

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
GENERAL SECTION
MILITARY HISTORY COMMITTEE
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED OFFICERS COURSE
1946-1947

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY F, 327TH GLIDER INFANTRY
(101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN THE DEFENSE OF BASTOGNE, BELGIUM
19-26 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: COMPANY IN DEFENSE

Captain James F. Adams, Infantry

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of Company F, 327th Glider Infantry, 101st Airborne Division in the defense of Bastogne, Belgium, from arrival of the division 19 December 1944 through the days this American force was ~~surrounded by the enemy;~~ and terminating when the 4th Armored Division broke through the German ring from the outside to aid the garrison on 26 December 1944.

On 16 December 1944 the Germans launched their biggest offensive since the beginning of the Campaign in Western Europe. Simultaneous attacks were made at five places along a seventy mile sector of the Western Front. The German objective was the capture of Liege and Antwerp and the splitting of the main American and British forces. The German attack consisted of two prongs: one, in the north through Malmedy toward Liege; the second to the south was aimed at Bastogne and bridgeheads across the Meuse River, with a thrust to seize the city of Luxembourg. Both drives initially met with success. (1)

The 101st Airborne Division was withdrawn from the lines in Holland on 27 November 1944 after seventy-two days of combat. The division, in SHAEF Reserve, established base camp at Camp Mourmelon near Reims, France. Units rested and began preparation and reorganization in anticipation of the next airborne mission. (2)

(1) A-3; (2) Eye witness, self.

The 327th Glider Infantry Regiment had not received reinforcements during the Holland campaign. As a result the regiment was considerably under strength. Many weapons had been turned into Ordnance for repair and replacement. Requisitions covering shortages of other equipment had been submitted. Forty-eight hour passes to Paris for officers and enlisted men had been authorized and quotas were easily filled. Daily training was devoted chiefly to close order drill, athletics, and care and cleaning of equipment. (3) Regimental football teams were being organized in preparation for a division tournament culminating in the Champaigne Bowl game during the Christmas Season.

Officer casualties in the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry, during the Holland campaign necessitated a change in assignments. Recommendations were approved by the regimental commander and on 11 December 1944 Company F Commander was assigned to Battalion Headquarters as S-3. Second Battalion Headquarters Company Commander was assigned to command Company F. Consequently the following four days were devoted to the turning over of property and equipment of the companies involved. On 16 December the new Company F Commander spent his first time in the field training of the company, and becoming acquainted with its personnel. (4)

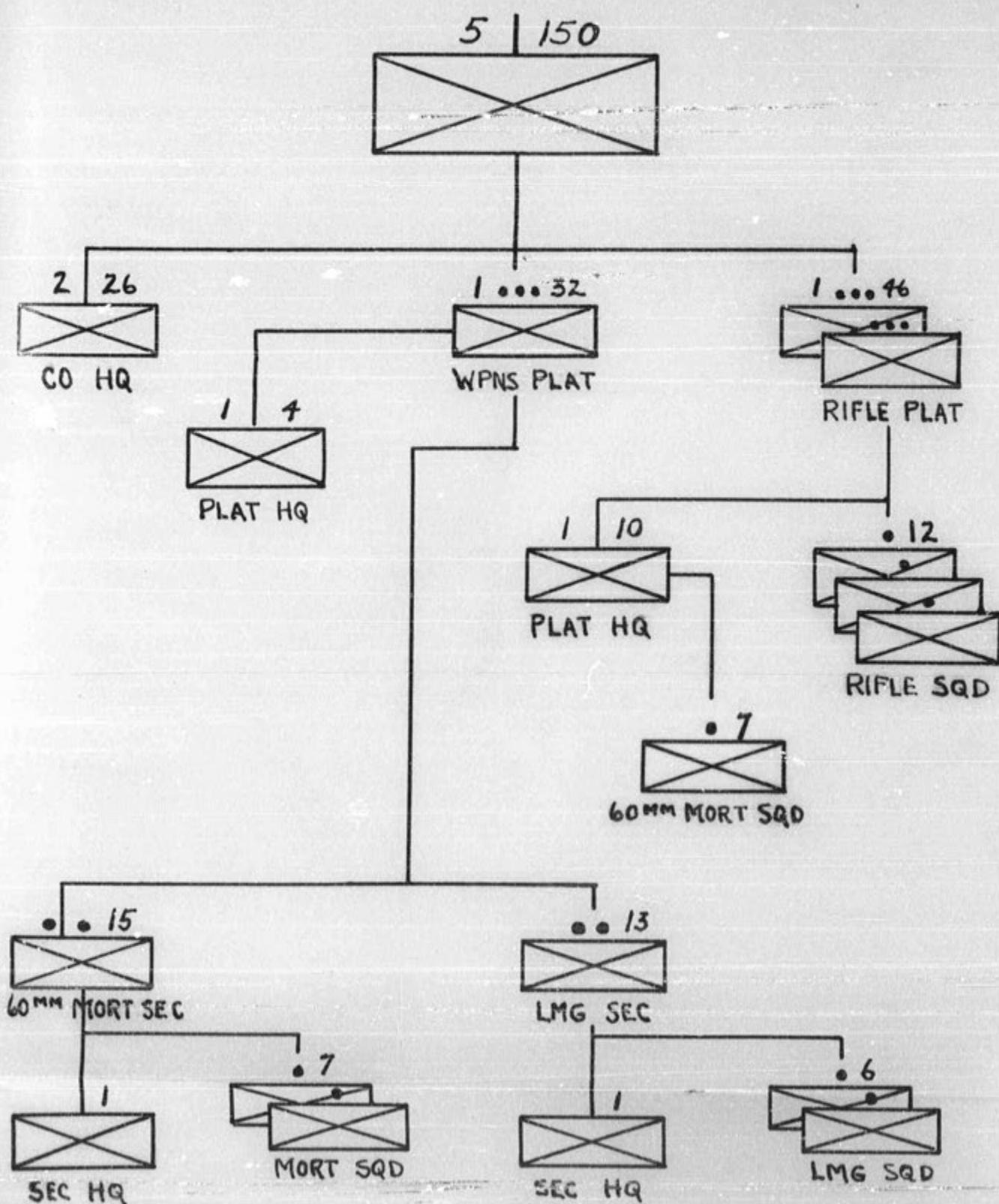
The Table of Organization and Equipment of the Glider Infantry Rifle Company was materially different than that of the standard rifle company. (See T/O&E 7-57) Actual strength of Company F as of 16 December was four officers and about one hundred twenty enlisted men. Duty assignments were as follows: (5)

(3) Eye witness, self; (4) A-16; (5) Eye witness, self, Capt. R.H. Evans.

INFANTRY RIFLE COMPANY, GLIDER

T/O 7-57 5 SEPT 1942

C-1 24 FEB 1944



Company Commander	Captain James F. Adams
Company Executive Officer	1st Lt W.J. Herzke
Acting Platoon Leader, 1st Platoon	T/Sgt O.Y. Butler
Platoon Leader, 2d Platoon	2d Lt W.E. Beirs
Weapons Platoon Leader	1st Lt. L.E. Smith
First Sergeant	1st Sgt Pappas
Platoon Sergeant, 2d Platoon	1st Sgt Streicher

On 17 December 1944 the 101st Airborne Division was alerted for movement into the Belgium in the area of the German breakthrough. Warning orders were received by subordinate units and feverish haste was made preparing for the move. Company F secured its weapons from Ordnance only to find that very little work had been performed on them. This, coupled with the fact that the unit was under strength, necessitated certain changes in the company organization. Only two 60mm mortars were available to the company. Therefore it was decided to maintain the mortar section in the weapons platoon only. The mortar personnel of the rifle platoons were assigned to the platoon as riflemen. Basics of the company headquarters were broken down to the rifle platoons, thus bringing the rifle squads to full strength.

(6)

On 18 December 1944 the 101st Airborne Division was ordered to proceed by motor transportation to Bastogne, Belgium, which was estimated to be the most advanced place they could reach before the enemy arrived there. The division was given the mission of holding this key communications center at all costs. The 327th Glider Infantry Regiment, with the 463rd Field Artillery Battalion attached, left Camp Mourmelon, France, at 1955 hours. (7)

(6) Eye witness, self; (7) A-1, p. 67, A-2.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The terrain upon which Company F was to establish its defensive position lent itself well to this type of operation. Low ridges with gently sloping ground were an asset to observation and good fields of fire. Wooded areas were widely scattered and consisted of pine plantations, trees ranging in height from fifteen to thirty feet. One small stream paralleled the front line and formed two small ponds in the wooded area on the left front of the company. This stream was not an obstacle to the foot troops or vehicles. Clear open fields in the right half of the company area were visible for some eighteen hundred yards to the front.

The main Bastogne-Arlon highway ran north and south through the company right area. This was an excellent first class two lane highway. The small village of Remoifosse (eight to ten houses) was only partially visible in rear of a slight rise one thousand yards south on the main highway.

Low ground adjoining the ponds was wet and soft and well wooded, thus limiting observation to the front. To the left of the ponds the ground rose higher and the wooded area thinned out, permitting excellent observation to the southeast. About one thousand yards to the rear (north) of the front lines was another paralleling ridge slightly higher than the battle position. North of the battle position, about twenty-five hundred yards, the main road entered the town of Bastogne, Belgium (population 4,500). (8)

OPERATIONS 19 DECEMBER 1944

The 327th Glider Infantry Regiment arrived at Flamizoulle, Belgium, at 1000 hours. The 2nd Battalion detrucked and immediately went into an assembly area about 1000 yards

(8) Personal Reconnaissance, December 1944.

south of the town. Preparation began on the defense of the area. At 1500 hours the Regiment moved to Mande St. Etienne. Here a perimeter defense was set up around the town. At 1630 hours the 1st Battalion was attached to the 501st Parachute Regiment and moved to the vicinity of Bastogne.

The 2nd Rifle Platoon, Company F, was ordered to establish a road block on the main highway 900 yards southeast of Mande St. Etienne. This platoon, with one section of the Regimental Antitank Platoon attached, immediately moved to their position. Bedrolls were delivered and after a meal of K rations the company rested for the night. (See Map A) (9)

OPERATIONS 20 DECEMBER 1944

At 0200 hours Regimental Headquarters Company, Regimental Command Group and the 2nd Battalion were alerted to move to Bastogne. Troops were awakened, rolls placed in a company dump. Orders came from Battalion that we would cross the Initial Point, the crossroad 400 yards southeast of Mande St. Etienne, at 0400 hours. Overcoats and overshoes would not be worn but would be left with the bedrolls. Battalion Supply Section would deliver them that night. G Company, F Company, Battalion Headquarters Company, E Company, Regimental Command Group, and Regimental Headquarters Company moved out in that order. (10)

The column passed through Bastogne, turned southeast and cleared the town by 0600 hours. Regimental Command Group and Regimental Headquarters Company left the column in Bastogne and proceeded to establish its Command Post there.

(9) A-1, p. 99, A-2; (10) A-2.

As the Battalion continued its march, Company Commanders and Heavy Weapons Platoon Leaders were taken by jeep to the 2nd Battalion Commander, Lt Col. Roy L. Inman, in Marvie. After a brief map study and conference with the Commander of the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion, Lt Col Inman had his officers move to where they could see the map and proceeded to issue the following order: (11)

"You are now in this small village of Marvie. This Battalion will effect immediate relief of the 326th Engineer Battalion, secure the village of Marvie and establish a defense position extending from the Bastogne-Wiltz Road northeast of Marvie, bending southwestward to the main road just above Remoifosse. Company G will have the left sector over to and including the Hill 500. Company F will have the right sector, tie in with G Company's right flank, bending back to the southwest to include the main road just north of Remoifosse. Company E will be in reserve in the vicinity of Marvie. 81mm Mortar and Heavy Machine Gun Platoon Leaders will make immediate reconnaissance of the area for suitable positions to support the Battalion. Let me have your recommendations as soon as possible.

Battalion Command Post will be established here. Send overlays of your position to Battalion as soon as possible.

Notify Battalion when you have effected relief.

Battalion Communication Section will lay wire line to your Command Posts.

Battalion Aid Station will be here in Marvie, exact location later. I will check your positions before noon. An officer from each Engineer Company is present to guide the Rifle Companies to their respective areas. Are there any questions?" (12)

(11,12) Eye witness, self, Capt R.H.Evans.

F Company Commander asked for enemy information. The Engineer Battalion Commander stated that they had moved into this area the night before and had not established contact with the enemy. Col Inman said that enemy patrols had been active in the area. He told the group to be on the alert for increased enemy patrolling. (13)

Capt Evans, G Company Commander, requested additional maps of the area. Lt. Miland (Battalion S-2) was instructed by Col Inman to secure additional maps from Regiment. The group was then dismissed. (14)

F Company Commander and the Engineer officer who was to guide him to the area joined F Company at the northeast edge of Marvie. Daylight was coming fast so F Company moved out quickly. Word was sent back to the Platoon Leaders to move to the head of the column. While the company moved along the route shown on Sketch B the Platoon Leaders were briefed by the Company Commander. Only the mission of the Battalion and the Company could be given at the time. The 1st Platoon was instructed that it would be in the right of the company area and would be responsible for the main road. The 2nd Platoon would be in the left of the company area and would establish close contact with G Company's right flank on Hill 500. The Weapons Platoon would be given definite orders upon completion of a reconnaissance of the company area. Weapons Platoon Leader, Lt L.E. Smith, would accompany the Company Commander on reconnaissance. The company moved in column of twos. (15)

It must be noted here that the Battalion order specified immediate relief of the Engineer unit. The Battalion Commander had not been able to make a reconnaissance of the ground and had ordered the Company Commanders to move out with their

(13,14) Eye witness, self, Capt R.H. Evans; (15) Eye witness, self.

companies, therefore they could not make a ground reconnaissance before rejoining their respective commands.

It was now daylight with some fog. Upon reaching Woods A and checking his map, F Company Commander could see that he was very near the planned main line of resistance. F Company moved into Woods A. Platoon leaders were instructed to place their platoons under cover, establish security, then to return with a runner. Lt W.J. Herzke, Company Executive Officer, was instructed to remain with the Company, check the security, and be prepared to dispatch the platoons to their areas upon the return of the platoon runners. The Company SCR-300 and SCR-536 were left with Lt. Herzke. SCR-536's were carried forward by the Company Commander and each rifle platoon leader. (16)

The following party then proceeded into the company area: Company Commander and two messengers, 1st Platoon Leader and one runner, 2nd Platoon Leader and one runner, and the Weapons Platoon Leader and one runner. Route B was followed. Positions occupied by the Engineer troops were inspected. None reported any positive contact with enemy patrols.

The main road was reached at Point X. A farm house in this vicinity was being used as a Command Post by the Engineer Company. Here F Company Commander asked for recommendations of the Weapons Platoon Leader as to the best employment of the Light Machine Gun Section and the 60mm Mortar Section. (17)

The recommendations were sound and the Company Commander proceeded to issue the following order. (18)

"Little is known of the enemy situation in the area. Enemy patrols have been reported in the vicinity. You know the mission of the 2nd Battalion and of Company F.

(16,17,18) Eye witness, self.

"The 1st Platoon will prepare its defensive position astride the main road just forward of this farmhouse; establish a road block 150 yards south of the building and stop any effort from the south. This platoon constitutes the right flank of the Battalion. Be prepared to send out patrols for flank security.

"The 2nd Platoon will prepare its defensive position in the woods just north of the small ponds; tie in with G Company's left flank and swing around to the open field just northwest of the ponds. Stop any effort from the south.

"The Light Machine Gun Section, from prepared positions in the 1st Platoon area, will cover the gap between platoons and the area to the front of the 1st Platoon.

"The 60mm Mortar Section will prepare firing positions near the center of the company area. Fire in general support of the company."

Platoon leaders immediately dispatched runners to bring their units forward. The Company Commander sent his messenger to Lt. Herzke to guide the command group to the Command Post.

The frontage assigned to the Company was 1700 yards. Company moved into its defensive positions without incident. (See Map B.)

At 0900 hours all platoons had reported positions occupied. Company F Commander then proceeded to the Engineer Company Command Post to complete the relief of that unit. He was informed by Lt. Smith that they had left the area some time before. All efforts to contact the Engineers in this area were futile. (19)

(19) Eye witness, self.

The weather continued very cold and damp. This encouraged the men to work on their foxholes and weapons emplacements. Security was maintained by the platoons at all times. T/5 Shaw and Pfc Owens (communications men of the company) ran wire lines to the 1st and 2nd Platoon Command Posts and the 60mm mortar position. Limited supply of wire necessitated using the shortest routes to these installations. (20)

A four-man foxhole was dug for the Company Command Post. The Company Commander, the Executive Officer and two communications men would establish the control center there. The line from Battalion came into F Company Command Post at 1030 hours. (21)

An overlay of company positions was submitted to Battalion at 1000 hours. (22)

T/Sgt Ruben A. Mackey, Platoon Sgt, Weapons Platoon, established the mortar Observation Post in a small farmhouse in the center of the company area. Wire line was laid from there back to the mortars. (23)

All communications were checked by T/5 John Shaw. He reported the SCR-300 on the Battalion net working well. The Company SCR-536 net was not operating properly. The 1st Platoon could be contacted with no difficulty but the 2nd Platoon would not come in. Both platoons, mortar position, and the Observation Post could be contacted from the Command Post on the sound powered net. (24)

During the morning no enemy artillery fire fell in the company area. Artillery could be heard some distance to the east. Enemy activity was negative.

(20,21,22,23,24) Eye witness, self.

At 1125 hours Marvie began to receive heavy shelling. Battalion notified F Company Commander that enemy movement had been picked up in G Company area, to be on the alert and report any activity at once. (25)

Shortly thereafter G Company was heard to open up with a large volume of fire and the Battalion heavy weapons went into action. G and E Companies received a heavy infantry and armored attack. During this attack Lt Colonel Inman, 2nd Battalion Commander, and Captain R.H. Evans were wounded and evacuated. F Company Commander was kept informed of the situation. The company speeded up the improvement of its positions. (26)

After the attack began on Marvie, Commander Company F moved into the 2nd Platoon position to observe the action on his left flank. By this time civilians were evacuating Marvie. One group, moving through the company area, attempted to leave by the unimproved road through the 2nd Platoon position. They passed through the lines but, on reaching the woods just south of the pond, stopped. On returning these civilians informed the troops that six or eight Germans were in the woods establishing a road block. This was the first positive information of enemy to the immediate front. Later, by use of field glasses, increased enemy activity was detected in the woods. (27)

At Marvie the enemy reached the south edge of town but soon lost the initiative due to the heavy volume of fire placed on him by Companies G and E. By 1300 hours he had withdrawn. (28)

The 1st Platoon reported small groups of enemy foot troops in the vicinity of REMOIFOSSE. This was verified by the 60mm mortar Observation Post.

(25,26) A-1, p. 101, A-2, p. 105; (27) Eye witness, self;
(28) A-1, p. 106, A-2.

Task Force Charlie 16 (three medium tanks), under 1st Lt Richard C. Gilliland, arrived in the 1st Platoon area to support the company. (29)

A Forward Observation Party from the 463rd Parachute Field Artillery Battalion reported into Company F Command Post about 1500 hours. 1st Lt Gill ^{← who is this?} made a brief reconnaissance of the area and established his Observation Post on the left side of the main road in the 1st Platoon area. This installation was well prepared on the front line. (30)

The weather was becoming much colder. Snow began to fall about dark. Intermittent artillery was falling in the area of Company F. (31)

Shortly after dark the Battalion Supply Section delivered K rations and ammunition to the Command Post. The men had their individual sleeping bags but no bed rolls were delivered. The communications were in good order. Platoons were instructed to report every hour. Security instructions were issued.

The 1st Platoon sent out small patrols to the right flank on security missions and to contact friendly units. No enemy or friendly units were contacted during the hours of darkness.

About 2300 hours a small enemy patrol was observed moving north on the dirt road just west of the Company Command Post. All personnel of the Command Post were alerted and moved to this vicinity. This patrol was observed to move north a short distance, turn around, and return across the open ground toward REMOIFOSSE. Fire on this patrol was withheld as it was felt that they had not located our positions. (32)

(29) A-1, p. 119; (30) Eye witness, self; (31) A-1, p. 106; (32) Eye witness, self.

Again at 2400 hours a larger patrol of eleven men, under the cover of heavily falling snow, using the same route as the previous patrol, was fired upon by the Command Post security group. One casualty was effected and the patrol withdrew. (33)

Platoons were alerted as to this activity. Battalion informed.

OPERATIONS 21 DECEMBER 1944

At about 0100 hours the 2nd Platoon reported a small patrol in its area. Lt. Beirs was instructed to either capture or destroy it. Shortly thereafter Sgt. Berry of the 2nd Platoon brought one of the members of the patrol into the Command Post. He had taken him in a hand to hand fight and had been forced to use his trench knife. The prisoner had a nice gash in his abdomen. The other two had escaped. (34)

In the early hours enemy tanks and vehicles were heard moving in the area south of REMOIFOSSE. Some ground activity was detected in the vicinity shortly after daylight. Snow was still falling. (35)

Colonel Joseph H. Harper, Regimental Commander, made an early visit to the company front lines near the main road. Colonel Harper and F Company Commander discussed the situation on the right flank, relative to its being open and having no contact with friendly units. (36)

Commander F Company visited all positions. The 1st Platoon was well situated. It had high ground and a farmhouse for a Command Post. This building was very exposed, thus limiting movement during daylight. (37)

The 2nd Platoon's right position was low and damp. Fox holes could not be over a foot deep due to water seepage. Its left flank was high and dry. (38)

(33,34,35,36,37,38) Eye witness, self.

Due to the patrol activity during the night it was decided to strengthen the Observation Post in the center of the area. Sgt. Berry and five men from the 2nd Platoon were placed near the farmhouse, making this a strong point and giving added security to the Observation Post. This strong point contained a BAR Team, a Bazooka Team, and mortar observers. (39)

Several small groups of enemy were observed preparing positions in the woods on the west of the main road 400 yards to the south of the 1st Platoon. Artillery and mortar fire was placed there with good effect. (40)

Early in the afternoon the 2nd Platoon of Company G, 327th Glider Infantry, under the command of 1st Lt. Frank Hibbard, was attached to Company F. It was moved into position on the right of the 1st Platoon, extending back toward the north, covering the unimproved roads to the southwest. A wire line was extended from the 1st Platoon to Lt. Hibbard. Coordination of fires was made. Lt. Hibbard was instructed to send out a patrol to locate the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion reported moving into positions to the west. (41)

Regiment placed a squad of the Regimental Antitank Platoon covering the road defile just to the rear of the 2nd Platoon, G Company. (42)

Artillery falling in F Company area increased through the day and night.

K rations and some 60mm mortar ammunition was brought up under the cover of darkness. A request was submitted to Battalion for blankets and overshoes. The ground was now frozen and covered with four inches of snow. (43)

Security was checked. No contact had been established with the Engineers.

(39) Eye witness, self; (40) A-1, p. 119, eye witness, self; (41) A-1, p. 119, A-2; (42) A-2; (43) Eye witness, self.

OPERATIONS 22 DECEMBER 1944

Bitter cold and snow characterized this day. From 0330 hours to 0430 hours enemy tracked vehicles could be heard milling around in front of the company. 1st Lt Gill directed artillery fire in this area. A dawn attack was anticipated and all personnel of this company were ordered into firing positions. The enemy attack failed to develop at daybreak. (44)

Major R.B. Galbreath, Executive Officer of the 2nd Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry, acting as Battalion Commander, arrived shortly after daylight to make a reconnaissance and inspection of Company F position. This was his first and only visit to the area. Major Galbreath was conducted over the front lines by F Company Commander. He was greatly surprised at the large frontage allotted to the company and the lack of observation and fields of fire in the right portion of the 2nd Platoon position. Observation here was limited to about a hundred yards. Lt. Beirs, 2nd Platoon Leader, reported that most of the fox holes in this area were filling with water and ice. He also said his feet had been wet for eighteen hours and were now very painful. (45)

Upon return to the Command Post, Major Galbreath stated he would try to get some Battalion weapons to help cover the 2nd Platoon front. F Company Commander asked particularly for overshoes for the company and, if possible, additional blankets and overcoats. Major Galbreath then left the company area. (46)

At about 0930 hours the Mortar Observation Post reported increased activity in the vicinity of REMOIFOSSE. Small enemy groups and light trucks were on the road and in the adjacent

(44,45,46) Eye witness, self.

fields. T/Sgt Mackey directed effective 60mm mortar fire on these targets. At about 1000 hours F Company Commander visited the mortar Observation Post and remained there for about an hour and a half. (47)

At 1130 hours F Company Command Post called its Commander at the Observation Post, telling him that four Germans had come up the main road from REMOIFOSSE, entering the 1st Platoon area under a white flag. This group, made up of a major, a captain and two enlisted men, had some sort of surrender message. The two officers were now enroute to the Company Command Post, blindfolded and under guard. F. Company Commander immediately left for the Command Post. He arrived there and found Lt. Herzke, Company Executive Officer, on the battalion phone. 1st Sgt Papas informed the Company Commander that the Germans had brought an ultimatum for the surrender of the Bastogne garrison. Lt. Herzke read the ultimatum to the 2nd Battalion Commander. Colonel Harper was immediately informed of the situation. He dispatched Major Jones, Regimental S-3, via jeep to pick up the ultimatum and deliver it to the 101st Airborne Division Headquarters in Bastogne. (48)

THE ULTIMATUM

December 22nd 1944

"To the U.S.A. Commander of the encircled town of Bastogne.

The fortune of war is changing. This time the U.S.A. forces in and near Bastogne have been encircled by strong German armored units. More German units have crossed the river Ourthe near Ortheuville, have taken Marche and reached St. Hubert by passing through Homores-Sibret-Tillet. Librament is in German hands.

There is only one possibility to save the encircled U.S.A. Troops from total annihilation: that is the honorable

(47) A-2, eye witness, self; (48) A-1, p. 115, A-2, eye witness self.

surrender of the encircled town. In order to think it over a term of two hours will be granted, beginning with the presentation of this note.

"If this proposal should be rejected one German Artillery Corps and six heavy A.A. Battalions are ready to annihilate the U.S.A. Troops in and near Bastogne. The order for firing will be given immediately after this two hour's term.

"All the serious civilian losses caused by this artillery fire would not correspond with the well known American humanity.

The German Commander." (49)

The two German officers, still under guard, were kept in the woods in rear of Company F Command Post. The major was a very impressive looking officer, six feet four and wearing a long field gray leather overcoat and heavy black leather boots. The captain, much shorter but equally well dressed, spoke excellent English. (50)

Colonel Harper called F Company Commander from 101st Airborne Division Headquarters to find out the exact time the German officers were due to return to their own lines. Captain of Company F informed him that they were due to return to their own lines at 1400 hours. (51)

It is interesting to note here that shortly after Colonel Harper called Company F, the German major requested admission to a warm building. He complained of having to stand around in the cold. He even went so far as to ask that he be taken into a room where he could be permitted to remove his blindfold. F Company Commander tersely informed him that this was impossible. (It will be recalled that the company Command Post was quite removed from any buildings.) These officers

(49) A-1, p. 115, A-8, A-12; (50, 51) Eye witness, self.

were wearing far warmer clothes than those worn by the company. Their complaining of the extreme cold verifies to some extent the weather conditions during this operation. (52)

Colonel Harper, accompanied by Major Jones, arrived at the command post of Company F at 1340 hours. Colonel Harper placed the written reply to the ultimatum in the German major's hand. The German major asked if the reply was negative or affirmative. He stated that if it were the latter he was authorized to conduct further negotiations. (53)

Colonel Harper immediately informed the major that it was not affirmative. He said, "The answer is 'NUTS'." The German captain indicated that he did not understand the meaning of "NUTS". (54)

Colonel Harper said, "In plain English it is the same as 'GO TO HELL'."

The two German officers were then taken by Colonel Harper's jeep to the point of entry into Company F lines. Their blindfolds were removed and the group returned to their own lines at 1400 hours. (55)

Enemy action began again at 1550 hours. In a column of two fifty Germans and a horse drawn cart advanced toward F Company's Observation Post. This force, marching from the high ground to the south, came under observation some 600 yards before the front lines. It was permitted to advance to within 200 yards of the Observation Post. There the combined fire of the Observation Post and the entire 1st Platoon was brought to bear on it. Annihilation was complete. (56)

At 1700 hours an attack by an estimated infantry company, advancing north astride the Bastogne road, progressed to within 200 yards of the 1st Platoon. This was stopped cold by

(52) Eye witness, self; (53,54) A-1, p. 116-117, eye witness, self; (55) A-1, p. 117; (56) A-1, p. 117, A-2, Eye witness, self.

effective artillery, mortars, machine gun and small arms fire. (57)

The enemy then resorted to placing artillery fire over the company area. No large concentrations were delivered.

Just before dark a messenger from 2nd Battalion brought information that an air resupply mission would be dropped at 2000 hours. The drop zone was to be the open ground directly west of the houses of Bastogne. Companies had the responsibility of recovering supplies that dropped in their area. Reports as to type and amounts were to be made to Division through channels. No supplies could be used by units unless approved by the Division G-4. Later the operation was cancelled because of ice conditions. (58)

The dire need of supplies by the Bastogne garrison is borne out by the fact that by noon of 22 December the 463d Field Artillery Battalion, which was supporting the 327th Glider Infantry, had only 200 rounds of ammunition left and other battalions were in a similar plight. (59)

Throughout the balance of the night periodic movement of enemy vehicles and troops was heard to the 2nd Battalion front. K rations, limited supply of 60mm mortar ammunition, 25 blankets, and a dozen pairs of galoshes were received from Battalion Supply. (60)

OPERATIONS 23 DECEMBER 1944

Daylight found Company F on the alert. At 0900 hours Lt Beirs, 2nd Platoon Leader, reported to F Company Command Post. His frozen feet were very painful and he could barely walk. Lt. Beirs was evacuated to the Battalion Aid Station in Marvie. (61)

(57) A-1, p. 117, A-2; (58) A-1, p. 135; (59) A-1, p. 133; (60, 61) Eye witness, self.

Captain of Company F immediately went to the 2nd Platoon Command Post. 1st Sgt Streicher, acting platoon sergeant, was made acting Platoon Leader. He was brought up-to-date on the situation. F Company Commander and 1st Sgt Streicher made an inspection of the platoon position and all squad leaders were informed of the change. S/Sgt Brownie T. Rushin, squad leader of 1st Squad, was designated Platoon Sergeant. (62)

At 0945 hours pathfinders jumped in the area where the 2nd Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry, was deployed. They were guided to the drop zone and soon had their radar in operation. (63)

Considerable movement of enemy vehicles on the RIMOIFOSSE-Lutrebois road over the high ground to the south was reported to the Command Post. Lt Richard C. Gilliland, Commander of Force Charlie 16, was contacted and asked to take them under fire. Lt Gilliland, using one tank from position in the 1st Platoon area, directed effective fire on the road, knocking out two half-tracks and a command car. A German antitank gun located near LUTREBOIS opened up, causing the tank to withdraw from firing position. (64)

At 1115 hours friendly aircraft began attacking enemy armor to our front. This was the first air support of the operation and contributed greatly to the morale of our troops. A great volume of enemy anti-aircraft fire opened up to the southwest and at 1150 hours the first of the resupply planes approached the drop zone. Troops from the firing positions cheered this welcome appearance of the C-47s. Spirits rose and the men were sure now that they had not been forgotten (62) Eye witness, self; (63) A-1, p. 137, A-2; (64) Eye witness, self.

in Bastogne. By 1606 hours, 241 planes had dropped 1,446 bundles weighing 144 tons by parachute into the drop zone. (65)

At 1715 hours the enemy made a new attack upon the 2nd Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry. It came as a frontal attack on Company G's position on Hill 500. Enemy small arms and ~~artillery fire was extremely heavy.~~ Adding to this there was constant fire from tanks and machine guns located in the woods on either flank of the approaching infantry. The attacking force was estimated to be two companies and, being dressed in snow suits, the personnel was difficult to detect. It was now apparent that the enemy determined to seize the town of Marvie, thus enabling him to push a stronger force of armor and infantry into Bastogne from the southeast. (66)

Coordinated with the attack on G Company was one of like proportions on the 1st Platoon of Company F. Darkness soon enveloped the battlefield. The 1st Platoon delivered a tremendous volume of fire on the attacking force. Artillery support was called in. Lt. Smith of the Weapons Platoon adjusted the 60mm mortar to within 70 yards of the front lines. (67)

By 1745 hours an enemy buildup in front of F Company's 2nd Platoon began to develop. Mortar and artillery began falling in the platoon area with increased frequency. The woods in the vicinity of the company Command Post became subject to constant artillery fire. (68)

By 1800 hours the attack on the 1st Platoon position had decreased in intensity. However, the enemy remained in close contact. (69)

At 1830 hours the 2nd Platoon began to receive a frontal attack. This was on a narrow front in the center of the pla-

(65) A-1, p. 137, A-2, Eye witness, self; (66) A-1, p. 121, A-2; (67, 68, 69) Eye witness, self.

toon position. Tanks were not employed here due to the lowness of the area. However, the enemy did employ many automatic weapons. He attempted to advance under cover of mortar and artillery fire. His advance was retarded by the platoon's excellent BAR and rifle fire, causing him to lose his cover. This attack was held off and the enemy did not close with the 2nd Platoon. (70)

At 1900 hours the 1st Platoon was again attacked but this attack lacked the punch of the first one. The enemy was held off and pinned down by effective artillery and machine gun fire.

At 1915 hours the telephone line to Battalion went out and the SCR-300 had to be used. It was apparent that the telephone lines to the other companies were out as the Battalion Commander was on the radio constantly. During this period the company wire net remained operational. (71)

The attackers on the 2nd Platoon continued the pressure on its front, feeling out its strength. At 1920 hours the wire line to the 2nd Platoon went out. T/5 John Shaw left the company Command Post to repair the line. A 2nd Platoon messenger arrived at the Command Post at 1930 hours with the information that Company G had been forced off HILL 500 and that the company's left flank was exposed. Second Platoon's left squad was bending back to protect the flank. F Company Commander called Battalion on the radio and informed them of the situation. (72)

At 2000 hours the left flank of F Company received an attack through the gap opened by the enemy seizure of HILL 500. This was held off and the enemy shifted to the north in an effort to find the flank. For the next hour the enemy maintained heavy pressure on all positions of F Company.

(70, 71, 72) Eye witness, self.

At 2100 hours the 2nd Platoon reported the enemy had maneuvered around its left flank. An effort was being made to prevent his getting behind the platoon's position. Increased pressure was being felt on the front of the platoon at this time. (73)

F Company Commander informed the 2nd Battalion by radio of his situation and requested assistance on his left flank. The Battalion Commander informed him that assistance would have to come from Regiment as he had committed all his units to hold Marvie. (74)

At 2130 hours the 2nd Platoon reported that an enemy platoon had passed around the left flank and was now in its rear. First Sgt. Streicher was keeping his platoon in position, knowing that anything that moved in his area was enemy. (75).

Battalion called F Company and informed it that "FRIENDS" were on the way and to attempt to hold on until they arrived. Battalion would not give information as to what was coming or by what route. The "FRIENDS" knew the location of the company and would find it. (76)

At 2145 the Observation Post notified the 60mm mortar position that an attack was being launched on it and that they might have to fight it out. T/Sgt Mackey at the Observation Post ordered the 60mm mortars to fire on the primary targets immediately to his front and to continue to fire until ordered to stop. (77)

At 2150 hours Lt Herzke informed the Company Commander that an enemy group was in the immediate vicinity of the Command Post. F Company Commander ordered instant preparation for the evacuation of the Command Post. Personnel in the vicinity was alerted while the Company Commander notified

(73) A-2, Eye witness, self; (74,75,76,77) Eye witness, self, A-2.

the 60mm mortars and the 2nd Platoon to extricate themselves as best they could and move into the 1st Platoon area. Contact had been broken with the Observation Post. Before the 1st Platoon could be notified of the plan, the enemy group began throwing hand grenades toward the Command Post. The Command Post group then withdrew rapidly to the north through the woods in an attempt to reach the 1st Platoon area. At the time of the withdrawal an attempt was made by radio to inform the Battalion Commander, but he was issuing important instructions to E Company, therefore he was not made aware of the withdrawal. (78)

The command group moved out of the woods and proceeded north along the narrow road. At the first hedgerow it moved west under cover to the main Bastogne road. Here the group was halted by F Company Commander. An ambush was set up with the purpose of destroying any enemy that might be following the command group. Lt. Herzke and a runner were immediately dispatched north along the Bastogne road. He was instructed to check the first house on the west of the road to determine if it was suitable for a new Command Post. If suitable, the runner was to return for the command group. Lt. Herzke was then to proceed quickly to the first crossroad to the north with the purpose of contacting the "FRIENDS" that were on the way to assist F Company and to acquaint them with the situation. (79)

The runner returned in about ten minutes, informing the Company Commander that the house was useable. F Company Commander instructed two men to remain with him and the balance to proceed to set up the Command Post. T/5 Shaw was to salvage some old wire lines along the road and establish a wire to 1st Platoon Command Post. (80)

(78) Eye witness, self, A-2; (79, 80) Eye witness, self.

to find out their situation. He returned shortly with information that they were receiving sporadic small arms fire. F Company Commander then left the command post and moved north along the Bastogne road to contact Lt. Herzke. At about 2400 hours he contacted Lt Colonel Thomas J. Rouzie, Regimental Executive Officer, and Lt. Herzke at the crossroad. Lt Colonel Rouzie was informed of the present situation of Company F. (84)

OPERATIONS 24 DECEMBER 1944

Lt Colonel Rouzie had with him 40 men of Company A of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment under the command of Captain Stanfield Stach. These were the "FRIENDS" sent to reinforce Company F. (85)

Colonel Rouzie stated that he could use this unit plus Company F to counterattack and restore the company position. He then asked what Commander of F Company would recommend. F Company Commander recommended that Company A of the 501st be used to set up a defense position rather than counterattack. The ground forward of the crossroad sloped gently to the woods recently lost by F Company. This was all open ground. Just forward of the crossroad and extending around to the left toward Marvie was a natural ridge commanding all ground to the woods. An excellent defensive position could be set up along this high ground with good fields of fire for all weapons and complete observation of the front. In addition, the time element was considered. To obtain additional men from F Company, organize and coordinate the attack would require much more time than to set up the defensive position. (86)

(84) Eye witness, self; (85) A-1, p. 126, Eye witness, self, A-2; (86) Eye witness, self.

Captain of Company F ordered the two men remaining with him to cover the hedgerow, to hold any of the company there that might come out of the woods, and to fire on the enemy if he should come that way. (81)

F Company Commander then left for the 1st Platoon position to inform Lt. Smith and T/Sgt Butler of the situation. At this time the 1st Platoon was receiving mortar, machine gun, and direct fire from two S.P. guns. T/Sgt Butler was informed of the situation and that a wire line would be laid from the new Command Post if sufficient wire could be found. T/Sgt Butler felt that their position could be held. The S.P. guns were now concentrating on the farmhouse. Hay in the adjoining barn was ignited. Soon the 1st Platoon position was well illuminated. (82)

F Company Commander returned to the men left at the hedgerow. This group proceeded toward the new Command Post. Twelve men of an 81mm mortar section of an armored unit were found in the basement of the first farmhouse on the east side of the main road. Captain Company F ordered them into a defensive position covering the woods just vacated by the command group. Two men were directed to employ a 50 caliber machine gun to cover the open left flank of the 1st Platoon. Two others were ordered to repair the wire line to the 81mm mortar Observation Post in the 1st Platoon area. A Company F sergeant was placed in command of this group. (83)

F Company Commander then left for his command post, arriving there about 2330 hours. He had secured a EE-8-A telephone from the 81mm mortar section. A runner was sent to the 2nd Platoon, G Company, to bring them up-to-date and (81,82,83) Eye witness, self.

The possible further attack by the enemy was also considered. If he were determined to exploit the breach in the line he could pour out of the woods and, guiding on the unimproved road, move directly on Bastogne. (87)

Lt Colonel Rouzie decided to establish the defensive position on the high ground. He instructed Captain Stach to tie in with Company F's left flank and, by a series of strong points, defend the high ground as far east as possible. Colonel Rouzie would command the two companies and the 2nd Platoon of G Company. The Command Post to be established in the vicinity of the crossroad. (88)

Communications would be established as soon as he could get the equipment from regiment. By 0100 hours the position was organized and the breach closed. (See Map C)

An immediate patrol was to be dispatched by Captain Stach toward the woods to determine if the enemy were preparing a buildup there. The Company A patrol was fired upon before reaching the woods. They received fire from other positions when they attempted to approach the woods from other directions. (89)

Captain F Company returned to the company Command Post at 0100 hours. There he found that the entire company 60mm mortar section, under the command of S/Sgt Arnold L. McClure, had slipped out past the enemy in the woods and were now setting up a new position in the rear of the 1st Platoon. Two mortars and sixty rounds of ammunition had been carried out by the section. (90)

T/5 John Shaw entered the Command Post with a casualty. This man had been helping Shaw lay the wire line to the 1st Platoon. Enemy mortar concentration had caught them just

(87) Eye witness, self; (88) A-1, p. 127-128; (89) Eye witness, self.

to the rear of the 1st Platoon. T/5 Shaw then went on alone to complete the wire line. (91)

At 0130 hours the Company Command Post had communications established to the following: the 1st Platoon, the 2nd Platoon G Company through the 1st Platoon, and the 60mm mortars. Shortly thereafter an SCR-300 radio, netted to one at Lt Colonel Rouzie's command post, and a reel of assault wire were received by the company. T/5 Shaw laid this wire between the two command posts. A regimental wire team completed the communications to regiment. (92)

At 0145 hours Lt Colonel Rouzie informed Company F Commander that S/Sgt Brownie T. Rusin and twenty-three men of the 2nd Platoon had successfully withdrawn from the woods and were now employed on the left flank of Company A, 501st. (93)

Twice again the German infantry, with tank fire support, directed frontal attacks on the 1st Platoon position. These were held off and by daylight the pressure eased. (94)

In the early morning the Germans asked for and received permission to remove their dead and wounded from in front of the 1st Platoon. (95)

At about 0800 hours 2nd Battalion Command Post was contacted by telephone. Major Galbreath was informed of the present situation and disposition of units in F Company area. the situation in Marvie was much improved but enemy troops still held the southernmost edge of town. Several men of F Company's 2nd Platoon were at the Battalion command post and would be directed to join their company at once.

The new positions, hastily set up during the night, were now being improved. Contact with the 326th Airborne Engineer

(91,92,93) Eye witness, self; (94) A-2, A-1, p. 128, eye witness, self; (95) A-1, p. 129.

Battalion on the right was made. A coordinated plan of contact patrols was established.

Support from friendly aircraft began at 1030 hours and lasted throughout the day. At 1340 hours a resupply by air was dropped to the 101st Airborne Division. Planes continued to bring in their bundles until 1530 hours. About 100 tons of materiel were parachuted out of 160 planes. (96)

Pressure on Company F throughout the day was in the form of light concentrations of artillery and mortar fire.

At about 1600 hours the command post was subjected to an intense mortar concentration. No casualties resulted as all personnel was under cover. (97)

Shortly before dark German S.P. guns or tanks began firing on the front lines of the 1st Platoon. These guns were located in the vicinity of REMOIFOSSE. An Artillery concentration in this area, adjusted by Lt. Smith, was effective. (98)

German artillery and mortar fire was heavy throughout the night. A small group of enemy, under cover of darkness, set up a machine gun in the house on the west side of the main road in front of the 1st Platoon. Its fire was directed on the entrance to the platoon command post. T/Sgt Butler and four men assaulted the position and destroyed the gun. The night became bitter cold and the men were very miserable in the fox holes. The entire platoon was on the alert for a possible attack.

Several enemy planes were over Bastogne during the night. The center of the town was heavily bombed. (99)

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This was Christmas Day. However, the Holiday spirit failed to manifest itself along the front lines. Relief would (96) A-2; (97,98,99) Eye witness, self.

have been the only Christmas present of which the men would have been cognizant.

The cold dawn found all men in their fox holes in anticipation of another attack. They were very thankful that one did not develop.

At about 0900 hours Lt Hibbard, Platoon Leader, 2nd Platoon, of G Company, reported an enemy group of eight men off his right flank, moving north toward the high ground. Captain Company F instructed Lt Hibbard to send out a squad to capture the enemy group. This squad returned in an hour with an artillery observation party of seven men and a powerful radio. Somehow the party had missed their own lines and entered the gap without knowing it was hostile territory. These prisoners were sent to regiment. (100)

At about 1400 hours two S.P. guns or tanks began firing on the 1st Platoon positions. Their fire was concentrated on what was left of the platoon command post. T/Sgt Butler requested some supporting fire to neutralize the enemy's direct fire on his position. Captain F Company called regiment and requested that an effort be made to get some of the fighter planes in the vicinity to reduce the S.P. guns. (101)

Captain W.L. Abernathy (Regimental S-2) called Company F shortly thereafter with the information that an air mission had been approved and to mark the platoon front lines at once.

In fifteen minutes two P-47s came out of the north, flew once over the area on reconnaissance and then made a strafing run. The planes came around again on a bombing run, dropping napalm bombs. With mission accomplished the planes left the area. (102)

(100, 101, 102) Eye witness, self.

The company front remained quiet until 1730 hours.

At this time an attack with small arms was launched against the 1st Platoon. It was made astride the main Bastogne road. Artillery and mortar support was immediately given the 1st Platoon and by 1800 hours the situation began to calm down.

(103)

K rations and ammunition were delivered to the company under cover of darkness. During the balance of the night Company F received considerable mortar fire.

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Company F spent a relatively quiet morning. Men were rotated so that they could spend some time indoors getting warm and making coffee. Enemy artillery and mortar fire fell mostly in the rear areas.

Heavy fighting could be heard along the western sector of the Division. Several miles to the south and southwest heavy firing gave hope of an early break-through by the 4th Armored Division.

At 1500 hours Medical personnel landed by glider on the drop zone just west of Bastogne. (104)

A resupply by parachute was dropped at 1520 hours. A portion of the last serial fell outside the perimeter. (105)

At 1650 hours, amid a great deal of firing, five tanks could be seen to break out of the woods 1500 yards due west of Company F command post. Observed through field glasses, they were found to bear the white star of friendly tanks.

(106)

Regiment called Company F Command Post at 1730 hours to officially confirm the arrival of five friendly tanks in the area of the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion. Regiment also instructed that yellow panels would be displayed, marking our

(103) A-2, eye witness, self; (104, 105) A-2; (106) Eye witness, self.

forward positions on the main road. The main elements of the 4th Armored Division were expected to enter Bastogne via this road on the following day. (107)

Company F then settled down for the night. Nevertheless strong security was maintained. No chance could be taken even with relief promised for the morrow. The enemy still manned his positions and, while in them, was a constant threat.

F Company continued in these defensive positions until 2000 hours on 29 December when it was moved into Bastogne to rejoin the 2nd Battalion. (108)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing the operation related in this monograph it will be seen that Company F was assigned a most difficult mission. It was given a defense mission covering a very wide frontage. The company was at reduced strength and lacked some of its crew served weapons. The organization of only two rifle platoons made it most difficult to maintain a support element in the company. The exposed right flank placed an added burden upon the company, that of maintaining security patrols of considerable strength.

The outstanding performance of the communications personnel is highly commendable. Their initiative and understanding of the vital importance of communication found them working under fire and in extreme cold constantly.

Specific criticisms are the following:

1. The organization of the Glider Infantry Rifle Company at the time did not provide for an adequate support element, nor did it provide sufficient strength for a long period of combat. Transportation was totally lacking, necessitating the hand carrying of all supplies and rations throughout all operations.

(107, 108) A-2, eye witness, self.

2. Fully trained and qualified replacements were not made available to the regiment at the conclusion of the Holland Campaign.

3. No provision was made for the unit commanders to conduct even a limited reconnaissance prior to the relief of the Engineer units.

4. Security measures were never taken by the regiment or battalion to cover the organization of the main line of resistance. Each company had to maintain its own security during the preparatory phase. Little or no warning could be expected prior to the actual contact of the enemy with the main line.

5. Adequate and detailed plans to reduce possible penetration of the battle position were not prepared by the Company Commander.

6. Engineer companies lacked a thorough knowledge of infantry defense tactics. When used as infantry they should be capable of complete cooperation and understanding.

7. One set of maps per company made fire plans and control of mortars extremely difficult and reduced their efficiency.

8. The failure of the 2nd Battalion Supply Section to properly secure the Battalion dump at Manda St. Etienne on 20 December 1944 resulted in the loss of all of Company F's bedrolls, overcoats, and galoshes, thus causing additional suffering to the troops on the front line.

9. Adequate winter clothing was not provided for troops prior to their departure on the Bastogne mission.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Reconnaissance is of the utmost importance in any type of military operation. Adequate reconnaissance by

regimental and battalion commanders prior to issuing orders to subordinate commanders will greatly add to the success of the operation. Reconnaissance by company commanders will result in more efficient employment of troops and utilization of the terrain.

Failure of the Germans to conduct thorough reconnaissance caused them to overlook the wide gap on F Company's right flank. Had their reconnaissance been more thorough, it is very probable that the outcome may have been disastrous for F Company.

2. Once a breach has been established in the enemy line every effort must be made to capitalize on his disorder before he has time to reorganize his force and establish a new position. This lesson was clearly demonstrated when the Germans overran the 2nd Platoon position. Had the enemy quickly reorganized and continued the attack to the north he would have reached the very edge of Bastogne before meeting further resistance.

3. Communication is vital in the control of any unit. In a defensive position several wire lines laid over separate routes will insure continued operation and ease of maintenance. Radios were found to operate less efficiently in cold weather. This was due primarily to the freezing of the batteries. Snow and ice on the sets shorted them.

4. Supplementary positions for all-around defense to the flanks and rear should be constructed and provisions made for shifting squads to those positions.

5. All personnel in a rifle company should be thoroughly familiar with the proper procedure for requesting and adjusting artillery fire.

6. Normal combat clothing and shoes were not adequate for front line troops in this winter operation.

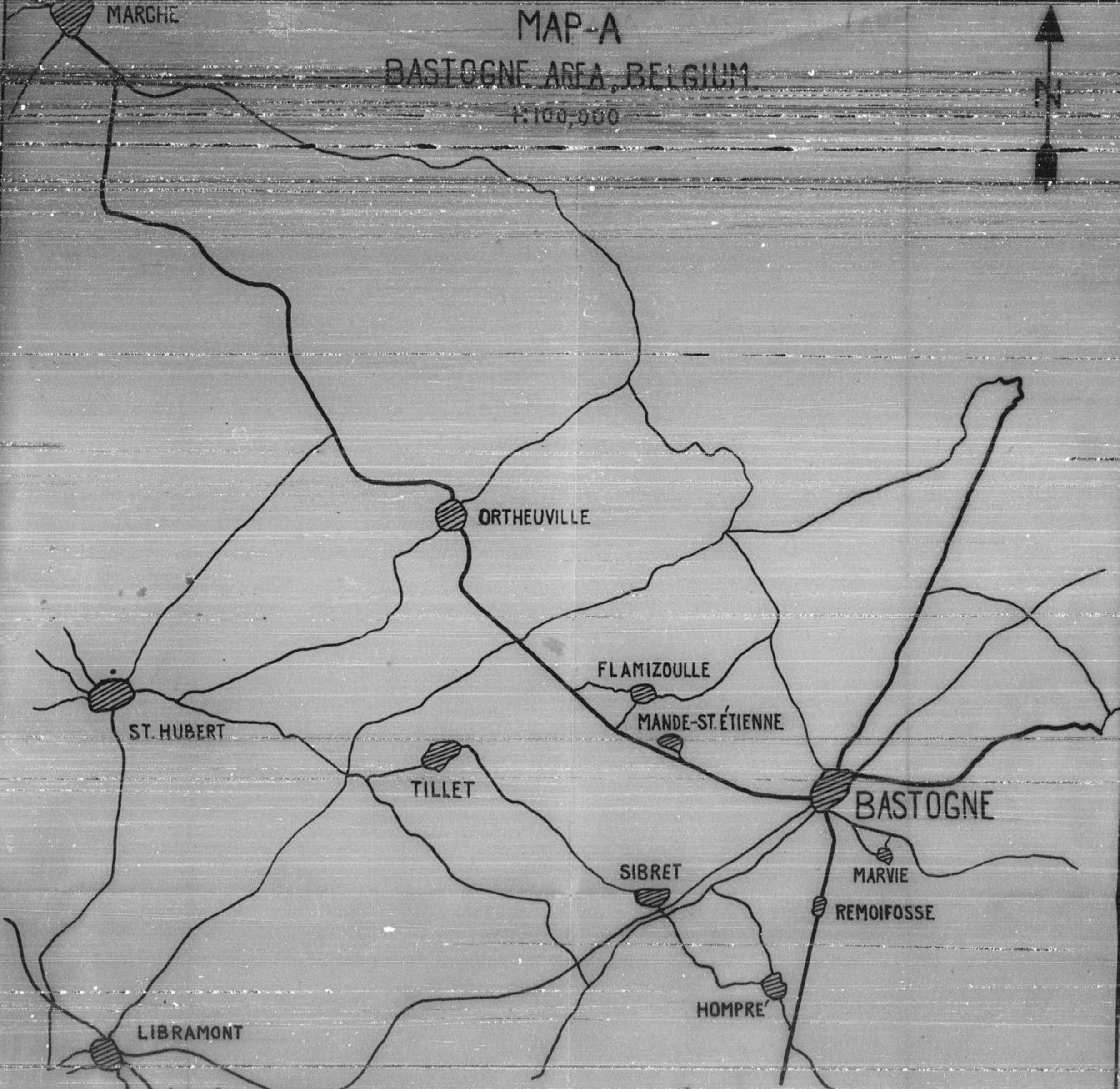
7. Counterattack plans must be incorporated in every defensive situation. They must be made early and all units made familiar with them. These plans should be changed to meet each situation and commanders kept up-to-date.

MARCHE

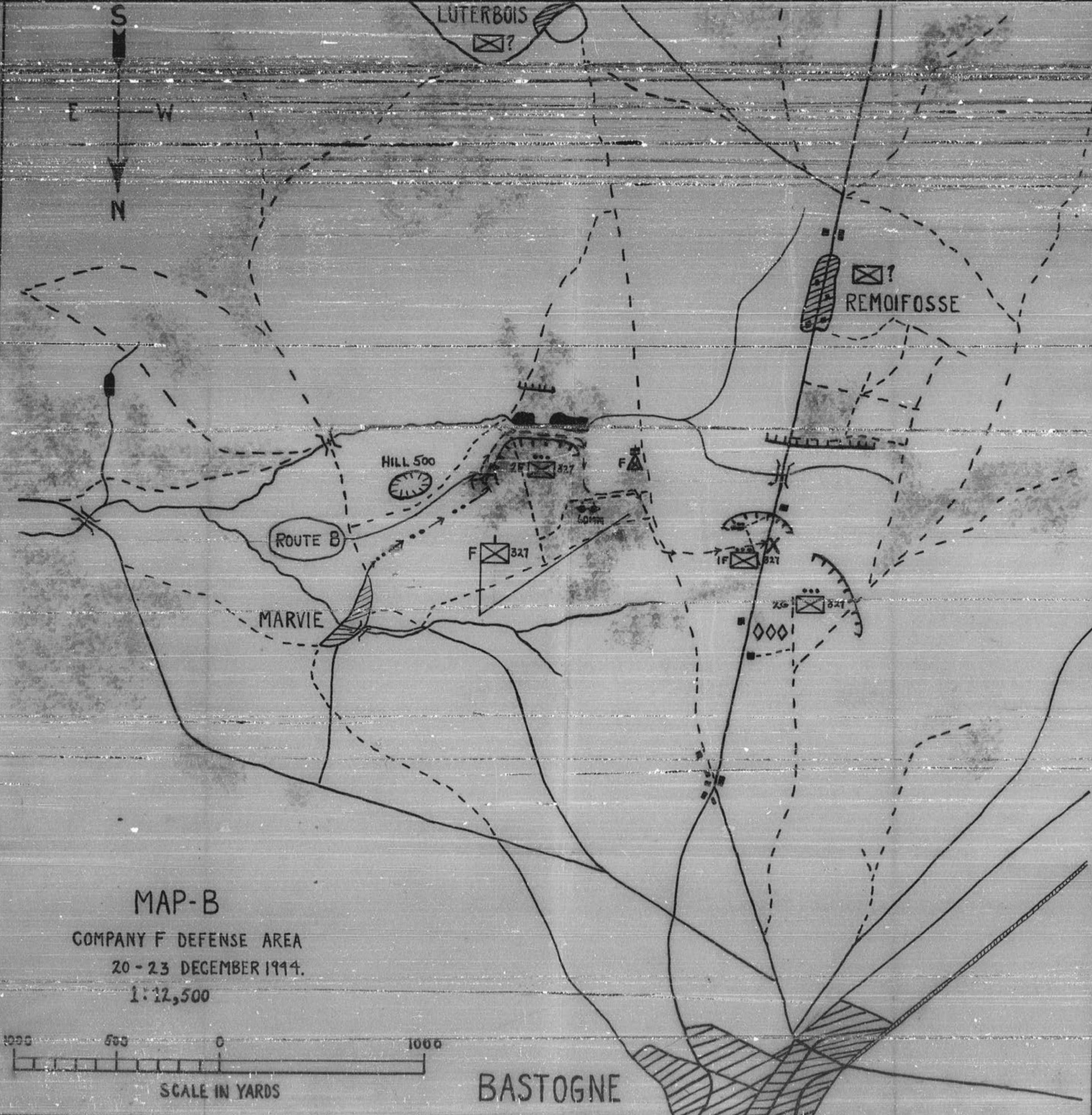
MAP-A

BASTOGNE AREA, BELGIUM

1:100,000



SCALE IN MILES



MAP-B

COMPANY F DEFENSE AREA

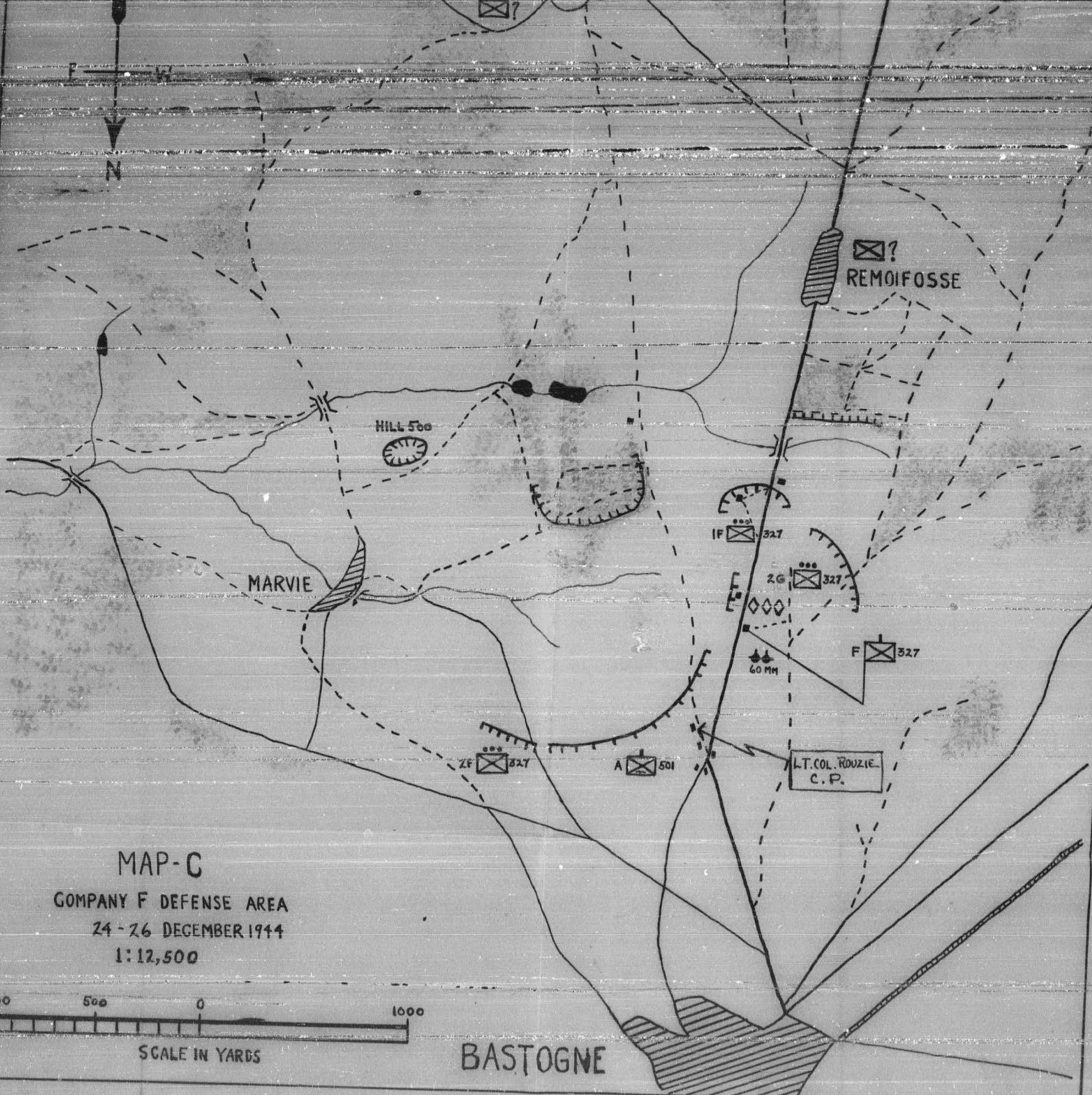
20-23 DECEMBER 1944.

1:12,500



SCALE IN YARDS

BASTOGNE



REMOIFOSSE

HILL 500

MARVIE

IF 327

2G 327

F 327

60 MM

ZF 327

A 501

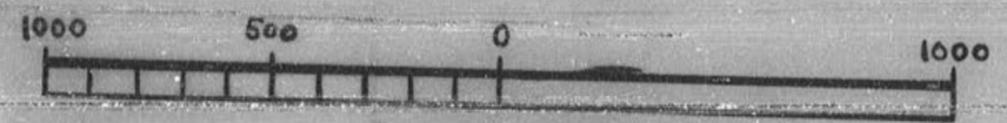
LT. COL. ROUZIE
C.P.

MAP-C

COMPANY F DEFENSE AREA

24-26 DECEMBER 1944

1:12,500



SCALE IN YARDS

BASTOGNE