tanks were destroyed the attack continued with the lead tank going down the road toward the railroad crossing. Upon approaching the railroad this tank was stopped by an antitank mine. The second and third tanks following immediately went to the right and left of the road but these hit mines also and were knocked out. (See sketch #1). Since the tanks could not get through until the mine field was breached the battalion commander ordered the armored infantry commander to continue the attack on foot without tank support. The 81mm mortar platoon and assault gun platoon of Hq. Company were to support this attack. The battalion commander and his S-3 went forward to the mine field to determine its extent and what action would be necessary for its removal. It was discovered that the field was quite extensive and that considerable time would be needed for its removal. It was also reported to the battalion commander at this time that the bridge Northeast of the town (see sketch #1) had been blown and that the stream was not fordable for vehicles. The Engineer Officer was ordered to start his vehicles forward and to report to the head of the column. In the meantime, the

Order of March



SKETCH #1

battalion reconnaissance platoon was quickly brought forward to clear a path through the mine field. Having been trained for this type mission the unit cleared a gap with minimum delay. This mission was accomplished while under heavy artillery fire.

Upon completion of the gap in the mine field the tank company commander was ordered to take his company through the gap and place his tanks in positions where they could cover the building of the bridge. This was done and the engineer platoon moved to the bridge site. Under normal conditions the bridge could have been built in the minimum time. This was not true in this case however, as the abutments had been blown, the stream had swollen to considerable size and was overflowing its banks, and the enemy increased his artillery fire causing several casualties in the engineer platoon. Darkness had fallen when the bridge had been completed.

The armored infantry company had little difficulty in taking the town. During the attack one German tank was destroyed by a bazooka and thirty-one prisoners were taken. Several fires caused by the artillery preparation which preceded the attack, were burning in the town. The armored infantry outposted the town as best they could with their small force and waited for the rest of the column.

Under cover of darkness the tank company and battalion headquarters moved into town, the tanks reinforcing the armored infantry. The engineer platoon was left at the bridge site to guard the bridge, the 81mm mortar platoon, the 105mm assault gun platoon, the heavy machine gun platoon and Co. headquarters of battalion headquarters company were in position on the

far side of the mine field (see sketch #2). It was the battalion commander's decision to leave his force in this position because of the heavy artillery fire falling on the town. In the hours that followed this proved to be a wise decision.

After all outposts had been checked by the battalion commander and the orders issued for the following morning the battalion settled down for the night. Heavy artillery fire continued to pound the town, the bridge site and the roads leading into the town. By this time it is approximately 2100.

The battalion was suddenly alerted when the guard who had been guarding the prisoners reported to the C.P. that the thirty-one prisoners had escaped. The guard reported that he had been knocked unconscious and a medical aid man who was standing near by had been killed by a grenade. A house to house search was started by the entire battalion minus the outpost, for the missing prisoners and soon ended successfully. The entire group was found in a barn near the place they had been under guard. It was never determined who threw the grenade, whether a German soldier or a civilian, but this incident alone caused great consternation within the battalion.

At approximately 1400 hours the battalion trains arrived in the area. One gas truck was immediately hit by artillery fire, killing the transportation platoon leader and causing the truck to explode showering burning gasoline over a medium tank, the S-3's $\frac{1}{4}$ ton truck, and the battalion C. P. These burning vehicles plus the sudden flame caused by the burning gasoline informed the Germans of their accuracy and the artillery fire was intensified causing several casualties.

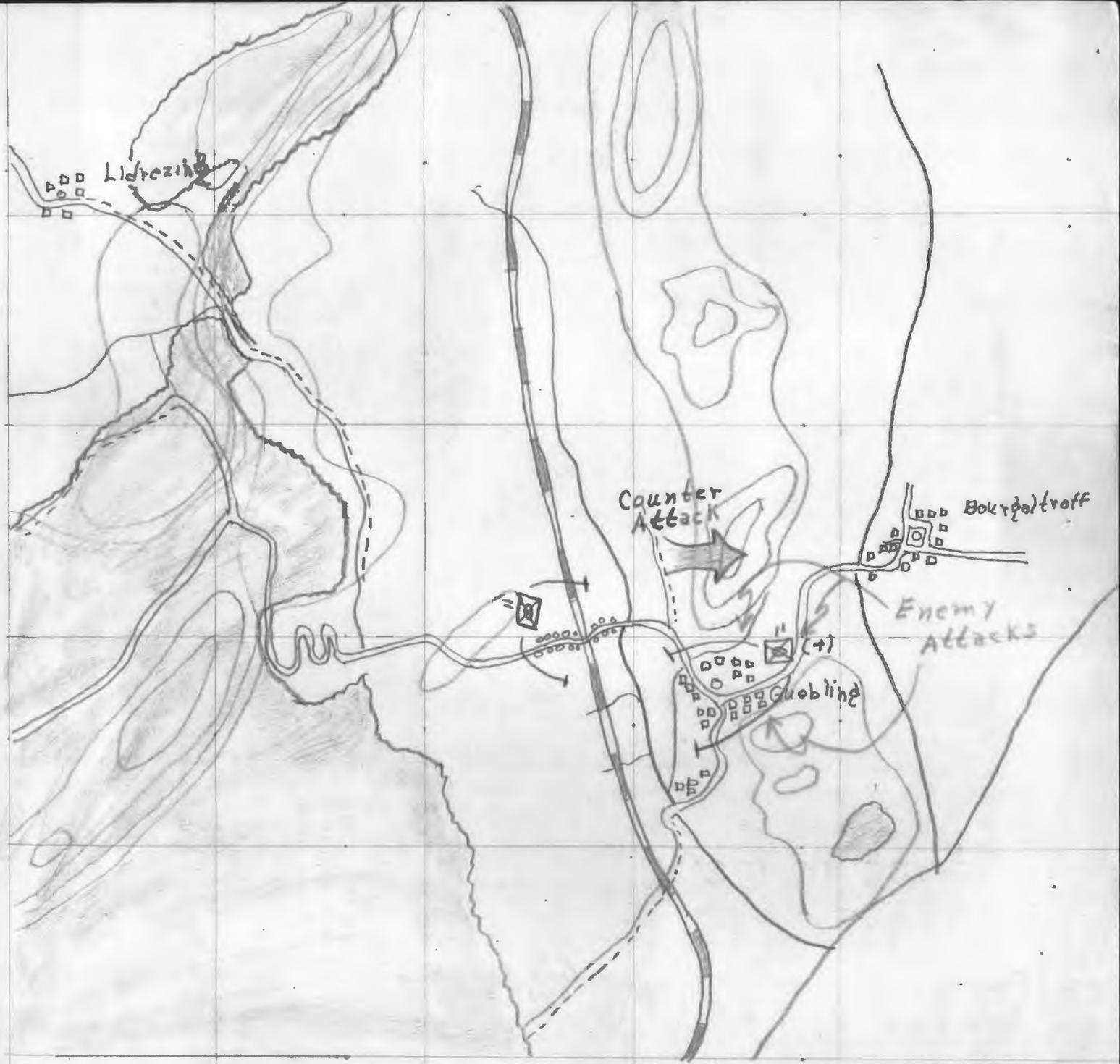
It was at this time that the battalion commander was literally caught with his pants down. He had taken them off because they had become wet during the day. He had lain down and had just dropped off to sleep in battalion C. P. when the gas truck exploded showering the C. P. The S-3 awakened the battalion commander and the two of them left the C. P. by a back window; the battalion commander carrying his pants.

The crashing of artillery shells and the cry of medics was heard throughout the night. Two medium tanks, one light tank, three halftracks and two $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trucks were knocked out by artillery fire.

At first light the next morning 15 November 1944, the battalion was met with heavy small arms fire and bazooka fire from the high ground and woods north of the town and the high ground southeast of the town (see sketch #2). This fire was neutralized by the machine guns of the tanks outposting the town.

At this same time the battalion was reinforced with a tank and an armored infantry platoon from one of the other columns. This force was met outside the town by the battalion S-3 and given the mission of securing the high ground just north of the town (see sketch #2). This platoon was quickly engaged by the enemy and lost one tank to the German tank fire, seriously wounding the tank platoon leader. A second tank was knocked out by an antitank mine. The remaining tanks pulled back in defilade and were later reinforced by the remainder of this tank and armored infantry company.

Strong German counterattacks continued throughout the day but were



Scale
 $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1000 \text{ yds}$

1000 yds

Legend



Single Track Railroad

SKETCH #2

beaten off each time by the defenders. Each attack increased in strength and it soon became apparent that the force in the town would soon be forced to withdraw. At this time the battalion commander ordered his S-3 to take the Reconnaissance Platoon and go back to the position the battalion had held the day before and select positions for the returning companies.

Orders were issued for the withdrawal at 1600, 15 November 1944. The withdrawal was led by the battalion headquarters, followed by headquarters company, engineers, the tanks and infantry. The battalion commander was one of the last to leave the town and was leaving the west side as the Germans entered the east. The engineer officer and a few of his men brought up the rear of the column as they had to blow the bridge they had built the night before.

During its withdrawal the column was once again under heavy artillery fire but its accuracy was greatly reduced by screening smoke placed by our supporting artillery.

CONCLUSIONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE ATTACK

The principal reason for the failure to hold Guebling was the failure on the part of the column commander in ordering the battalion commander to secure the high ground outside the town. The battalion commander also failed to seize the initiative of doing this. This same battalion commander learned the lesson well and in subsequent attacks never failed to secure the high ground regardless of the weather, morale of the troops, or any other considerations. Contributing factors to the loss of the town were the adverse weather conditions which precluded a good employment of the tanks of the team, trenchfoot, shortage of officers and men, the

lack of coordination between the column commander and the battalion commander, all necessitated the ordered withdrawal from the town.

Lessons to be learned from the operation are these:

1. Where there is high ground or key terrain outside of a town objective, move through the town and hold it from that advantageous terrain. Cut the approaches into the town and defend by denying the enemy from entering the town by fire.

2. When attacking with reinforced battalions, the commanders at all levels must be where they can observe and control the attack. In this case, the battalion commander demonstrated this type of leadership but was attacking at a disadvantage in that his commander directed the attack from a location where he was unable to keep abreast of the situation. He did make infrequent visits to the front to keep the attack going but these proved to be insufficient.

3. In withdrawing from a town, the headquarters vehicles must lead the withdrawal and tanks and armored infantry stay back to cover the withdrawal.

4. Before attempting to withdraw, a staff officer with reconnaissance personnel should precede the withdrawal and select high ground or positions to which the command will move.

5. When making a daylight withdrawal, the use of smoke against enemy positions is frequently desirable.

6. The commander who is withdrawing his unit from a town should be among the last to leave. This prevents panic or undue haste and contributes to the morale of the troops.

7. Natural obstacles should be prepared in advance of the final elements withdrawing and utilized to slow the enemy attack.

8. All vehicles that are partially disabled and are to be left behind must be completely destroyed.

GUNGWILER 27 NOV 44

The attack of Gungwiler, France has been selected due to the fact that it is a particular example of that which is desirable in good armored employment. Adequate reconnaissance, good leadership, a coordinated fire plan and violent execution of the attack contributed towards making this attack a successful and memorable event in the minds of the participants.

The same reinforced armored infantry battalion that made the attack at Guebling, launched the attack for Gungwiler. This battalion was a part of a combat command that had been attacking for several days. The battalion had just taken a succession of small towns and was preparing to continue the attack. The terrain in that area of northern France, was hilly with frequent small woods dotting the landscape. The small hills were sufficient in height to afford a commander with as much as a mile of good observation in some places. The weather had been adverse but a few days of sun had hardened the ground to a degree that permitted good cross country mobility. Winter had not set in and there was a great deal of natural cover and concealment available. Early in the morning of the day of the attack, the battalion was in the process of reorganizing and preparing to continue the general advance. Near the city of Drulingen, the battalion commanders forward echelon, the heavy weapons platoons,

the reconnaissance platoon, a medium tank company and Company C of the battalion were dug in a defensive position on the high ground north west of the city. Inside of Drulingen was Company A of the battalion. Company B of the battalion was on its way to join the battalion, having been released by the combat command. (See sketch #3)

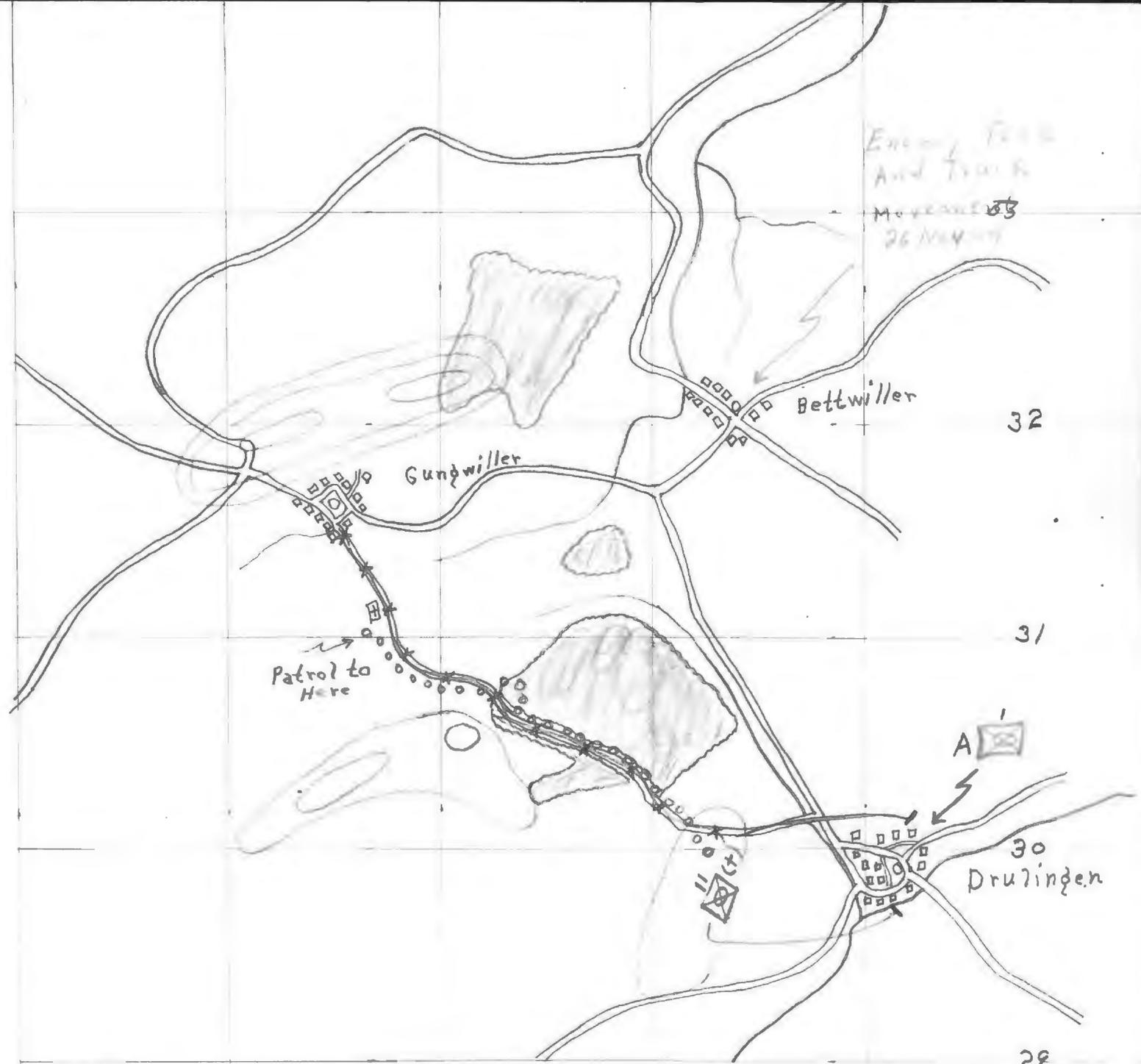
The battalion had moved into this position just prior to darkness the night before. Company A, which was in the town had been placed there to give it a chance to rest and refit for the next day's fight. The battalion commander liked to rotate his leading companies as much as possible and whenever possible he would rest a company to insure that he had fresh people at the head of his column.

During the night, enemy tank and truck movement was heard in the vicinity of Bettwiller. A little town immediately in the zone of advance of the battalion. It was tentatively planned to attack this town the next day. (See sketch #3)

Enemy artillery became active during the night and the Germans began shelling Drulingen. Several rounds were shorts and landed in the battalion area. The troops were well dug in and the battalion had only one casualty during the night. That casualty being a part of the local security in the town.

The remainder of the night passed without further incident. Artillery fire ceased and no more enemy movement was picked up.

Early the next morning resupply was effected and guides were sent out to lead Company B into Weyer. The battalion was fortunate to receive a number of replacements, several of which were combat returnees. During



Enemy Positions
And Their
Movements
26 MAY 49

Bettwiler

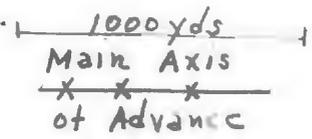
Gungwiler

Patrol to
Here

A

30
Druelingen

Scale
 $1\frac{1}{2}'' = 1000 \text{ yds}$



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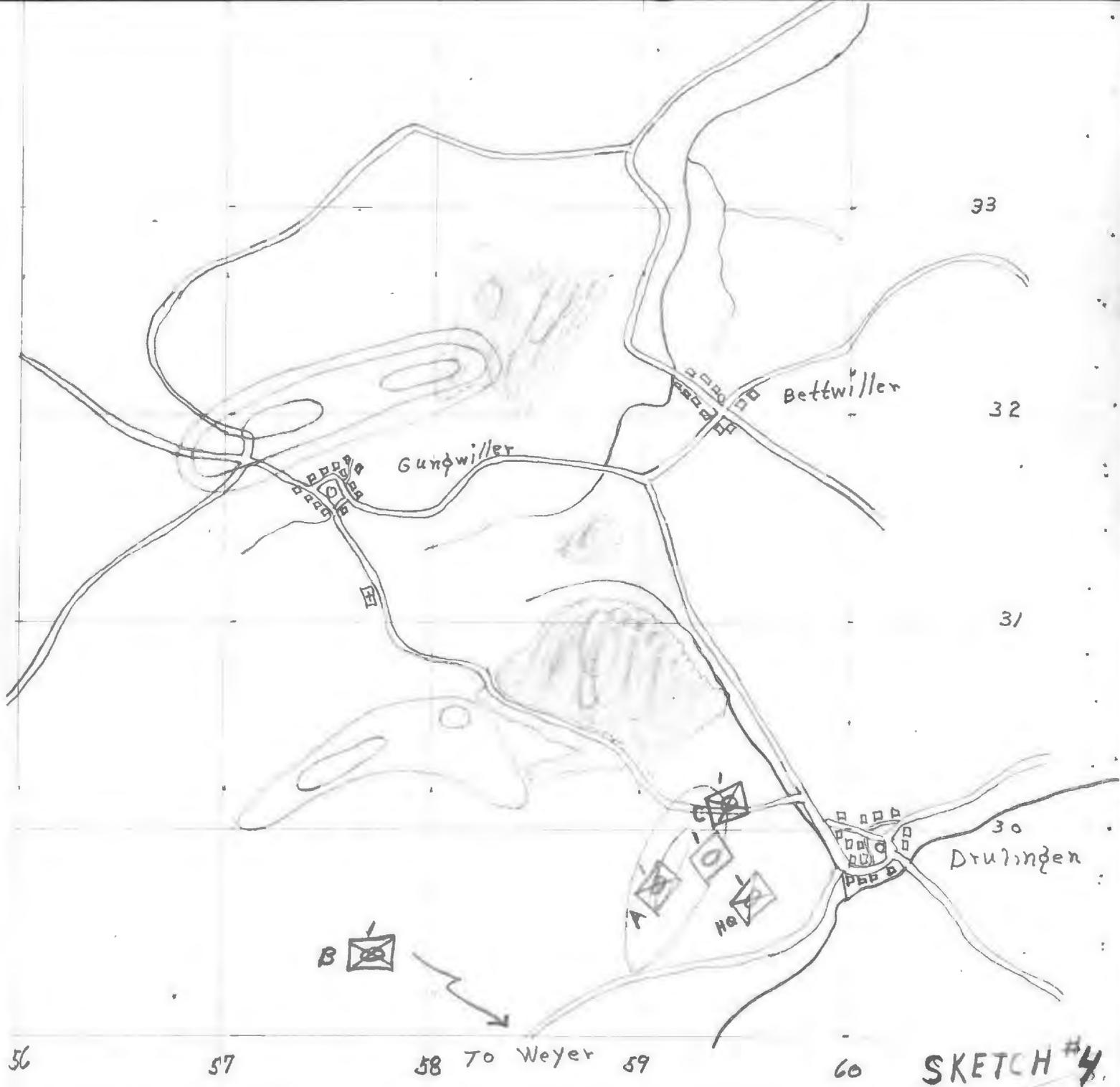
58 To Weyer 59

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SKETCH #3

the morning orders were received which indicated that a change of plan had been received and a new route assigned. The battalion commander departed and went to combat command headquarters to determine the situation. The battalion spent the morning gainfully performing vehicular maintenance and cleaning of weapons. Shortly after noon, the battalion commander returned with a tentative plan of attack. Artillery officers reported into the battalion area and relieved the forward observers with companies and a new artillery battalion liaison officer reported to work out artillery support for the coming attack. During the period that the battalion was waiting for the word to attack, the battalion commander and his staff were not idle nor were the Germans. Enemy artillery began falling in the area shortly after noon. Most of it was inaccurate and did not seriously constitute a threat to work going on at that time.

In readiness for the attack Company A was ordered to move to the high ground (see sketch #4) as shown it was an extremely long ridge overlooking Drulingen, to occupy defensive positions. As Company A moved into the new position they were guided in by the battalion S-3 and members of the battalion reconnaissance platoon. This saved time and insured a smooth occupation of the new position. As soon as the company was in position, the battalion was disposed in accordance with sketch #4 (see sketch #4). Company B, the company returning from combat command control, had been moved into the town Weyer (as shown) to rest and refit. It was discovered upon Company B's return that the company commander, two of his officers and several key non-commissioned officers had been recently wounded and evacuated in a recent fight with another column. The battalion commander



Scale
 $1\frac{1}{2}'' = 1000 \text{ yds}$
1000 yds.

56

57

58 To Weyer 59

60

SKETCH #4

decided to let Company B rest and refit for as long as he could and not commit it further unless it proved unavoidable.

Meanwhile, the battalion commander was making a terrain study and in conjunction with his staff, planning to continue the attack. The battalion commander noticed that the terrain was such that a frontal attack on the town of Bettwiller would be threatened by the larger town, Gungwiler. Gungwiler was located on higher ground than Bettwiller and it was only 1500 yards from Bettwiller. The battalion commander had to know if the enemy was in strength in Gungwiler. He correctly reasoned that whoever had Gungwiler and the high ground outside Gungwiler would control Bettwiller.

The battalion commander sent for the A Company commander, and as soon as he arrived he was ordered to send a reconnaissance patrol into the town of Gungwiler or towards Gungwiler to ascertain whether or not the city was defended.

On his return to his company, the company commander selected a staff sergeant of exceptional ability who would lead the patrol. He was ordered to take his squad, a rifle squad, and by first travelling by halftrack, dismount and reconnoiter the approaches into Gungwiler and to determine if the town was defended.

The patrol was given a good map, an SCR 300 radio and ordered to maintain radio contact with the company. The squad leader could expect to receive artillery fires if needed and tanks and infantry would go to the rescue if the squad got into trouble.

The sergeant moved out shortly after checking his squad very carefully.

He moved to the woods (as shown by sketch #3) and halted his halftrack. The sergeant proceeded by foot to carefully look the ground over and he deployed his squad around the half track to await his return. The sergeant should not have proceeded on alone but he was an extremely courageous man and already a holder of the Distinguished Service Cross. Without regard for his personal safety he pushed on alone until he worked his way toward the city where he was in a position to observe about twenty or thirty German infantry moving in the town. The enemy picked him up and he came under heavy machine gun fire. He changed his position and shortly he was taken under fire by 20mm guns. With this information, he withdrew to the woods where he collected his squad and returned to the company area. He was met by the Company Commander who immediately took him directly to the Battalion Commander. At battalion the sergeant gave his report.

While the patrol was gone, word had been given by combat command to start the attack.

The battalion commander drew up an immediate plan for attacking. He decided to attack Gungwiler first and then go after Bettwiler. The scheme of maneuver was briefly as follows.

First to hit the town with a medium tank company and Company A. He would support the attack by putting a Time On Target or TOT of artillery fire on Gungwiler, lifting just prior to the teams entering the town. In addition, the machine gun platoon of the battalion would over watch the attack from a position as shown on sketch #5 (see sketch #5).

The armored infantry rifle company commander was placed in command of

the two assault companies and directed to take the town and occupy the high ground as shown. (see sketch #5).

The attack would be launched from the battalion area. The battalion commander and his commanders echelon were to overwatch the attack and lift the artillery fires. The armored infantry company was told to ride the tanks to increase the speed of the attack.

The attack was to move along the route as shown. (Sketch #5)

As soon as the details of this coordinated attack were worked out, the tank and armored infantry companies went to work. Flame throwers were strapped on riflemen, extra grenades for cleaning out buildings were placed on the back decks of the tanks and a smooth system of communication and control was established by the tank and armored infantry company.

The stage was rapidly set, the armored infantry company commander and the tank company commander worked out a good company attack order.

Two platoons of armored infantry and one platoon of tanks would clean out the town while two platoons of tanks and one platoon of armored infantry would sweep around the town and seize the high ground. (See Sketch #5). The attack order was issued and the armored infantry and the tanks were in readiness.

The battalion commander gave the order to move out and the battalion as shown (sketch #4 and #5) moved to the battalion attack position. When the attack position was reached, last minute details of coordination were checked, and all was readied. With the stage set, the battalion commander called for the artillery, gave the order "Attack", with a signal the machine guns opened up and the attack jumped off. Magnificent artillery fires fell on the town, the tanks opened up on the outskirts of the town

as ribbons of machine gun fire poured into the town.

Almost no enemy fire came back to return this devastating assault and the tanks and armored infantry reached the outskirts of the town. As the left platoon swept into the town, they drove past the cemetery. The lead tank hit a mine and was knocked out. The infantry dismounted from the tanks of that platoon and dashed toward the first row of buildings. The remaining tanks of the platoon swung to the right and hit no more mines.

As the team neared the buildings the battalion commander lifted the fire of the artillery and the team closed on the first buildings. One of the two remaining tank platoons unloaded its infantry and turned to sweep around the town.

Meanwhile, the other platoon of armored infantry and a platoon of tanks were cleaning out the near buildings. As they started down the main street, they were met by a hail of machine gun fire from a large wooden building.

Two or three smoke grenades in the street stopped the enemy's fire from being accurate. A bazooka team fired at the large building putting a fair sized hole close by a window sash. The sash fell and the lead flame thrower closed in. One or two grenades were tossed into the building and then the flame thrower opened up. This ended resistance from the building and about fifteen Germans ran out surrendering. The building remained on fire and subsequently burned to the ground.

The rest of the team was not idle. Other squads and platoons were busy cleaning out their assigned areas. One platoon leader coordinated with a tank in reducing a building that offered heavy resistance. One

or two rounds of HE tore the door from the building and then the platoon leader rushed into the door. Just as he entered the building, the tank put another round inside. The platoon leader miraculously was not hurt.

The infantry in the town were busy clearing buildings and taking numerous prisoners while the tank heavy enveloping force were doing very good work. As the two tank platoons and the platoon of armored infantry swept around the town, they were able to take under fire, a German column attempting to flee the town. Two self-propelled enemy twenty millimeter armored carriers were destroyed and about forty enemy infantry caught in the road. This team started to reorganize the high ground.

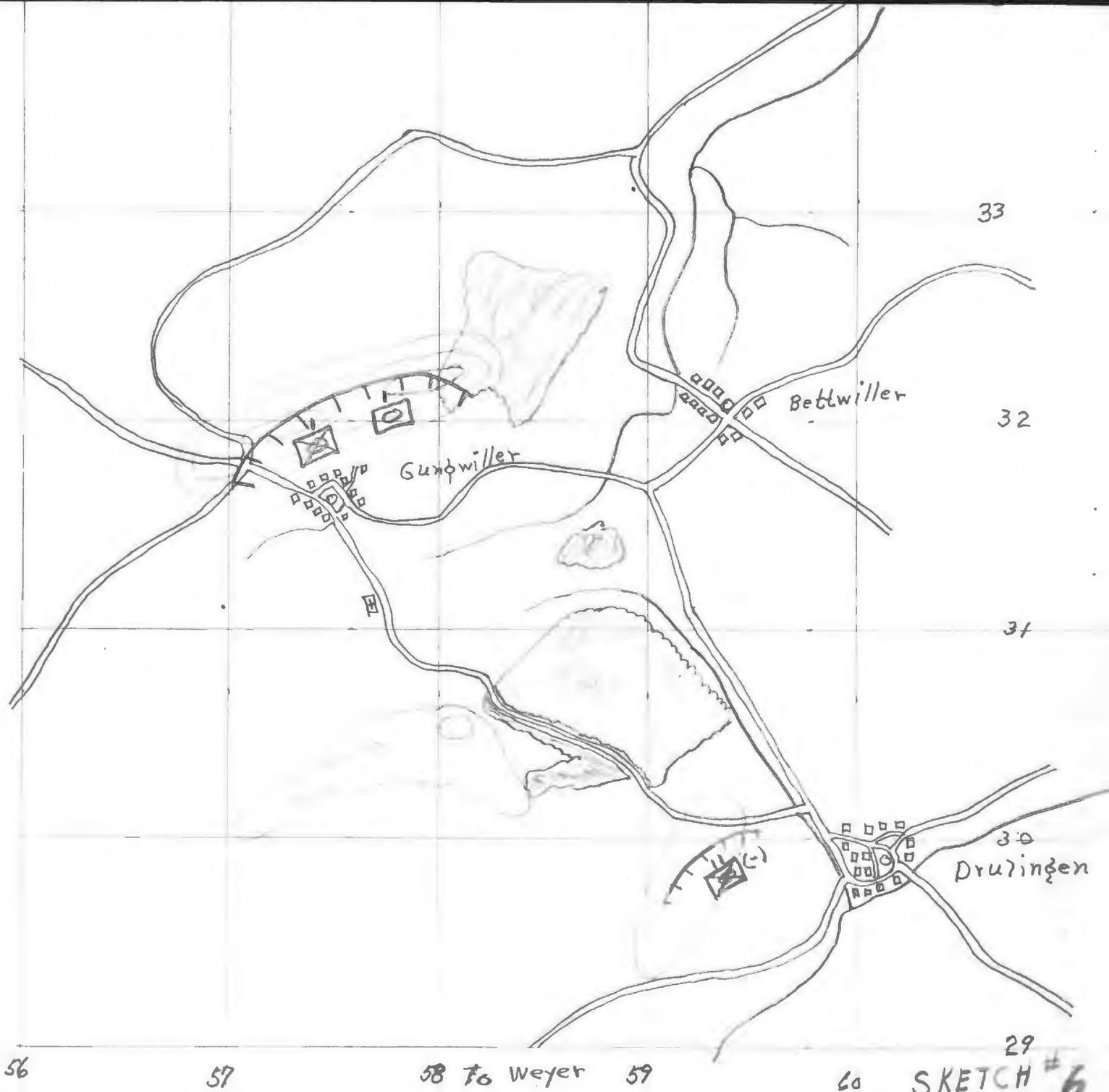
Shortly after this, the town was clear and the tank and armored infantry companies moved to the high ground. As they cleared the town enemy artillery fires fell on Gungwiler and a few casualties were suffered. Some fire fell on the woods outside the town and one platoon of armored infantry lost their platoon leader and platoon sergeant. The company 1st Sergeant took over and did a nice job of running the platoon in the mopping up phase. A strong patrol was sent towards Bettwiler, the next objective, to see what was there and they were able to move into the town which was not defended. Upon looking around Gungwiler it was readily apparent that Gungwiler was the critical terrain feature and dominated the area. The team followed the lesson learned at Guebling and secured the high ground as shown on sketch #6.

The next day the battalion, attacking with Company C leading, continued the attack and pushed on further into enemy territory.

The attack of Gungwiler was the application of the lessons learned



Scale
 $1\frac{1}{2}'' = 1000 \text{ yds}$
1000 yds



56

57

58 To Weyer 59

60

SKETCH # 6

33

32

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Gundwiler

Bettwiler

Druzingen

at Guebling. The battalion lost the battalion commander shortly after the fight for Gungwiler but the tactics he developed and the schooling the battalion had in its fight across France, brought the battalion to a high degree of combat efficiency. The officers and men who fought with the battalion readily admit that some mistakes were made in combat. Happily they were not repeated and the after-action reports of the combat efficiency of this unit speaks for itself.

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