

General Subjects Section  
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "L", 26TH INFANTRY  
(1ST INFANTRY DIVISION) AT  
STE. ANNE, FRANCE, 8-9 JUNE 1944  
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY COMPANY  
DEFENDING IN HEDGEROW COUNTRY

Captain Linwood W. Billings, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index .....	1
Bibliography .....	2
Introduction .....	3
1st Infantry Division Plan .....	4
Division Situation, 6 June 1944 .....	6
Situation of the 3d Battalion 26th Infantry, 6-7 June 1944 .....	6
March to Ste. Anne .....	7
Plan for Defense of Ste. Anne .....	10
Defense of Ste. Anne .....	14
Analysis and Criticism .....	23
Lessons .....	27
Map A - Invasion Area for Plan Neptune	
Map B - D-Day Objectives 1st Infantry Division	
Map C - March to Ste. Anne, 8-9 June 1944	
Map D - Defense of Ste. Anne	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 Utah Beach To Cherbourg (6 June - 27 June 1944)  
Historical Division, Department of the Army (TIS Library)
- A-2 First United States Army  
Report of Operations (20 Oct 1943 - 1 Aug 1944) (TIS Library)
- A-3 Omaha Beachhead (6 June - 13 June 1944)  
Historical Division, War Department (TIS Library)
- A-4 The First  
Information and Education Division  
Special and Information Services, ETOUSA (TIS Library)
- A-5 Selected Intelligence Reports Vol. I (June 1944 - Nov 1944)  
Office of the A C of S, G-2  
First United States Infantry Division  
Germany, 6 December 1944 (TIS Library)
- A-6 The First  
First United States Infantry Division 1945 (Personal  
possession of author)
- A-7 Danger Forward  
By H. R. Knickerbocker and Others  
Society of the First Division, Washington, D.C. (TIS Library)
- A-8 Journal For the 3RD Battalion 26TH Infantry  
(1 November 1942 - 2 June 1945) (Personal possession of  
author)

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "L", 26TH INFANTRY  
(1ST INFANTRY DIVISION) AT  
STE. ANNE, FRANCE, 8-9 JUNE 1944  
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph provides an account of the actions of Company L, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, covering the seizure and defense of its assigned objective in the Omaha Beachhead area, at Ste. Anne, France, during the period 8-9 June 1944.

Neptune, the Allied plan, for the invasion of France, became operational during the early morning hours of 6 June 1944, when American and British paratroopers made several landings inland from the Normandy Coast. (1) After two years of planning and preparation the Allies were now ready to seize fifty miles of French Coastline, from the Vier Estuary to the Orne River, as a beachhead. (2)

The plan called for the American VII Corps to land, the 4th Infantry Division, on the southern portion of the east coast of the Cotentin Peninsula (Utah Beach) and link up with the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions. (3) The American V Corps was to simultaneously land two combat teams abreast on the northern coast of Calvados (Omaha Beach). One combat team from the 29th Division was to land in the west zone, while the other from the 1st Division landed in the east zone. (4) Elements of the British Second Army were to seize beaches along the Normandy Coast between Port-en-Bessin and the Orne River. (5) (See Map A)

(1) A-1, p. 15; (2) A-3, p. 1; (3) A-2, p. 26;  
(4) A-7, p. 171; (5) A-3, p. 3.

All ground forces in the Normandy Operation were under the 21st Army Group, commanded by General Sir Bernard Montgomery. (6) Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley commanded the First US Army, comprised of the V and VII Corps during the assault phase. (7) The entire landing area did not afford a port; therefore, all initial elements and supplies to sustain them, were brought over the beaches. (8) H-hour for the water-borne elements at Utah Beach was at 0625 hours; at Omaha Beach it was 0645 hours. The Airborne elements made their initial landings four or five hours earlier. (9)

Troops scheduled to land at Omaha Beach on D-Day were divided into two forces. Force "O", an assault force of about 34,142 men and 3,306 vehicles, contained the 16th and 18th Regimental Combat Teams of the 1st Infantry Division, and the 116th and 115th Regimental Combat Teams of the 29th Division, plus ranger, tank, engineer, and artillery units. Force "B", the follow-up force of about 25,117 men and 4,429 vehicles, contained the remainder of the 29th Division, the 26th Regimental Combat Team from the 1st Infantry Division, and other supporting units. Force "B" was to arrive off the assault beaches, after noon on D-Day. (10)

#### 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION PLAN

D-Day plans of the 1st Infantry Division involved the use of all three of its Regimental Combat Teams. (See Map B)

The 16th Infantry, after reducing the beach defenses in their zone of attack, was to place its battalions in assembly areas about 1,000 yards inland and move on to

(6) A-3, p. 3; (7) A-3, p. 5; (8) A-1, p. 3;  
(9) A-2, p. 41; (10) A-7, p. 175.

capture its assigned D-Day objectives. The 2d Battalion Landing Team was to seize Colleville and occupy the high ground south of the village, to provide protection for later landings of other units. The 3d Battalion Landing Team was to turn to the east, reduce the defenses as far as Ste-Honorine des Pertes, and protect the east flank of the 1st Infantry Division along the First Army boundary. On the west flank of the 1st Infantry Division, the 1st Battalion Landing Team was to capture Formigny and occupy the high ground southeast of the town. (11)

The 18th Infantry, part of Force "O", was to assemble southeast of Colleville behind the 16th Infantry, move across the Aure River, and occupy the high ground east of Mandeville. The mission of patrolling to the D-Day Phase Line for the division was also assigned this unit. (12)

The 26th Regimental Combat Team, the only major element of the 1st Infantry Division in Force "B", was to land on orders of V Corps. Upon landing it would revert to 1st Infantry Division control. An assembly area in the vicinity of Colleville was picked for this unit. (13) Its mission was to seize the high ground south and southeast of Tour-en-Bessin and organize it for defense. (14) The 3d Battalion's portion of the regimental objective was located in the vicinity of Ste. Anne, one mile southeast of Tour-en-Bessin. In addition, the 3d Battalion had the mission of contacting the British 50th Infantry Division, the west element of the British 2d Army, on the Bayeux Road.

Because of determined enemy resistance in the 1st Div-

(11) A-3, p. 33; (12) A-3, p. 33; (13) Personal knowledge; (14) A-3, p. 33.

ision zone of the beachhead, the execution of many portions of this plan were delayed. Such was the case in that part of the plan which applied to the 26th Regimental Combat Team. (15)

#### DIVISION SITUATION, 6 JUNE 1944

Units of the 16th Infantry suffered about 30% casualties in their assault landings; consequently, they fell far short of taking many of their D-Day objectives. (16) The 18th Infantry Regimental Combat Team, which landed at 1300 hours, was given the mission of taking many objectives, originally assigned to the 16th Infantry. (17) At 1800 hours, when the 26th Infantry landed, the 1st Division plan was still far behind schedule. It was necessary to use the three battalions of the 26th Infantry Regiment to plug dangerous gaps existing in the beachhead at this time. (18)

Many factors were involved in preventing the assault elements of the 1st Division from taking its objectives on schedule, but the one factor which Allied Intelligence had not counted on was having the major portion of the German 352d Infantry Division just behind the beaches. This enemy unit, which was on anti-invasion maneuvers at the time, provided greater depth to what otherwise would have been shallow beach defenses, normally manned by one and one-half battalions. (19)

#### SITUATION OF THE 3D BATTALION 26TH INFANTRY, 6-7 JUNE 1944

*Map Reference*  
Shortly after 1800 hours, 6 June 1944, the 3d Battalion minus Company L, landed from LCIs on Omaha Easy-Red Beach, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John T. Corley. The original plan called for the entire battalion to land at Omaha Fox-Green Beach. Because of sandbars on Fox-Green, the land-

(15) Personal knowledge; (16) A-6, p. 17; (17) A-4, p. 5; (18) A-7, p. 189; (19) A-5, p. 8.

ing was shifted to Easy-Red. The battalion rapidly crossed the beach and started toward its prescribed assembly area at Colleville. A short distance from the beach the column ran into the 26th Infantry Command Post in an enemy gun emplacement. Colonel Corley was directed to hold his battalion in place pending a change of orders. Later, the 3d Battalion received instructions to move to a defensive position on the St-Laurent--Formigny Road, where it was attached to the 18th Infantry. (20)

LCI #416, loaded with Company L, struck a mine before it could join the rest of the battalion. Company L was forced to wade ashore under heavy shell fire on Fox-Green Beach suffering a total of six casualties, and went into action with units of the 16th Infantry. It was not until 1040 hours, 7 June 1944, that Company L rejoined the 3d Battalion south of St-Laurent. Here for the next 24 hours the company took part in 3d Battalion offensive actions aimed at taking Formigny. (21)

#### MARCH TO STE. ANNE

With the stabilizing of the front in the 1st Division zone at the end of D plus 1, the 26th Infantry Regiment was ordered to take its planned D-Day objectives. This action commenced with the 2d Battalion seizing the high ground at the crossroads between Mosles and Tour-en-Bessin at 0530 hours, 8 June. (22) By evening of this day the 1st Battalion had pushed elements through Etreham and had succeeded in passing one company across the Aure River. The 3d Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 18th Infantry during the morning of 8 June, but actual movement of this unit toward the regi- (20) A-8, p. 44; (21) Personal knowledge; (22) A-3, p. 119.

mental objective was held up until a battalion of the 115th Infantry could arrive to take its place at Formigny. At 1340 hours the 3d Battalion started toward Ste. Anne, its planned D-Day objective. This move involved marching from the extreme west flank of the 1st Infantry Division to the extreme east flank. (See Map C) (23)

By 1800 hours the battalion reached the rear of the 2d Battalion's position at the crossroads beyond Mosles. Approximately six miles were covered during the hike. Organic transportation which joined the battalion at 0800 hours that morning, was very useful in carrying crew-served weapons, ammunition, and heavy communication equipment. No enemy resistance was met during the trip as the battalion moved laterally behind the lines held by the 18th Infantry. Companies were marched into assembly areas to the left of the main road. Here the men consumed another "K" ration and rested for the next two hours. The battalion had been marching and fighting for forty-eight hours. However, it was to be another forty-eight hours before they would get any real rest. Company C of the 745th Tank Battalion was attached to the 3d Battalion in the assembly area. The tank company had only six tanks that could still function at this time. (24)

At 2040 hours the battalion moved toward Le Calvaire, a small village 300 yards south of Tour-en-Bessin, with Ste. Anne as its objective. (25) Earlier that morning the 2d Battalion of the 26th Infantry had requested and obtained a fighter mission on the town of Tour-en-Bessin. An armored patrol went into the town at about 1140 hours and reported that the enemy had withdrawn. (26) The 3d Battalion Commander,

(23) A-8, p. 45; (24) Personal knowledge; (25) Personal knowledge; (26) A-3, p. 120.

having this information and realizing the fluid situation that existed on this front, felt that the enemy might have re-occupied the town in the meantime. (27) The battalion order of march designated I Company as the advance guard, followed by the battalion command post group, L Company, K Company, Headquarters Company minus the battalion anti-tank platoon, M Company, battalion anti-tank platoon, with an attached anti-tank platoon from regiment bringing up the rear. The foot elements of the battalion moved in a column of twos on each side of the road while the six tanks of Company C, 745th Tank Battalion, rolled down the center, dispersed throughout the entire column. (28)

On approaching Le Calvaire, the leading elements of the battalion came under small-arms fire from the town. I Company's point deployed and started to slowly work its way forward. The remainder of the battalion took cover in the ditches beside the road. Although twilight, in June, in Normandy, lasts until 2300 hours the battalion commander sensed that daylight was fast slipping away. Unless he could get his unit through Le Calvaire in a short time, Ste. Anne could not be reached before darkness. The battalion commander ordered all of the tanks to the head of the column and directed them to start firing on the town using both cannon and machine guns. Orders were passed back along the column to move forward. The tanks slowly worked their way on into the town, firing continuously, with foot elements moving on both sides of them. This afforded the tanks some protection from German anti-tank weapons, such as the "Panzer-Faust", which was used by enemy (27) Personal knowledge; (28) A-8, p. 45.

tank hunting teams. Sufficient covering fire was provided by the tanks to permit the entire battalion to pass through the town by 2400 hours. (29) I Company suffered the only casualties, three men killed and two wounded. (30) No effort was made to clean the enemy out of each individual building. The town contained only a very small garrison of which the majority withdrew to the east. After brushing several small enemy patrols aside the battalion arrived at Ste. Anne at 0015 hours 9 June. (31)

#### PLAN FOR DEFENSE OF STE. ANNE

Ste. Anne was a small farming community, consisting of ten to twelve buildings, including barns and sheds. All buildings were of masonry construction, stone and rubble-mortar, a type predominant throughout this section of France. Most of the buildings were located on the north side of the Isigny--Bayeux Highway, a paved, two lane road which ran directly through the village. Several secondary roads joined the main highway in the vicinity of the built up area. The majority of the population had fled the town before the entry of the 3d Battalion; however, it probably never had more than twenty-five inhabitants.

The sector of ground which the 3d Battalion had been directed to defend ranged between fifty and sixty meters in height, which was somewhat higher than the immediate surrounding terrain. The whole area was made up of gently rolling ground, gradually sloping in an easterly direction toward the Drome River in the British zone. Orchards and pasture land comprised the majority of the ground occupied by the 3d Battalion. (29) Personal knowledge; (30) A-8, p. 45; (31) Personal knowledge.

lion, although there were also small areas of woods and cultivated fields included. Hedgerows with banks three to six feet high divided the fields and lined the roads throughout the entire area.

Shortly after midnight a light rain had begun to fall and visibility was greatly reduced. This caused considerable difficulty in getting units quickly established in their positions.

The 3d Battalion entered Ste. Anne with considerable confidence in its ability to defend the town. With two campaigns under its belt, Africa and Sicily, key personnel were battle wise. Back in England each unit carefully worked out the difficulties involved on sand tables and terrain boards. A sponge rubber terrain board, showing the area in detail, had been provided by higher headquarters. All officers and key noncommissioned officers, including squad leaders, were briefed on this board. Each platoon worked sand table problems on the complete situation; for security reasons the names of the towns involved were not used. Battalion unit training prepared them for this mission for over five months. Before the 26th Infantry moved into the marshalling area in England, a regimental maneuver was held using its Normandy mission as a basis for the problem. All men in the battalion knew what was expected of them, when they reached Ste. Anne. The men were very tired but morale was high.

Let us consider the enemy situation in the vicinity of Ste. Anne, a factor at the time which was not at all clear, particularly at company level. The 3d Battalion lost contact with the enemy shortly before the town was entered. It was

empty but several enemy road blocks on northern and eastern approaches to Ste. Anne showed signs of having hastily been abandoned a short time before. Close to the eastern approach an enemy anti-tank gun was found in a prepared position.

Information provided by regiment indicated that the enemy held a corridor beginning south of Port-en-Bessin and extending southeast along the Drome River Valley between the American First Army and the British Second Army. 1st Division unit locations were known but British unit locations were general and indefinite. No accurate estimate of the German strength holding the corridor was available to the battalion at this time. (32) It has since been revealed that this area on 7 and 8 June was occupied by elements of two German battalions, the 1st Battalion, 726th Infantry, and the 517th Battalion, 30th Mobile Brigade.

The British had been driving west but were having difficulty in reaching the Drome River due to stiff enemy resistance. (33) Vaucelles, a small town, a mile east of Ste. Anne was reported as having fallen to the British. Units of the 1st Division had steadily been compressing this corridor to the east since the evening of 7 June.

Information now available indicates that with the advance of the 26th Infantry to Ste. Anne, the enemy was in danger of having his escape route cut. (See Map C) The enemy corridor at the close of 8 June was fast becoming a pocket with only a little over a mile gap between the British and the 3d Battalion.

The battalion's plan was to occupy positions in accord-  
(32) Personal knowledge; (33) A-3, p. 121.

Map D  
ance with a scheme worked out in England. Company L occupying the ground northeast of the village with its right flank on the Bayeux Road. Company I to take positions in the vicinity of Cussy and defend to the east. Company K was to move in between L and I Companies, 500 yards to their rear facing to the south. One platoon of M Company's machine guns was to support L Company and the other I Company. The 81 mm mortar platoon was to select positions in the center of the triangle formed by the rifle companies. The battalion command post was planned to be located in the town. The 3d Battalion Anti-tank Platoon was to cover approaches into the town from the west and east, while the attached regimental platoon was to move to Cussy to meet any tank threats developing from the southeast. This disposition of units would cover all of the major routes of approach into Ste. Anne. A strong point system of defense for the town existed; however, a gap of over 400 yards between L and I Companies caused the commander considerable concern. I Company planned to cover this with small outposts. At the time the defense plan was drawn up it was not known that tanks would be available to the battalion. Thus they were not included in the initial plan. (See Map D)

All plans for the defense of this area had been based on the fact that the 3d Battalion would reach Ste. Anne late on the evening of D-Day. It was anticipated that by morning of D plus 1 the enemy would counterattack from the east or south. Therefore, the majority of the battalion's strength was to be deployed to cover the eastern and southern approaches to the town. Although, it was the close of D plus 2 before the battalion moved into Ste. Anne no major enemy counterattack

had developed in the 1st Division zone. Information passed down to the 3d Battalion indicated that it was highly probable that a counterattack would occur on the morning of 9 June. It was anticipated that this attack would come from the east or south. However, the battalion commander was also concerned about a possible attack from the north or northeast from the enemy's corridor. (34)

#### DEFENSE OF STE. ANNE

L Company followed I Company through Ste. Anne. Orders were issued by the battalion commander at the eastern edge of town, to move into position according to previous plans. Platoon leaders were quickly called forward and directed to move their units to the preplanned areas. L Company's plan gave the 1st Platoon the eastern portion of the company sector, the 2d Platoon the northeastern and the 3d Platoon the northwestern. (See Map D) The 60 mm mortar section was to provide support from defilade in the center of the company area; the light machine-gun section was attached to the 2d Platoon. The supporting heavy machine-gun platoon from M Company was to place a section of its guns in the 1st Platoon area and the remainder with the 3d Platoon. All units had been instructed to dig in and provide local security. Patrols from the 2d and 3d Platoons were to reconnoiter the secondary roads running into their respective area. There was no enemy interference during the movements of units to their positions.

Shortly after 0040 hours the company commander started making his reconnaissance. This was a difficult task in the extreme darkness, secondary roads were hardly distinguishable and a clear picture was never obtained of the area until day-  
(34) Personal knowledge.

light. At the 1st Platoon he found the organization of the defense going well and the men were already digging in. While he was at this location, a patrol from Company K checked out through this position on the way to contact the British. Company K had the added mission of providing the long-range patrols for the defense plan of Ste. Anne. In the 2d Platoon area it was found advisable to move two squads forward approximately seventy-five yards in order to take advantage of a hedgerow in that sector. In the 3d Platoon sector it was discovered that their patrol had not as yet moved out to check the roads coming into their area. The patrol was immediately dispatched. One squad was also shifted to provide better protection of the company's rear. Shortly after 0115 hours the company commander, while at the 3d Platoon, received a message to report to the battalion command post.

The battalion commander had assembled all his company commanders and staff to bring them up-to-date on the situation. Additional information had been received from regiment concerning the enemy corridor. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was held up in the vicinity of Etreham, leaving a gap of over two miles between the 1st and 3d Battalions. It was now evident that an attack might develop from the northeast on L Company's position. Therefore, the battalion commander directed the tank company commander to support L Company with four tanks. The remaining tanks were sent to I Company. About 0145 hours the meeting broke up and the tank company commander, with one of his platoon leaders, accompanied L Company's Commander back to his position.

While the tanks were not attached to L Company, its company commander felt that they would fully cooperate in his

defense plans. However this was not quite the case as the tankers had their own ideas on the missions of tanks in a defense at night. The tank unit had very little experience in combat at this time; its first fight had been at the beach two days before. Unfortunately, the tankers and personnel of the 3d Battalion were complete strangers to each other since this was their first action together. In fairness to the tank commander it should also be stated that the experience of L Company's Commander in the use of tanks was extremely limited; his unit rode on tanks a few times while in England. After a hasty reconnaissance of the area, there was disagreement between the rifle company commander and the tank company commander as to positions for the tanks. L Company's Commander wanted the tanks to move to positions where they could support his riflemen holding the northeastern sector of the company zone. This necessitated the use of a sunken road and movement through narrow gaps in hedgerows. The tank company commander maintained that these positions were not feasible, particularly at night, and recommended that they move into positions behind L Company in the town. Finally the matter was referred to the battalion commander and the tank unit was ordered to move into position inside the L Company area.

At 0230 hours the tanks had moved up on the main road to the rear of L Company's position. The tank platoon leader was still not satisfied with the positions and returned to the battalion command post to confer with his company commander. Automatic weapons fire could now be heard north of L Company. A check was made with the 2d and 3d Platoon and both indicated all was quiet in their sectors; the firing was well out beyond them.

At approximately 0245 hours firing again was heard from the same area. This time enemy tracers could be observed in the distance northeast of L Company. Within a few minutes all was quiet again. The 2d Platoon reported that it was not engaged but something was going on out to its front. L Company's Commander became quite concerned that the tanks were not in position. He went at once to the battalion command post and made a report of the enemy activity on his left flank. It was apparent to him that an enemy build-up was taking place to the northeast of his company. However the battalion commander did not realize the existing situation and he took the report as undue concern on the part of the company commander. The tank question was brought up again and L Company's Commander was ordered to move them in position at once.

As L Company's Commander approached the rear of his position firing broke out again in a greater volume. The 2d and 3d Platoons became heavily engaged in a matter of minutes. Shortly after 0300 hours mortar and tank fire began falling on the whole L Company area. The friendly tanks began to open fire with their machine guns from positions behind L Company but it had little effect due to their poor locations. Sounds of enemy motors could be heard to the east and northeast, enemy tanks were moving toward L Company's position.

The rifle company commander contacted two of the friendly tanks and placed them in charge of his weapons platoon leader and directed that they move up to protect the left flank of the company. The other two tanks he moved down on the Bayeux Road, and they began firing high explosive and machine-gun fire at the enemy attacking from the east. As the tanks under the

command of the weapons platoon leader turned into the sunken road an enemy tank began firing from the far end of the road. Before the tank could back up and get behind a bank beyond the road junction it was hit and began to burn. The remaining tank withdrew toward the battalion command post.

By this time L Company was being attacked on three sides, from the east along the Bayeux Road, from the northeast in the 2d Platoon area, and a strong enemy force supported by at least one tank was driving up the sunken road through the 3d Platoon. In a matter of fifteen minutes small groups of enemy had reached the main road. (See Map D) The entire company was now involved in a vicious fire fight. Hand grenades were used liberally by the Germans. The many hedgerows in the area provided excellent cover for the enemy in working up to the platoon positions.

The company commander was at the road junction when the shelling began and the tank knocked out. At that time he was accompanied only by a runner and they both sought shelter in a ditch along the main road. His weapons platoon leader and the crew from the knocked out tank joined him there shortly. The company command post lay about 200 yards up the sunken road which was already partially in the hands of the enemy. There wasn't much hope of reaching it at that time. A sharp fire fight at close range broke out between the company commander's group and the enemy at the road junction. Enemy grenades were thrown in the ditch, wounding two men. The company commander's group moved east along the main road to join the 1st Platoon. The two tanks on the Bayeux Road had pulled back abreast of the 1st Platoon and continued their withdrawal to the rear.

On reaching the 1st Platoon's right flank the company commander's group found the platoon leader in the ditch along the road. He had come over to check his flank on hearing the friendly tanks moving to the rear. He reported that the 2d Platoon had folded up and the enemy held that position. Also, he reported an enemy motor column was on a small road just to his front. During this discussion, the enemy increased the tempo of their advance from the east toward Ste. Anne. Complete confusion now existed, it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe as both forces were thoroughly intermingled. Firing was heard back in the vicinity of the battalion command post. The situation gave the appearance of a total defeat.

A beaten and frightened company commander crossed the road with four men and moved through an orchard, in the general direction of the battalion command post, keeping off the main road. When the group arrived near the town, they moved out to the road. The company commander dashed across the road and into a building he thought to be the battalion command post; it was empty. Now all of his suspicions and fears were confirmed; the battalion command group had been taken. It was still thought possible that K Company might be holding out, so the group began moving toward that direction, crawling in a ditch along the main road. A German joined this group thinking it was part of his own unit; he was later recognized when he called out in German and <sup>was</sup> disarmed. K Company was passed by in the darkness, but a short time later the group came upon two anti-tank guns guarding the western approaches to the town of Ste. Anne.

Here, L Company's Commander found the Battalion S-1 with a small group, including a radio jeep. The S-1 had been trying to contact the battalion commander by radio for some time,

but without success. Vain attempts were made to contact regiment. Finally the 2d Battalion was reached by radio and a report was made, that Company L had been over-run and the remainder of the battalion was out of radio contact. The 2d Battalion reported that attempts were being made to obtain artillery fire to support the 3d Battalion.

Back in the town, 700 yards away, the intensity of the firing increased. At approximately 0400 hours, cannon fire could be heard from the town and large fires began to burn on the road. The group with the S-1 believed the enemy was moving into town and mopping up. The fires were thought to be friendly tanks burning. The anti-tank guns were turned toward town everyone expecting the worst was yet to come. Shortly after this, the battalion commander's runner, a cool Tennessee mountain boy, who had done well in combat in Africa and Sicily, joined the group. He reported that the battalion commander had been killed and the forward command post over-run. Here the group remained until dawn. Just before daylight exceedingly heavy concentrations of artillery fell all around the town. The group with the S-1 spent the next hour ducking artillery shells. (35)

It was a surprised and joyous group that saw the 3d Battalion Commander approaching them from the town at approximately 0600 hours 9 June. L Company's Commander had become confused in the darkness and had passed the battalion command post. Although a fierce fight took place it had held out. The attack had ended and the Germans were completely beaten. Much of the credit for this success belonged to the battalion commander. With the beginning of the attack on L Company he immediately (35) Personal knowledge.

took steps to get supporting artillery fires for the threatened area. Before this could be accomplished, small groups of the enemy had reached the battalion command post and interrupted operation. When the tanks withdrew from the L Company area, the battalion commander rushed out on the road and stopped them from moving to the rear. Under his direction they stopped a large enemy motor column coming from the east. (36) It was burning enemy vehicles that the group with the Battalion S-1 thought were friendly tanks. K Company had taken the enemy under fire, and with the help of six battalions of artillery and naval gunfire the attack was halted. (37)

It was apparent that the enemy attack was not planned; it was an attempt to escape from the fast closing corridor between the Americans and the British. The enemy was greatly surprised to find an American unit across its route of withdrawal. Neither the enemy or the 3d Battalion knew each others strength or dispositions at the time of the action. On interrogation of enemy prisoners it was revealed that the German strength consisted of six hundred men of the 518th Battalion, 30th Mobile Brigade, and much of their motor equipment. The German unit had recently arrived in the corridor but finding the situation hopeless had begun a withdrawal from Sully, northeast of Ste. Anne, and blundered into the American lines.

On returning to Ste. Anne, it was evident that a violent conflict had taken place. Men of Company K had nearly a hundred prisoners lined up on the main road and were busily engaged in searching them. Eight Germans lay dead outside the battalion command post. Three blown up enemy trucks, still

(36) Personal knowledge; Statement by Lieutenant Colonel John T. Corley, then 3d Battalion Commander, 15 November 1948;  
(37) A-7, p. 195.

burning covered the road just beyond the battalion command post. A column of abandoned enemy vehicles extended along the Bayeux Road and into a secondary road in front of L Company. Enemy motorcycles and bicycles filled the ditches beside the roads. The battalion aid station was treating both American and German casualties; enemy dead were scattered over the whole battle area.

By 0630 hours the battalion began reorganizing. L Company's Commander returned to his company area, picking up small groups of his men as he went. Some of the men had joined K Company and others had fought in small groups by themselves. Small patrols were sent out to roundup any Germans still hiding in the area. Some of the men were assigned to security duty while others helped in collecting the dead and wounded. On inspection of the 1st Platoon sector it was found the majority had remained in position, taking advantage of their well dug fox-holes in an apple orchard. This platoon had stood their ground well except the right flank close to the Bayeux Road. Although some of the men in the 2d and 3d Platoons had remained in their positions, most of them had withdrawn. Both of these platoons had defended from hedgerows. As soon as their local security was forced in, a large number of hand grenades were thrown on their positions. The company's casualties were not as large as expected. By 0800 hours the company was nearly reorganized. Some men had been captured but most of them escaped during the artillery fire which was placed on the area. (38)

The total casualties for the entire battalion during this action amounted to 38 wounded in action, including 2 officers; (38) Personal knowledge.

11 men killed in action; and 7 men missing in action. Two of the attached tanks had been knocked out and many of the automatic weapons in the L Company area had been damaged.

For this price the battalion had extracted from the enemy considerable in return. Many Germans lay dead in the L Company sector, some of them had been killed by artillery fire. (39) A total of 125 prisoners had been taken. The majority had been captured by K Company. Of these 94 men and 1 officer were in a walking condition while the remainder were evacuated as casualties. Although considerable of the enemy, including tanks, successfully withdrew, much of his transportation was destroyed or captured. (40)

Later the battalion learned that it was the first unit to reach its initial objective in the whole allied beachhead.

At 1300 hours 9 June, L Company moved out with the rest of the 3d Battalion heading south toward its final beachhead objective. (41)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In comparing my own memories of events, at Ste. Anne, on 8 and 9 June 1944, with published accounts of the action, I am quite amazed to find that the movement of the 3d Battalion to the town was part of a plan to completely cut the enemy corridor existing between the British and Americans. I had been under the impression since the very beginning of the planning for this operation that the 3d Battalion mission had been to defend to the east and southeast in conjunction with other battalions of the 1st Division, operating to the north. If the published accounts of this action are correct, it is apparent that considerable risks were taken in placing the 3d Battalion in a position which was one to three miles away from all

(39) A-8, p. 45; (40) A-3, p. 121; (41) A-8, p. 45.

other friendly units.

The 3d Battalion found itself in a position where an all around defense was necessary. In an attempt to block the numerous roads that entered Ste. Anne, Company I and L covered a frontage of some 1500 yards. This was far too great an area for two companies to hold in a country where hedgerows and sunken roads existed.

Unfortunately, arrival on the objective took place at night. A clear picture of the terrain was never achieved until the morning after the action. This led to many mistakes in the location of small units. In many cases, where men had taken up positions behind hedgerows, it was found in daylight that twenty yards beyond other hedgerows existed, which provided excellent covered routes of attack for use by the enemy. One hour of daylight could have been used to great advantage in selecting correct positions.

The entire battalion was far from being firmly established when the attack came. Many battalion staff personnel had been injured in the landing on the beach and the majority of their many duties became additional burdens of the battalion commander. Communication from battalion to regiment and the artillery depended entirely on radio which proved to be ineffective. No mines were available for the numerous roads in the area. Registrations of the supporting fires were not completed before the enemy attack. Mutual support by small-arms fire was not feasible due to the many banks of intervening hedgerows between the companies.

Consequently, the fighting was almost two separate battles with Companies I and K engaging the enemy in turn separately. Although I Company was outnumbered over three to one, it held

up the enemy's advance for nearly an hour and forced the enemy to deploy on a wide front. This is the only credit that L Company can take for the action. General confusion and lack of control reigned in L Company's area throughout the entire fight. Fortunately, K Company afforded the battalion some depth to its defensive positions. Thus even after the enemy had gotten through L Company he found that he had by no means pierced the entire American defenses in this area.

The enemy fighting was characterized by recklessness and a strong desire to break through what he believed to be a small force attempting to control the road net in the vicinity of Ste. Anne. As soon as the enemy's advanced elements engaged L Company's 2d and 3d Platoons his reaction was immediate and violent. Considerable of his strength was utilized in attempting to force an opening for his column in L Company's area. Apparently on piercing L Company's position he believed a route had been cleared as he sent his motor column on into Ste. Anne. When the column was taken under fire by our tanks and K Company entered the fight, he became utterly confused. Our long delayed artillery fire completely demoralized him.

I made many mistakes as L Company's Commander. At the time the battalion commander assigned tanks to my company area, I did not insist on a clear cut decision as to under whose command they were placed; consequently, I was to later find the tank unit commander unwilling to accept my authority. He believed that his unit was to support L Company and was not attached to it. Much valuable time was lost in haggling over this situation which could have been better spent in supervision of my company.

limitations. Unfortunately this was not the case of the tanks and Company L. Too often tank units and infantry are thrown together in combat with neither of the units having any training with the other. Success, as in this instance is achieved in spite of many errors made in employment and not because both units function as a skillfully coached team.

From a battalion standpoint the defense of Ste. Anne was a great success. Many casualties had been inflicted on the enemy, far more than our own. But looking at it from the eyes of L Company's Commander it was a sad affair with the only comforting fact being that a much smaller force had been able to delay the enemy for a short time. Although the entire 3d Battalion, figuratively speaking, "was caught with its pants down", there is no intention of detracting from the courageous and skillful efforts of the battalion commander in the turning of the tide.

#### LESSONS

1. In any mission where two or more different units are operating on the same terrain it is imperative that one commander be charged with the responsibility for control of all units. The tank versus infantry controversy would never have taken place at Ste. Anne if this matter had been cleared up in the early stages.

2. When defending in hedgerow country considerable more security must be placed well outside the main line of resistance in order to assure timely warning of an attack.

3. Even though a unit is forced by circumstances to occupy a defensive position in darkness, a vigorous and complete reconnaissance must be initiated by all leaders.

4. The planning of supporting and defensive fires should

take a very high priority when no covering force is available to a unit moving into a defensive position.

5. Battle coordination between tanks and infantry can only be achieved by a training program for all men and officers of both components before entry into combat. The training should consist of something more than having small groups of infantry ride on a tank in a simulated attack situation. Defensive situations should be covered as well.

6. All unit leaders must take positions on the field of battle where they can exert control of their unit. No matter how great the temptation becomes to get involved in the fight themselves their principal mission is to command their entire unit.

7. In a defensive situation at night where the enemy has pierced the friendly positions, all men must be trained to remain in their fox-holes and fire at any movement that can be heard.

8. Anti-tank mines can be used to good advantage in stopping enemy vehicular movement on roads in hedgerow country. The high banks of the hedgerows completely canalize the movement of vehicles.

9. Utilizing hedgerows in a defensive position provides good cover and concealment. However, positions should never be occupied in such a manner that the main line of resistance is clearly outlined to the enemy.

10. All command posts must have sufficient security elements to enable it to continuously operate without interruption during the battle.

11. Several means of communication should be provided when a unit is in a defensive situation.

12. Due to the short fields of fire found in hedgerow country, smaller frontages must be assigned all units in a defensive situation.

13. When contact is lost with an enemy, patrols must immediately be sent out to restore it at once.

14. Battle is a confusing experience. Information received concerning an action must be carefully analyzed and weighed before a commander allows it to influence his actions.