

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

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D PLATOON, COMPANY C, 308TH
ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION (83D INFANTRY DIVISION) AS
PART OF THE 331ST INFANTRY REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM
(83D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK TO AND CROSS-
INGS OF THE TAUTE RIVER 10 - 27 JULY 1944.
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Combat Engineer Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: COMBAT ENGINEER PLATOON IN
SUPPORT OF INFANTRY IN ATTACK AND RIVER CROSSING OPERATIONS.

Captain William M. Calnan, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	4
Engineer Organization	4
Engineer Mission	5
The 3d Platoon	5
Background of Plans and Operations	6
The 83d Division	9
The 3d Platoon, Company C, 308th Engineer Combat Battalion	25
Analysis and Criticism	25
Lessons	28
Map A - Normandy, 6 June to 3 July 1944	
Map B - VII Corps Zone, 3 July 1944	
Map C - 331st Infantry, 10-27 July 1944	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 First United States Army, Report of Operations
20 October 1943 to 1 August 1944
(TIS Library)
- A-2 Utah Beach to Cherbourg, 6 June to 27 June 1944
United States Army, Historical Division, Department of the Army, October, 1947,
(TIS Library)
- A-3 St. Lo
United States Army, Historical Division, War Department, August 1946
(TIS Library)
- A-4 The Invasion of Western Europe, Part I, 6 June -
31 December 1944, Department of Military Art and
Engineering, U S Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.
1946
(TIS Library)
- A-5 Thunderbolt Across Europe
A History of the 83rd Infantry Division
1942 - 1945
(Personal possession of author)
- A-6 We Saw It Through
History of the 331st Combat Team
1942 - 1945
(Personal possession of author)
- A-7 After Action Report, 331st Infantry ✓
Period 1 July through 31 July 1944
(Personal possession of author)
- A-8 After Action Report, 308th Engineer Combat Battalion ✓
Period 1 July through 31 July 1944
(Personal possession of author)
- A-9 St. Lo Breakthrough
By Lieutenant Colonel Howard P. Persons, Jr.,
Military Review, December 1948, page 13,
(Personal possession of author)
- A-10 FM 100-5 (Draft),
(Personal possession of author)
- A-11 Immediate Report No. 29, Hq., 12 Army Group, ✓
15 August 1944, Night Operations.
(TIS Library)

BIBLIOGRAPHY CONTINUED

- A-12 T/O & E 5-15 N
T/O & E 5-16 N
Reference Data, Infantry Regiment
The Infantry School, Ft. Benning, Ga.,
August 1948,
(Personal possession of Author)
- A-13 Omaha Beachhead, 6 June - 13 June 1944
United States Army, Historical Division,
War Department, September, 1945,
(TIS Library)

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D PLATOON, COMPANY C, 308TH
ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION AS PART OF THE 331ST INFANTRY
REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM (83D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE
ATTACK TO AND CROSSINGS OF THE TAUTE RIVER 10-27 JULY 44.
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Combat Engineer Platoon Leader)

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of a platoon of Combat Engineers, the 3d Platoon of Company C, 308th Engineer Combat Battalion, 83d Infantry Division, in the fighting between Carentan and Periers during July of 1944, in Normandy.

ENGINEER ORGANIZATION

The Infantry Divisional Engineer Combat Battalion at the time of this operation consisted of a headquarters and headquarters and service company and three line companies. The usual method of employment of engineers within the 83d Division was to assign one engineer line company to each infantry regimental combat team. Regiment placed one engineer platoon in direct support of, or attached to each infantry battalion. These assignments remained relatively constant; that is, C Company, 308th Engineers was a part of the 331st Infantry Regimental Combat Team and worked with no other regiment. The 3d Platoon of C Company worked with the 3d Battalion of the 331st Infantry, unless working on tasks assigned by regiment. Engineer work in the rear of the regimental area was usually effected by Corps or Army engineers. (1)

(1) Personal knowledge.

ENGINEER MISSION

The primary mission of the Corps of Engineers is to assist the combat forces by construction and destruction, especially that which aids in the movement of our combat forces and prevents or hinders the movement of the enemy.

(2) In accomplishing this mission a platoon of combat engineers is most concerned with breaching obstacles and laying and removing mines and wire in front of advancing troops and bridging small gaps and constructing and repairing roads and trails in the immediate rear of front line troops. An important secondary mission of combat engineers is to enter combat as infantry.

THE 3D PLATOON

The 3d Platoon of C Company, when at full strength, consisted of a platoon headquarters and three engineer squads. The platoon headquarters had a platoon leader and a platoon sergeant and in addition had a weapons sergeant, a tool corporal and two drivers. In platoon headquarters was a $\frac{1}{4}$ ton truck and the platoon supply truck. The weapons sergeant and the tool corporal worked as a team and maintained the weapons of the platoon for which there was no T/O & E crew, three heavy machine guns, three rocket launchers and a machine gun caliber .50 mounted on the platoon supply truck. They also maintained the platoon pioneer chest, demolition chest and carpenter chest and any

(2) A-10, p. 6.

special equipment issued to the platoon, such as mine detectors, flame throwers and power saws. The three squads each had thirteen men including a squad truck driver. These men were armed with the M-1 rifle and, in addition to their weapons training, tactical training, and basic engineer training, had been trained as demolition men, riggers or bridge carpenters. When the squad's engineer equipment was unloaded, the squad trucks could be used as dump trucks. (3)

BACKGROUND OF PLANS AND OPERATIONS

On 20 October 1943, the First United States Army opened its command post at Bristol, England, and attacked the task of planning its part in Operation Neptune, the cross-channel invasion of "Fortress Europe". Between that time and 6 June 1944, the constant planning and movement of combat and service units, supplies and replacements to the British Isles continued. Troops were trained and briefed for the job at hand, and, after waiting for favorable weather, moon and tide, the attack was made beginning on the night of 5-6 June 1944.

With ground forces under the command of General Montgomery's 21st Army Group, the landings of airborne and sea-borne forces were made on the coast of Normandy by the British and Canadians east of Bayeux and by the First U.S. Army west of Bayeux and on the east coast of the Cotentin

(3) Personal knowledge.

Peninsula. (4) In the First Army zone the initial landings were made by the V Corps on Omaha Beach and by the VII Corps on Utah Beach. In the early morning hours of 6 June the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions were dropped behind Utah Beach west and southeast of St. Mere Eglise, respectively. (5) (See Map A)

A perilously weak contact, which left the Carentan-Isigny Road under fire, was made by elements of the VII and V Corps troops near Carentan on 10 June. On the same date the 1st Division on the left of the V Corps made contact with the British near Agy. The establishment of the beachhead was considered completed, and the first phase of the operation was ended. (See Map A)

The calculated risk was successfully taken that the vulnerable connection between VII and V Corps in the vicinity of Carentan would hold until units could return from the capture of Cherbourg to relieve the situation. Thus immediate attention was turned to the second phase of Operation Neptune, which was the severance of the Cotentin Peninsula and the capture of the much needed port of Cherbourg. (6)

The mission of capturing Cherbourg was assigned to the VII Corps, which began the attack west across the base of the peninsula. While two divisions pivoted to the north up the peninsula, two divisions fought their way across the peninsula toward the Gulf of St. Malo. The peninsula was

(4) A-1, p. 13, 18, 20, 22, 25, 26; (5) A-1, p. 41, 43, 44; (6) A-1, p. 55.

cut off when Barneville was taken on the 18th of June.

(7)

The main effort of the VII Corps was turned north and began the fight to overcome ever increasing resistance up the peninsula toward Cherbourg. (See Map A)

The advance to the city of Cherbourg was made through prepared positions and fortified areas and was completed by 22 June. The city itself was forced to surrender on 26 June and by 1 July the remaining harbor forts and troops on the Cape Hague Peninsula ceased fighting. (8)

For the purpose of commencing further operations, the campaign on the Cherbourg Peninsula was considered ended on 26 June. The reorganization for the third phase of the Normandy Campaign began on that date.

While the VII Corps had been occupied in the capture of Cherbourg, however, the remainder of the First Army had not been standing still. The V Corps on the left (east) had made the greatest penetration to capture Caumont. The XIX Corps, which had become operational on 14 June, pushed within striking distance, about two miles, from St. Lo. On each side of Carentan the 30th and 101st Divisions had pushed forward sufficiently to relieve the immediate danger to Carentan. These were the general positions when the regrouping for the third phase of the invasion began. (9) (See Map A)

The mission of the First U. S. Army in the invasion

(7) A-1, p. 56, 58, 60; (8) A-1, p. 64, 65; (9) A-1, p. 72.

of Normandy had been "to secure a lodgment area on the continent from which further offensive operations can be developed." (10) The first phase had established the beachhead. The second phase had secured a port and room for the build-up of troops and supplies. The third and final phase of the operation had the purpose of obtaining more maneuver room and better positions from which to attack in breaking out of the Normandy pocket. (11)

By 3 July adjustment of units and boundaries had been completed. The VIII Corps on the right (west) began the First Army attack to the south toward Coutances. The VII Corps was to commence its attack on 4 July from the vicinity southwest of Carentan toward Periers. The XIX Corps was to attack on 7 July toward St. Lo with the V Corps on the left (east) attacking to support XIX Corps on 11 July. The First Army attack was a pivoting movement to the left, based on the V Corps and aimed at objectives extending from Coutances east through St. Lo. (12) (See Map A)

THE 83D DIVISION

In the zone of the VII Corps, the 83d Infantry Division held positions on 4 July which it had occupied upon its relief of the 101st Airborne Division on 26 June. The 83d Division had been scheduled to land beginning 18 June, but had been held off the beach for nearly a week by a lashing storm which suspended movement across the beaches

(10) A-1, p. 126; (11) A-3, p. 1; (12) A-1, p. 84, 85, 89, 90.

and destroyed or damaged much equipment. As soon as possible after landing, however, the 83d moved to relieve the 101st which reverted to Army reserve. (See Map B)

The VII Corps was directed to attack down the narrow neck of dry land from its position, just southwest of Carentan, toward Perriers. The zone of attack was bounded on the west by the marshes of the Seves River and on the east by the boggy, recently flooded bottomlands of the Taute River. At the widest part, the isthmus down which the VII Corps was to attack was less than three miles wide, and tributary streams of the Seves and Taute further cut into the corridor. (See Map B)

The greatest obstacles to the attack, however, were the hedgerows. These were the mounds of earth which bordered every field and lined every road. They rose as high as ten feet in height, and the majority were covered with vines, bushes and trees. "An aerial photograph of a typical section of Normandy shows more than 3900 hedged enclosures in an area of less than eight square miles."

(13)

It is easily observed that the hedgerows of Normandy were of great assistance to the German defenders. German soldiers skillfully employed the hedgerows by digging their positions in, under and through the hedgerows for protection from American artillery. The positions had openings dug through the hedgerows in many instances to

(13) A-3, p. 4.

provide firing apertures into the fields in front. Tanks were skillfully placed behind hedgerows and camouflaged so that first evidence of their presence was their opening round at close range. (14)

The 83d Division opened the VII Corps attack on 4 July with the 4th Division in reserve while the 9th Division was still closing in from the Cherbourg Peninsula. The original plan was for the 83d Division to attack toward Periers until it reached Sainteny when the 4th Division would attack through, followed by the 9th Division and 3d Armored Division. However, enemy action caused alterations in this plan as the situation developed. (15)

The German Seventh Army expected an offensive after 1 July and estimated that the American main effort would be made from Carentan in the direction of Periers in the American VII Corps zone. The 17th S. S. Panzer Grenadier Division was in position to oppose this thrust. It was supported by the 2d S. S. Panzer Division and the 6th Parachute Regiment. The parachute and S. S. units were among the best the Germans had available in the Normandy area. (16)

At 0445 on 4 July the 83d Division jumped off from its positions on a line running along the east arm of the Gorges Swamps, west across the Carentan-Periers Road. After being initially stopped, the division ground out a slow, costly 600 yards by the end of the long Normandy

(14) Personal knowledge; (15) A-3, p. 4; (16) A-3, p. 7, 8.

summer day.

On 5 and 6 July progress was about the same, and on the afternoon of 7 July, the right of the 83d Division was passed through by the 4th Division to strengthen the attack. (17) Both divisions continued the attack astride the Carentan-Periers Road with the road inclusive to the zone of the 4th Division. By 8 July both divisions had advanced about 2000 yards. The German defenses again stiffened, and on 9 July the 4th Division gained about 400 yards and the 83d Division about 700 yards to capture the town of Sainteny. (18) (See Map B)

Map C

At this time the 83d Division was disposed with the 331st Infantry on the right, the 330th Infantry on the left and the 329th Infantry in reserve. The 329th Infantry was preparing to continue the attack through the right of the 331st Infantry and the 330th Infantry was preparing to continue the attack under the control of the 9th Division of the left, east of the Taute River. The 331st Infantry was located on an east-west line running south of Sainteny and north of Bois Grimot and La Lande with the 2d Battalion on the right and the 3d Battalion on the left. The 1st Battalion was in reserve. (19)

THE 3D PLATOON, COMPANY C,
308TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION

On 10 July 1944 the 3d Platoon of C Company, 308th

(17) A-7, p. 2; (18) A-1, p. 88; A-3, p. 49; Personal knowledge; (19) A-5, p. 32, 33; A-7, p. 3; Personal knowledge.

*Major
Sperdick*

Engineers was in direct support of the 3d Battalion, 331st Infantry. The 3d Battalion was prepared to attack at 0915 to clear the village of Bois Grimot. To assist in the attack of the 3d Battalion, a platoon of tanks from C Company, 746th Tank Battalion was attached to the battalion and was further attached by the acting battalion commander, Major Harold W. Brown, to Company I. The 3d Platoon of Engineers was placed in direct support of I Company to assist in the advance of the tanks. (20)

The plan of Captain Huston Smith, I Company Commander, was that the Engineers, accompanying the Infantry in the attack, would locate, mark and clear of mines any existing openings in the hedgerows and blow paths through the hedgerows where necessary, so that the tanks could follow in the immediate rear of the attacking Infantry.

The Tank Platoon Leader was not present when the Engineer Platoon Leader received I Company Commander's orders as the tanks were to be brought up at the last possible moment before the jump-off.

In preparation for its part in the attack the 3d Platoon had organized two mine detector teams of three men each. Each team had one mine detector operator, one man to provide immediate security for the team. Also prepared were fifteen pound satchel charges of TNT, one of which was carried by each of the remaining engineer soldier of the platoon. All men also were prepared to probe for and

(20) Personal knowledge.

remove mines, and each man carried his M-1 rifle.

The method used to blow hedgerows was to dig in and place in the hedgerows two fifteen pound charges ten feet apart, and approximately two-thirds of the way down from the top of the hedgerow. This usually required from two to three minutes for a three man team to place the charges and connect the "prima cord", fuze and fuze lighters to the charges. The gap blown was sufficient for a M-4 tank to pass. (21)

At 0915 the 3d Battalion moved out from its positions, two hedgerows north of the Bois Grimot-Sainteny Road. The 3d Platoon moved up to the first hedgerow with the leading platoons of I Company. In the field through which the tanks were to move, approximately one squad of Engineers and one squad of Infantry reached the first hedgerow under a heavy fire from an enemy strong point approximately fifty yards away behind the hedgerows along the Bois Grimot-Sainteny Road. Before the charges could be placed to blow the hedgerow, the platoon of tanks, moving down the dirt road into the I Company zone, moved into the field with the lead Infantry and Engineers. Three tanks moved into the hedgerow enclosed field, which was about forty yards wide and sixty yards long, and two remained on the road. At this time a German tank included in the enemy strong point opened fire. The enemy tank had been camouflaged, had its engine cut off and had not fired a round until

(21) Personal knowledge.

this moment. For the next few minutes an intense tank fight ensued. The three American tanks in the lead fired at the general location of the concealed German tank, unable to locate it exactly. With no room to maneuver they were forced to fight from their exposed position against a skillfully concealed enemy tank whose fire had been withheld until it could make every round count. The result was that three American tanks were knocked out, one burning, and a fourth, at the entrance to the field, was immobilized by a damaged track. The German tank then turned its fire on the troops of I Company which were forced to withdraw to their starting positions. (See Map C)

The 3d Platoon of Engineers remained in the I Company front lines until the battalion commander could be contacted. Upon his orders the 3d Platoon moved over into the area of L Company on the right. L Company had moved ahead by this time, and its front line was on the Bois Grimot-Sainteny Road. The Battalion Commander's plan for the 3rd Platoon was to move a 3" gun of the platoon of C Company of the 802d Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed), which was in support of the 3d Battalion, into position from which it was hoped to knock out the German tank holding up the advance. Hedgerows were cut, and one 3" gun was slowly and laboriously manhandled into position in L Company's forward area. However, it was impossible to obtain a hit on the tank from any position available. (22)

(22) Personal knowledge.

That night the seriously depleted 3d Battalion was counterattacked just at dusk and forced to withdraw to a position approximately 300 yards north of the Bois Grimot-Sainteny Road. Thus at the end of the day the 3d Battalion found itself one hedgerow behind where it had started that morning. (23)

On 11 July at 0900 hours the 3d Battalion again attacked, with the 1st Battalion on its left to clear Bois Grimot. The 3d Platoon of Engineers was in direct support, however it was assigned no specific tasks, and simply accompanied the battalion in the attack, prepared to remove mines and obstacles. Movement was slow, and by dusk the battalion had reached the road running from Bois Grimot to Sainteny. At this time the 3d Platoon of Engineers was given the task of outpostting the battalion position in order to relieve the tired, understrength rifle companies. This in effect meant placing sentries along the front-most hedgerow to give the alarm in case of patrols or attack. At approximately 2330, the 3d Platoon was released on regimental order and returned to the company area to prepare for the next day's task. (24)

On 12 July the 3d Battalion made little forward movement against the dug in enemy tank-infantry teams. During this day, the 3d Platoon was assigned to cut a lateral supply trail from the Regimental Main Supply Route to join the road entering Bois Grimot from the northeast. The

(23) A-7, p. 3; (24) A-7, p. 3; A-6, p. 19; Personal knowledge.

sunken dirt road, serving as the MSR barely permitted two vehicles to pass, and with the recent rains and constant use by supply vehicles, tanks and ambulances, its condition was fast becoming critical. Pick and shovel work to provide drainage and the use of the squad trucks to haul rubble for fills repaired the worst spots. The new trail was constructed with the C Company bull-dozer and more pick and shovel work. Work was frequently halted by enemy artillery which seemed to have the main roads registered in.

(25)

A coordinated regimental attack was planned for 13 July with all three battalions attacking. The 1st Battalion on the left fought through the village of La Lande and the point of land to the south. 1st Battalion then reverted to regimental reserve. The 2d Battalion in the center and the 3d Battalion on the right cleared Bois Grimot and by noon were in position on the edge of the open, swampy ground south of Bois Grimot preparing to cross it. (26) (See Map C)

The 3d Platoon of Engineers in support of the 3d Battalion cut a path through the hedgerows to the edge of the high ground overlooking the swamp. This time the movement of the tanks and Infantry was comparatively rapid due to the increased artillery support and the increased strength of the coordinated attack.

Instructions for the 3d Platoon in supporting the

(25) Personal knowledge; (26) A-7, p. 4.

crossing of the swamp were to clear the road crossing the swamp, on the right of the battalion, of mines and replace the culvert type bridge over the stream, should it be blown. Once across the swamp, the 3rd Platoon was to continue with the battalion in the attack, prepared to remove mines and obstacles. The road crossing the swamp was cleared and the bridge remained undamaged. However, on the south side of the swamp the hedgerow bordered trail was blocked by trees and so narrow and muddy that it was barely passable. The 3d Platoon was directed to improve the trail which paralleled the swamp and cut a new trail behind the battalion by way of the Chateau d'Auxais. The Chateau was located in the battalion zone, approximately 900 yards south of the swamp. This task was completed by the end of the day under sporadic shelling by German artillery which knew the crossing had been made and apparently was aiming at the approaches on the south side of the swamp. This artillery falling behind the assault rifle companies was unobserved by the enemy, but it definitely delayed the progress of the Engineers when they were caught several times working in the open as the shelling commenced. (27)

By night of 13 July, the 3d Battalion had pushed about 1000 yards south of Chateau d'Auxais and the 2d Battalion was south of Auxais, on the 3d Battalion's left, with its flank on the Taute River. On the night of 13

(27) Personal knowledge.

July the 3d Battalion received a strong tank-infantry counterattack by way of the open right flank created when the unit on the right had been unable to advance. Part of the battalion was forced to withdraw to the vicinity of the Chateau, and part was cut off for the next two days. (28) (See Map C)

On the higher ground in the vicinity and south of the Chateau d'Auxais the fields were slightly larger and the roads and trails were better. The one road crossing the swamp to the rear had been included in the zone of the 329th Infantry, and another route across the swamp was definitely needed. On 14 July, the 3d Platoon was given the job.

A trail was cut from Bois Grimot down to the swamp, a route was picked across the swamp which would support $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trucks with the least amount of filling and corduroy construction, and a bridge was placed across the stream. On the south side of the swamp the trail was connected to the trail running to Chateau d'Auxais on the west of the regimental zone. From the south edge of the swamp a new trail was also constructed leading to Auxais on the Taute River. Again the platoon was subjected to intermittent artillery fire, which at one time was quite accurate and was believed to be observed from the La Varde or Les Aubris Peninsulas. (29) (See Map C)

On 15 and 16 July the 2d and 3d Battalions pushed

(28) A-7, p. 4; A-6, p. 19; (29) Personal knowledge.

forward along with the 329th Infantry on the right and that part of the 3d Battalion which had been cut off was relieved. The 2d Battalion reached Village des Saints but was counterattacked heavily with tanks and forced to pull back.

On 17 July, VIII Corps, to which the 83d Division had been transferred was ordered to discontinue the attack as plans were made for Operation Cobra, the breakout of the Normandy pocket, through VII Corps on the left. The 4th Division was pulled out and transferred to VII Corps, and the 4th Armored Division closed on the 83d Division's right flank. The front line of the 83d Division ran from the division boundary, northeast of Raids, southeast to the Taute River, south of Le Canal. (30)

The 331st Infantry then changed the direction of its attack to force a crossing of the Taute. On 17 July the 2d and 3d Platoons of C Company, 308th Engineers placed a hasty mine field and triple concertina wire across the front of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions' defensive position which the regiment was to hold until further orders. Mines and wire were brought as far forward as possible with $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trucks and trailers. Mines were fuzed and then hand carried forward with the wire. (31) (See Map C)

On this same date, at 1800 hours, the 1st Battalion attempted a crossing of the Taute River to the La Varde Peninsula but was unsuccessful. Another crossing was plan-

(30) A-1, p. 83; A-9, p. 18; A-5, p. 32 (Map); (31) Personal knowledge.

ned for 0300 hours the next morning, 18 July, and an engineer patrol from the 3d Platoon was sent out at dusk to reconnoiter the main stream for crossing sites.

It was found that the 1000 yard wide swamp, so recently flooded as a defense measure by the Germans, had almost completely dried except for the main stream in the center. It was about six feet deep and eighteen feet wide. The banks were perpendicular. A trail over which one way traffic could move led across the swamp. However, no bridges over the stream existed.

No bridging equipment was available to the 3d Platoon to support the crossing of the 1st Battalion. But in the meantime, the 1st Platoon of Engineers commencing at dark on the 18th, was placed ⁱⁿ a 50 foot Bailey Bridge across the Taute River on the north end of the causeway leading from Le Moulin south to the La Varde Peninsula. It was planned to cross the tanks and anti-tank guns to support the 1st Battalion once its crossing had been made from Le Canal. This left the 3d Platoon of Engineers to improvise foot-bridge crossings for the 1st Battalion.

Because of the steepness of the banks the original plan to anchor ropes for the Infantrymen to pull themselves across was discarded. It was decided to construct simple footbridges of twelve foot 12" x 3" planks which were carried on the Engineer Platoon lumber trailer. The planks were fitted so that they could be hand carried to the crossing site, bolted together and placed across the gap. This was believed to be the quickest and quietest method

to get the Infantry across the stream under cover of darkness.

At 0300 hours the attack moved off with Engineers in advance of each assault company. The crossing of the stream was completed slowly but without discovery. Soon after the assault companies had cleared the crossing sites, however, the areas were subjected to heavy enemy artillery fire. The assault companies crossed the remainder of the swamp, but before clearing the edge of the swamp, were met with heavy automatic weapons and tank fire and were forced to withdraw. (32) (See Map C)

On the night of 19-20 July the 3d Battalion was to be sent across the swamp astride the causeway from Le Moulin to the La Varde Peninsula. For the purpose of shortening the route between the 3rd Battalion, once across, and the remainder of the regiment, the 3d Platoon of Engineers was ordered to repair the causeway from Auxais to Le Moulin which had been cratered by bombs. This job was begun in daylight, but was discontinued as enemy observation on the La Varde Peninsula brought accurate artillery on the site whenever work was attempted on the exposed roadway. The work was continued at night. However, other events caused it to be discontinued entirely.

On 20 July, at 0330 hours the 3d Battalion without artillery preparation attacked astride the cause^{way} toward La Varde. The surprise attack successfully enabled the

(32) Personal knowledge.

battalion to gain a foothold on the peninsula. But as the battalion reached the end of the 1500 yard causeway at La Varde, it was discovered that there were two more small gaps in the causeway where bridges had been blown. Maps did not indicate the existence of the bridges, nor had patrols previously discovered them. Treadway bridge was immediately sent for and placed over both gaps under fire. Two sections of treadway were damaged by fire. One section was replaced by 1200 and the other by 1800. Just before they were replaced however, the Bailey Bridge at Le Moulin end of the causeway was destroyed by enemy artillery. Again the Infantry was deprived of their supporting tanks and anti-tank guns, and, upon being heavily counterattacked on 21 July, the 3d Battalion was forced to withdraw from the peninsula, with heavy losses. (33)

(See Map C)

During the period 21 to 24 July the 331st Infantry was limited to patrolling south toward Village des Saints. Plans were made to continue the attack through Village des Saints across the Taute toward Marchesieux on 25 July when the coordinated attack for the breakout began with the VII Corps on the left. This attack, originally planned for 18 July, had been postponed by weather which prevented air support. (34)

In the meantime the strong German position on the La Varde Peninsula was felt to be a definite threat. From

(33) Personal knowledge; A-11, par. 3; (34) A-7, p. 4.

this position it was possible for the enemy to attack across the causeway to Le Moulin into the rear of the 331st and 329th Infantry Regiments. It was also believed possible for the enemy to attack from La Varde across to the Les Aubris Peninsula into the rear of the 330th Infantry which, under control of the 9th Division, had advanced from Tribehou south across the Lozon River and was in position south of Remilly Sur Lozon.

On the night of 21 July, the 3d Platoon worked with the rest of C Company, 308th Engineers, to place a hasty mine field and a belt of triple concertina barbed wire along the edge of the swamp in front of Le Moulin. This work was not completed until shortly before dawn, because of the long hand-carry required. Later in the day the 3d Platoon secured additional mines and wire and moved to the Les Aubris Peninsula where sections of the 83d Division Reconnaissance Troop were in position.

On 22 July road blocks and the larger part of a hasty mine field were placed across the peninsula. The following day more materials were secured and a band of triple concertina wire was also placed across the peninsula in front of the mine field.

In preparation for the coming division attack the 3d Platoon worked on roads on 24 and 25 July. These were the roads on which supporting vehicles would move once the advance commenced. (35)

(35) Personal knowledge.

The Regiment attacked on 26 July with the 1st and 2d Battalions leading and the 3d Battalion in reserve. Progress was very slow the first day. Heavy automatic weapons, mortar and tank fire was encountered. Both battalions pushed slowly ahead and soon encountered many anti-personnel mines. Parties were sent ahead to remove the mines, and the advance was halted for the day.

The following day the attack was resumed at 0900 and troops slowly pushed into Village Des Saints where more anti-tank and anti-personnel mines and "booby traps" were sown. It was clear that the remaining enemy force had withdrawn south of the Taute, and the regiment immediately crossed the river south of Village Des Saints. (36)

While the 2d Platoon of Engineers placed an Infantry Support Bridge between Village Des Saints and Marchesieux, the 3d Platoon placed a timber bridge across the Taute, about 800 yards to the west. Both platoons then joined the battalions which were pushing rapidly to the south. (See Map C)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing this operation from the viewpoint of supporting Engineers it must first be noted that there were not sufficient Engineer troops to do the job. Where each Engineer Company was a member of a regimental combat team, the platoons of that company were in support of

(36) A-7, p. 5.

their normally supported Infantry battalion one day and pulled out for work behind the lines the next. As a result the Infantry battalion commanders never were certain of having Engineer support ^{or} of keeping it when it was available. The Engineer platoons could not remain intimate with the battalion situations or familiar with the troops they were supporting.

Engineer troops can be of definite value to attacking Infantry battalions if used properly, as when clearing the advance for tanks, accompanying the Infantry to remove mines and obstacles, or placing mines and wire to cover exposed flanks. However, they can be misused, as when outposting battalion positions, or not used at all, as when accompanying the battalion in the advance without being assigned definite missions or specific companies to support. Their proper use will only come with proper coordinated training. Just as Artillery, Infantry and Armor must train together, Engineers must also play their part in the team in training and not join it on the battlefield. The best example of this failure to work together for successful results was the quick loss of three tanks and resulting set-back to the 3d Battalion when the Engineers were not given sufficient time to blow the hedgerows in front of the tanks. Had the platoon of tanks taken overwatching positions until the gaps ahead were blown, this failure may not have occurred. A definite share of responsibility falls on the Engineer platoon leader for not indicating how much time would be needed to place his

charges.

Sufficient bridging equipment was not immediately available to supporting Engineers when stream crossing operations were planned. Maximum advance notice in planning this type of operation must be given to Engineers to enable them to assemble special equipment to support the operation. It is in providing special equipment and specially trained personnel that the major value of Combat Engineers lies. Without time to provide this equipment or personnel, a platoon of Engineers is little different from an additional platoon of riflemen accompanying the battalion.

This situation was true at the time of the attempted crossings of the Taute River. However, every moment counted in pressing the attack, and had bridging equipment been present in the 308th Engineer Battalion, the time allowed would have been sufficient to provide adequate bridging to support the crossing from both Le Canal and Le Moulin to the La Varde Peninsula. If the bridges had been placed rapidly following the crossings, tanks and tank destroyers would have in all probability been able to provide the support needed for success.

It should be stated that the recent addition of a fourth line company to the Division Engineer Battalion Table of Organization and Equipment will enable the Engineer platoons supporting the Infantry battalions to provide consistent support and become full time members of the combat teams. Also the addition to the Engineer Battalion of a

bridge platoon with three hundred feet of bridge and an assault platoon, with five tank-dozers, will place much needed equipment in the hands of the Engineers working with the Infantry. (37)

LESSONS

1. Combat Engineers can be a valuable part of the Infantry-Artillery-Armor team. This team must be trained before battle to operate together.

2. The platoon of Combat Engineers supporting an Infantry Battalion can build or maintain supply trails in the immediate rear of the battalion. They should not be required to do more than make jeep trails as their equipment is insufficient and their more important mission lies ahead in the clearance of mines and obstacles for both tanks and Infantry.

3. Bridging equipment must be immediately available to support river and stream crossings. Delay often means failure.

4. In river and stream crossings tanks must cross as soon as possible after the Infantry to help withstand the certain counterattack.

5. The use of mines and wire should be considered and used whenever possible to cover exposed flanks created by a change in the direction of attack, failure of a flank unit to keep up, or presence of enemy salients remaining in the line.

(37) A-12, Chart 29 and 30.

6. In planning the attack, the commander must insure that attached and supporting units as well as his subordinate units are thoroughly instructed in their part of the plan.