

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

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST PLATOON, COMPANY B, 319TH INFANTRY
(80TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ASSAULT ON THE SIEGFRIED
LINE AT WALLENDORF, GERMANY, 7-11 FEBRUARY 1945.
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: RIVER CROSSING INTO AND AT-
TACK ON A FORTIFIED POSITION AT NIGHT.

Captain W. M. Cunningham, Infantry.
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

The day after the Third United States Army recaptured the last of the ground lost by the United States First Army in the Battle of the Bulge, 29 January 1945, the four corps of the Third Army were abreast the Moselle, Sauer and Our Rivers ready to crack the Siegfried Line. (1)

On 3 February 1945, XII Corps of Third Army was ordered to seize and secure a bridgehead over the Sauer River and be prepared to continue the attack east and northeast. (2) * The 5th and 80th Infantry Divisions of XII Corps were assigned this mission. (3)

The First day of February 1945, found the 319th Infantry of the 80th Infantry Division, attached to the 4th Armored Division for operational purposes only, on a one-hour alert status while located in various small towns in Luxembourg which served as rest areas in which to rehabilitate and re-equip personnel. (4) Units remained in their respective areas until 4 February during which time indi-

*The Our and the Sauer Rivers converge at Wallendorf, Germany to form the Sauer River. The unit whose operations provided the subject for this monograph actually crossed the Our River, as did the major portion of the 80th Infantry Division of which it was a part. However, historians and others, in reporting this operation refer to the Sauer and the Our, at this point, almost synonymously. (See Map II) (#)

(1) F - p. 30; G - p. 283; (2) E - p. 255; (3) C - p. 290; (4) A - Sect. VII, 1 Feb 45.

vidual and some crew-served weapons were fired. (5) Individual equipment was issued as required and training in small unit problems was conducted. Short passes (6 to 8 hours) were given to as many men as possible to allow them to visit Luxembourg City. (6)

At 040800A February 1945, the 319th Infantry began a motor march to the Bettendorf-Moestroff-Kleinreisdorf area to relieve CCE of the 4th Armored Division in that area. By 1500 hours the 2nd Battalion was in Moestroff, the 1st Battalion was in Kleinreisdorf, and the Regimental CP was in Bettendorf. With the coming of darkness the 3rd Battalion began relief of the 19th Armored Infantry, 4th Armored Division, in the vicinity of Bettendorf and the latter cleared the area by 2200 hours. (7) The regiment was thus in position to make further preparations for its mission of crossing the Our River early 7 February 1945, and seizing Wallendorf and the high ground to the north and east. (8)

This monograph will recount, in particular, the operations of the 1st Platoon of Company B (located in Kleinreisdorf at this time) in the crossing of the Our River into the Siegfried Line and the action during the ensuing four days.

GENERAL SITUATION

The Sauer and the Our Rivers are comparatively small streams flowing generally north-south between the Duchy of Luxembourg and the Siegfried Line, the German western frontier. In the vicinity of the confluence of the two streams,

(5) B - p. 2, D - p. 2, #; (6) #; (7) A - Sect. VII, 4 Feb 45, B - p. 1, D - p. 3; (8) A - Sect. VII, 4 Feb 45, B - p. 2.

the scene of the action covered herein, they are about the same width. Normally, the Sauer has a water gap of around 75 feet. "At this period it was a flood-swollen torrent with a deadly current. In addition, the Germans were powerfully emplaced on the heavily wooded far shores* in innumerable pill boxes and natural rock formations. ~~Also, the~~ steep banks were extensively barb-wired and mined and all approaches covered with direct artillery and machine gun fire."

(9)

This operation occurred during the thaw immediately following the Battle of the Bulge. Very little snow was left on the ground, rain fell almost daily and the earth's surface in this area was thawed to a depth of about 6 to 8 inches, which was, of course, mud. (10)

Units were disposed as shown on Map II. During the period 4-7 February both friendly and enemy activity was confined to patrolling and to harassing artillery and direct fire. (11)

BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK FOR 7 FEB 45

The 319th Infantry planned to attack with the 1st and 2nd Battalions abreast with the 2nd Battalion on the north or left. (12)

The attack of the 1st Battalion, with which we are main-

*While it may have been true that the opposite shores were wooded in the greater part of the regimental zone, much of that portion of zone in which this action took place was completely devoid of trees. (#)

(9) G - p. 290, #; (10) #; (11) A - Sect. VII, 4 Feb 45, D - p. 2, D - p. 3; (12) A - Sect. VII, 7 Feb 45, B - p. 2, D - p. 5.

ly concerned, was to follow the route outlined on Map II. The Battalion was to form in a column of companies at the eastern edge of Kleinreisdorf at 0200 hours, follow the route shown across Hill X*, and arrive at the crossing site at 0300 hours (H-hour). (For IP and proposed route of attack, see Map II). An artillery preparation was scheduled ~~to begin at 0250 hours and continue to H-hour. As an added~~ psychological factor, as well as for any casualties that might result, weapons of all units in the area which were within firing range of the objective were to open fire at 0230 hours and continue firing for 30 minutes. Great care was taken to insure that all participants were thoroughly oriented on all details of this plan.

After the battalion had effected a crossing, it was to infiltrate to Ridge A of Hill Y which was to be hastily organized, for at daylight an attack was to be launched, with Companies B and C as assault companies, on Wallendorf, itself. (15) (See Map II)

PREPARATIONS WITHIN THE BATTALION
5-6 February 1945

On 5 February the two assault battalions (1st and 2nd) practiced river crossing in assault boats provided and manned by Company G of the 305th Engineer Battalion, which was attached to the regiment for this operation. The 150th Engineer Battalion and the 1135th Engineer Group were in support of the regiment. The footbridge which was to have ~~the~~ *The designations of the hills which figure in this action are not those used in the actual operation. The 1st Battalion did not record them name or number, and the letter identification attached to each here is solely a means of facilitating reference.

been constructed by the 150th Engineers for practice crossing was not completed. This rehearsal took place in the vicinity of Moestroff. It was a "full dress" rehearsal with the boats loaded exactly as they were to be in the actual operation and every man fully equipped. During the night of the 5th and 6th, 150 men from these battalions carried assault boats from the trucks to their respective crossing sites where the boats were left during the day of the 6th.

(14)

The nature of the terrain and the number and size of the boats made it impossible to conceal them from the Germans during daylight. From the increased harassing artillery fire laid on the battalion positions during this period by the enemy, it is reasonable to assume that he was aware of an impending attack, and had he not been, the presence of the assault boats on the forward slope of Hill X could have left no doubt in his mind. However, he must have been reassured, when on the afternoon of the 6th at approximately 1400 hours, a sound truck from Division or higher Headquarters proceeded to the top of this hill and broadcast a message to the Germans, in gist, that the Americans were coming over and that it would be better to surrender. (15)

During the entire day of the 6th the presence of even one man on Hill X, the best and practically only point from which a reconnaissance of the route for the impending attack could be made, would draw immediate and heavy, large calibre, direct fire from the enemy. (16) This situation was doubt-

(14) A - Sect. VII, 4 Feb 45, 5 & 6 Feb 45 & 7 Feb 45; B - p. 2; D - p. 3; #; (15) #; (16) #.

less aggravated by the activity of the tanks and tank destroyers attached to the regiment (1 company each from the 702nd Tank Battalion and the 811th Tank Destroyer Battalion). From hull defilade positions on Hill X, tanks and tank destroyers would fire one or two rounds at known or suspected enemy positions on the opposite side of the river and then ~~hastily withdraw to complete defilade, never more than~~ seconds ahead of retaliatory fire. (17)

(NOTE: The facts hereinafter recorded are drawn from the personal recollection of the writer, except in certain instances which are appropriately noted.)

Since the preparations were probably about the same throughout the battalion, let us take the 1st Platoon of Company B as representative. It had a strength of 39 EM and 1 officer which was about the average for the other rifle platoons of the battalion.

By 1200 hours on the 6th the platoon leader had been informed of all details of the plan of attack. He, in turn, oriented his squad leaders and checked to make certain that each squad leader had briefed his men.

During the afternoon each man was issued 2 days K Rations, 3 hand grenades, and 2 extra bandoleers of ammunition. Extra batteries were carried for the SCR 536 radio, and more than the usual amount of oil was carried for weapons in contemplation of the type of operation and the fact that rain was ever present. Every effort was made to see that each individual was fully equipped.

Just after darkness on the evening of the 5th a 111111

designed to discourage fraternization was shown to the assembled battalion. On the afternoon of the 6th the company commander addressed the company and stated that Division G-2 had reported that eighty per cent of the Germans in the pill box infested area about to be invaded actually wanted to surrender.

On the evening of the 6th a hot meal was fed just prior to darkness during which time the company suffered a few casualties from enemy artillery which had become increasingly active as the day raced on and which continued to increase in volume on into the night. Immediately after the meal religious services were held for those who cared to attend and the remainder of the evening was spent in making last minute preparations for the forthcoming attack which jumped off according to the plan and schedule previously outlined.

THE ATTACK

At 0130 hours, 7 February 1945, according to plan, friendly artillery began to bombard the German side of the Cur River which was the Siegfried Line. The bombardment continued until 0300 hours which was the time appointed for it to lift.

At 0200 hours the Battalion moved out in route column and proceeded along the pre-determined route shown on Map II to the crossing site.

Order of companies was C, B, A with 1 platoon of the heavy machine guns of company D attached to each of the two lead companies. The 81mm mortars of Company D were in posi-

tion between Kleinreisdorf and the foot of Hill X. (See Map II) They had registered during the afternoon and at 0230 hours, along with all other weapons in the area, they were to fire in support of the attack.

The order of platoons within Company B was 2nd, 1st, 3rd, and 4th. Company and platoon command groups marched at the head of the units which they commanded and an interval was maintained which would permit visual contact with the man immediately preceding. This interval was, of necessity, short as the night was very dark and a light rain was falling. Each leader was required to wear a piece of luminous tape about 1 inch by 2 inches on the back of his helmet to facilitate control.

Words cannot describe the fury of the artillery bombardment which was falling on the other side of the river. As far as one could see artillery and mortar shells of all sizes were bursting constantly. So intense was the fire that the landscape was almost continuously illuminated and to make oneself heard was practically impossible.

All went well until the head of the column was just starting the descent of Hill X to the river. This must have been about 0230 hours for, at that moment, all of the small arms in the area opened up as planned. This noise added to that of the artillery preparation already in progress, created a din that defies description.

One of the machine guns of a friendly unit had been laid slightly too low and it was firing grazing fire with occasional tracers along the length of Hill X about 20 yards

to the right of the column. Someone unidentified perhaps thinking that the battalion had been surrounded, yelled, "GO TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL!" Never was a command more promptly obeyed. In a matter of seconds, except for the command groups and possibly a very few others, that which ~~had been~~ a well-organized column was a fleeing mob.

Almost en masse and in a quite disorderly fashion, the entire group executed a right flank to the reverse slope of Hill X. A few seconds prior to this, 3 or 4 light artillery rounds exploded near the head of the column and produced a few casualties. Although the friendly machine gun continued to fire, no one in this group was injured by it.

The reader can readily imagine the chaos which resulted from this untimely sounding-off. Caution was abandoned and leaders went about shouting for their men by name. This may seem to have been ill-advised, but it actually was not; for since the shouts could hardly be heard in the immediate vicinity, they surely could not be heard across the river several hundred yards away. Further, this was the only possible means of restoring organization.

After a time the units were reorganized, and Company C, the leading company, began its crossing. As previously stated, the river was at flood stage and its current was swift. This slowed the operation considerably. German artillery and direct fire began to land in the vicinity to further complicate matters. The column now moved toward the river in slow stages advancing only as the men loaded on boats manned by the engineers and were ferried across

the river. The current was so swift that the boats would be carried several hundred yards downstream before they could reach the far shore.

Companies B and C and one platoon of Company A had crossed the river at approximately 0630 hours when it became evident that daylight was going to arrive before the remainder of the battalion could be brought over. These units were in an assembly area on the river bank; an area which was completely exposed except for darkness. Neither friendly nor enemy artillery was active at this time and the scene was comparatively quiet. These units remained in this area unmolested for about 45 minutes while the battalion command group was crossing the river. This group, daylight, and German small arms fire arrived simultaneously. The fire was coming from enemy-occupied pill boxes many of which could not be seen because they were almost perfectly camouflaged.

The battalion (-) ~~might be said to have been~~ pinned down and several casualties were suffered. The entire group was lying on the ground almost head to foot -- no dispersion whatever.

Perhaps 2 or 3 minutes after the initial enemy small arms fire had been received and it became evident that the Germans were firing from the pill boxes, the battalion commander and the two company commanders suddenly jumped to their feet and in true Hollywood style, shouted and waved the unit forward to assault Hill Y.

The battalion (-) moved out in a line of skirmishers

with Company C on the right. (The writer is unable to find written reference to the fact that one platoon of Company A was present at this time. However, it is believed that the platoon was attached to Company C and that some time later in the day, when the remainder of Company A had crossed under a smoke screen, it reverted to its parent unit.)

The topographical crest of Hill Y was reached without difficulty except for the steepness of the slope and the fact that, as the crest was neared, an enemy machine gun which had been by-passed fired into the back of Company C. By 0825 the battalion (-) was digging in on the line shown on Map III. (18) Hill Y was quite steep and at this point the battalion was about 200 yards from the river. The assault was made with every man firing his weapon continuously. Leaders had to constantly encourage their men in order to keep them moving, so steep was the ascent.

Units were in the same relative position on Hill Y in which they started the assault. No perimeter was formed and the companies intrenched in a comparatively straight line. By this time enemy artillery including Nebelwerfer*, mortars, and small arms had become active again and inflicted a few more casualties.

As the day wore on several prisoners were taken and

*Nebelwerfer was a type of German rocket artillery. The shells made a screeching sound in flight, and so it was a psychological as well as a casualty producing weapon.

(18) A - Sect. VII, 7 Feb 45; B - p. 3.

others were seen to be wading the river to surrender to the American forces on the other side.

The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company B was called to the Company CP at approximately 1500 hours and there he was told of the plan for the night which was to form the perimeter shown on Map III. By 1600 hours this had been done.

The greater part of the 1st Platoon of Company B was near the foot of Hill Y, but the platoon leader was ordered to remain with the smaller portion of his unit near the top of the hill so that he would be nearer the Company CP since radio and wire communication were non-existent within the company. The dampness had rendered the SCR 536 radio inoperative, and wire had not been installed.

The remainder of Company A had crossed the river under a smoke screen during the day and the company was ordered to attack Wallendorf and outpost the high ground to the north and east. Company A reported the town cleared by 2015 hours.
(19)

During the night of 7-8 February the 2nd Battalion succeeded in crossing 27 men in addition to the part of Company F which had made the crossing the preceding night in the vicinity of Hoesdorf. (See Map III) Devastating artillery fire prevented more crossings and wrecked the boats of the 3rd Battalion which had been ordered to cross the river.

(20)

(19) A - Sect. VII, 7 Feb 45; B - p. 3; (20) A - Sect. VII, 8 Feb 45; B - p. 3 & 4; D - p. 7.

In the area of the 1st Platoon of Company B the night passed without incident other than artillery and Nebelwerfer fire. The most of this fire, however, was placed on the river line itself. Inclement weather continued.

On the day of the 8th of February a limited number of K Rations and blankets were secured by the platoon from the vicinity of the original crossing site. These had been ~~carried down to the river by the kitchen personnel of the~~ several companies of the battalion under cover of darkness and the engineers had brought as many as possible across the river under heavy artillery fire. The K Rations were issued only to those who were without food for re-supply was uncertain. The day was spent in improving positions and the weather remained unchanged. Enemy artillery and sniper fire continued. Again the bulk of the enemy artillery was concentrated on the river and possible crossing sites with the obvious purpose of preventing supply, evacuation, bridging, and the crossing of more American troops. It accomplished its mission.

The night of 8-9 February passed without noteworthy event in the 1st Battalion sector and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions made repeated attempts to cross the Our, but they were hampered by ever-present and well-directed enemy artillery concentrations. The 2nd Battalion did, however, succeed in crossing the remainder of Company F. (21)

Throughout the period 7-11 February the engineers, ~~both those in support and those attached,~~ attempted to

(21) A - Sect. VII, 8 Feb 45; B - p. 4; D - p. 7.

bridge the Our, but every try was defeated by the swiftness of the river current or enemy artillery or both. On 11 February all units on the German side of the river were still being supplied as well as possible by boat. (22)

At approximately 0600 hours 9 February the platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company B was awakened by a runner of the 2nd Platoon who informed him that these two platoons (1st and 2nd) were expected at the top of Hill Y prepared to move out in an attack in 30 minutes. (For LD, see Map III) A lone man without equipment would have done well to have climbed this hill in that length of time.

The battalion had now been across the river almost exactly 48 hours. This platoon had received a limited number of K Rations, but no ammunition and much had been expended in the initial attack on Hill Y. The supply of oil for weapons was almost depleted as much had been required because of the dampness of the weather.

K Rations were issued, blankets were piled hastily on position, and the 1st Platoon moved out followed by the 2nd Platoon. The two units arrived at the line of departure on Hill Y (See Map III) where Company C and the remainder of Company B were assembled. The platoon leaders reported to a very impatient company commander as the time was now about 0720 and they were some 50 minutes overdue.

The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon received the following attack order: "You see that high ground above Wallendorf? We are going to take that. The 2nd Platoon will

(22) A - Sect. VII, 11 Feb 45; B - p. 5; D - p. 10.

be on the right and your platoon will be echeloned to the left rear. Move out!"

The area over which this attack was to be launched was a curving ridge. It was relatively smooth, without trees, and except for pill boxes which were occupied by the enemy, there was nothing on the surface save an occasional shell hole to offer individual cover. There were several pill boxes visible within this area and others which were there could not be seen because of the camouflage.

Day was just breaking at this time and the attention of the company commander was called to a column of Germans on the horizon approximately 500 yards away in the direction of the proposed attack. A counterattack was feared and everyone took position behind the retaining wall which was the line of departure. The counterattack did not materialize and in 2 or 3 minutes the attack was on the way. It followed the route shown and it stopped at the point indicated on Map III.

Company B moved out as ordered to be followed by Company C. The platoon of heavy machine guns from Company D was still attached to Company B and they were to move out with the 3rd Platoon which was in support. The company command group followed the 1st Platoon. No time had been allowed for getting units organized into any formation for this attack and the 1st and 2nd Platoons moved out in a sort of open column with all men walking at top speed and firing on pill boxes or any other features which might harbor enemy soldiers. After an advance of about 200 to 300 yards in this manner.

enemy machine gun and rifle fire was received from the left flank of the column and it produced several casualties. The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon directed several of his men to fire on this group of enemy for they were plainly visible outside a pill box -- a machine gunner and several riflemen. This order was immediately carried out and the Germans started to abandon the position just as the company command ~~ordered these men to stop firing on this group and~~ continue in the attack. The enemy forthwith resumed the position and the fire fight and continued to inflict casualties on the company.

Just after passing this position, the 2nd Platoon bore off toward the left of the intended route and the leader of the 1st Platoon, upon order of the Company Commander, directed his men to change their route of advance farther to the right. This was done and when the two platoons were abreast, they were hit with withering small arms, artillery, and mortar fire. The rifle and machine gun fire was intense, but no enemy nor enemy positions were visible. The fire came from all sides.

Actually, the Germans had allowed the column to get well within their position before they let go with all they had. Company C, and the Machine Gun Platoon of Company D were cut off and withdrew to their former positions and Company B was thus isolated in the position shown on Ridge B of Hill Y. (See Map III)

When the Germans opened up all men hit the ground and the leaders attempted to form a defensive perimeter. Little

could be accomplished in this direction and with a very little adjustment of position, all stayed as near the ground as possible and attempted to dig in.

The 1st and 2nd Platoons were in some semblance of a line with the 1st Platoon on the right. The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon and the platoon sergeant (a few minutes before he had been the platoon guide) took refuge in a shell hole which was about 50 feet in rear of the line. It could not be dug deeper so the dirt loosened by the shell burst was piled up around the crater for added protection. Word was received to, "Hold what you have".

A check revealed that the platoon sergeant, 2 squad leaders, and at least 2 men had been wounded and 4 others on the right flank of the platoon had been killed. All squads were now led by assistant squad leaders.

Nebelwerfer, artillery, and mortar concentrations rained on the position. The mortars were so close that the explosions could be heard as the rounds left the weapons. The enemy observation was such that if one stuck his hand out of a hole, it would be shot at. The shelling continued, but an expected counterattack did not come. Word was received during the morning that Company A would attack from Wallendorf and contact Company B. They were unable to get more than 100 yards out of town.

With the coming of darkness, all personnel got out of their holes and walked or ran around them in an effort to get warm. This unit had been across the river 60 hours now

without hot food or dry clothing and rain had fallen intermittently during the time. Further, though the position was just below the crest of a hill, the holes filled with water as though each was a spring. One could not dig to a depth of more than 6 to 8 inches and so the men had not stood in the water, they had lain in it for protection. It was necessary to bail the water out of these holes each 15 to 20 minutes and that only prevented one from being almost entirely submerged. Everyone on the position was as thoroughly wet as it is humanly possible to get.

No further mention has been made of the wounded. It was impossible to materially aid them. There were no medical supplies, and there was no available comfort of any sort. Only rain coats and shelter halves water soaked and muddy ones, were available with which to cover these men in an effort to keep them warm. This was futile since they were lying on the wet ground and rain fell occasionally. The platoon leader and the platoon sergeant visited each of the men in his position often during the night, but there was little in the way of encouragement to offer. Though there was no help in sight, not one complained. The only aid man remaining in the company had been left to man the battalion aid station.

At 2400 hours Company G had cleared three pill boxes and had contacted Company B. (23) In the meantime Company B had continued to be harassed by artillery and mortar fire as well as patrol action.

With the arrival of Company C it was decided to attempt to evacuate as many of the wounded as possible. One man from the 1st Platoon had to be carried. This required at least four men although it seemed that they could not be spared from the line.

No litter was available nor was there anything from which to improvise one except rifles and shelter halves. This is a difficult feat even under ordinary conditions, but with everyone and everything soaking wet, cold, and muddy it was next to impossible. There were few left on the position who were able to carry their one-quarter of the load which the wounded man represented, so the platoon sergeant was sent on this mission. This party departed to make their way through enemy territory to the battalion aid station at about 0100 hours on 10 February, but dawn came prior to their arrival and they were compelled to spend the day in a pill box in the enemy line.

Snow fell during this day (10th) as well as rain. Several attempts were made to supply the position by liaison plane, but the supplies fell into enemy hands on every occasion. The enemy continued all types of fire on the position, but it was mainly of a harassing nature now. Several harassing patrols contacted the company, but their fire was not often returned unless they came very close to the position.

Darkness came on the night of 10-11 February and the men again got out of their holes and moved about in an ef-

fort to get warm. Many were so cold and weak that they could take the low step out of their holes only after repeated attempts and some of those who attempted to run could not.

About 2200 hours the company commander, who with the advent of darkness had gone to the battalion CP, returned with the news that the company was to be relieved very shortly. In approximately one hour the relieving unit arrived. It was that part of Company C which was not already on position. Company B started the infiltration back through enemy lines for they had not yet been completely cut. Just how this was accomplished without serious incident is a matter of conjecture as it was almost impossible to maintain silence. Some men were wounded and others had frozen feet. To say that this group was cold, wet, and hungry would certainly constitute an understatement. They were soaked having lain in water for no less than 36 hours; they were almost frozen having been practically immobile and thoroughly wet in temperatures that were cold enough for snow for a like period; and they were half-starved, some of them having gone through this period with as little as one-third K Ration. The ground was rough and wet and the night was black. Some were so miserable that when an ankle was turned or one would stumble and have to use a little added energy to prevent a fall, he would cry audibly and unashamedly.

By approximately 2400 hours on the 11th the 1st Platoon was in a pill box in the same area from which it had moved

out on the morning of the 9th. Local security was posted and the men were made as comfortable as possible for the remainder of the night.

On the morning of the 12th reorganization of the platoon was begun and word was received that with the coming of darkness a composite platoon made up of the more able members of the 1st and 2nd Platoons would have to go back to the position which they had so recently left. This was to be done each alternate 24 hour period until further orders were received.

By the 14th of February 6 or 7 men in the pill box occupied by the 1st Platoon had frozen feet and were unable to walk. That night they were evacuated to the battalion aid station which was already filled to overflowing.

On the afternoon of 15 February Company B was relieved and moved to Wallendorf where the men received their first hot meal and clean clothing in 8 days. The 1st Platoon of Company B which had numbered 39 enlisted men and 1 officer at the outset of this operation now was made up of 12 enlisted men and 1 officer. Of the 27 casualties approximately 50 per cent were the result of enemy action and the remaining one-half were due to exposure.

By 12 February all 3 battalions of the 319th Infantry had succeeded in crossing the Our, and on that day the 3rd Battalion passed through the 1st Battalion and attacked northeast from Wallendorf. (24) The bridgehead was secured and the regiment continued to advance into Germany.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The crossing of the Our River into the Siegfried Line on the night of 6-7 February 1945, involved three distinct and difficult military operations, namely: a night attack, a river crossing, and an attack on a fortified position. It is my opinion that two days is insufficient time to plan and prepare for such an action. More time should have been allowed to permit a thorough reconnaissance and detailed planning to include, waterproofing of all communication equipment, main and alternate plans of attack, and means of re-supply across the river with due consideration to accomplishing the latter by air, if necessary. To cross a unit over a flood-swollen river into an enemy fortified position such as the Siegfried Line, when it is within the enemies capabilities to neutralize that river for further crossing and so isolate that unit, is to put it in much the same position as troops who might have parachuted into the enemy lines. Prompt re-supply and contact with friendly forces are the decisive factors in both cases.

From the enemy standpoint, his failure to launch a forceful counterattack during the first few days of this operation is the main reason for his defeat in this particular area. It is my belief that an aggressive and well-planned attack on the 1st Battalion, 319th Infantry, during the first three or four days of this action would have completely annihilated it due to the short supply of ammunition and the physical condition of the troops. The Germans, instead, attempted to accomplish this by fire alone.

The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company B should have insured that each of his men was familiar with all details of the fire support plan and so have helped to preclude the general rout which occurred on Hill X just prior to the actual crossing.

It will be recalled that in the attack on the morning of 9 February by Companies B and C, a group of enemy delivered small arms fire into the left flank of the column. The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company B ordered some of his men to return this fire which was the only course of action open at the instant. When the company commander ordered this fire lifted, he should have directed others to return this fire and so neutralize the position.

Closer contact should have been maintained between the command post of Company B and its platoons regardless of who took the initiative in establishing it. This would have afforded more time for planning the attack on Ridge B of Hill Y. The cost of this attack might have been materially reduced by a well organized operation which would have provided for a methodical clearing of the area pill box by pill box. In the end this is actually what happened.

The circumstances of the attack on Ridge B, as it was actually executed, coupled with the maintenance of the position for the succeeding two days under heavy enemy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire and adverse weather conditions, can only indicate that the unit which accomplished it was a well-trained, well-disciplined organization with a high degree of esprit de corps.

LESSONS

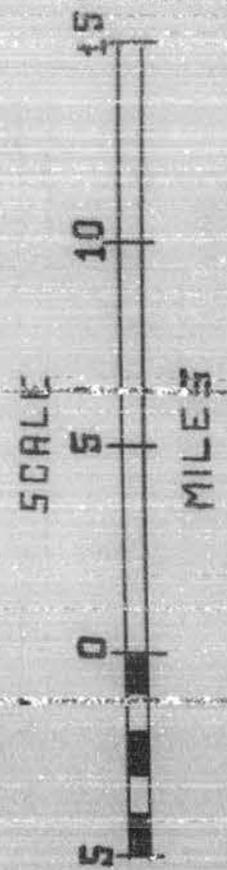
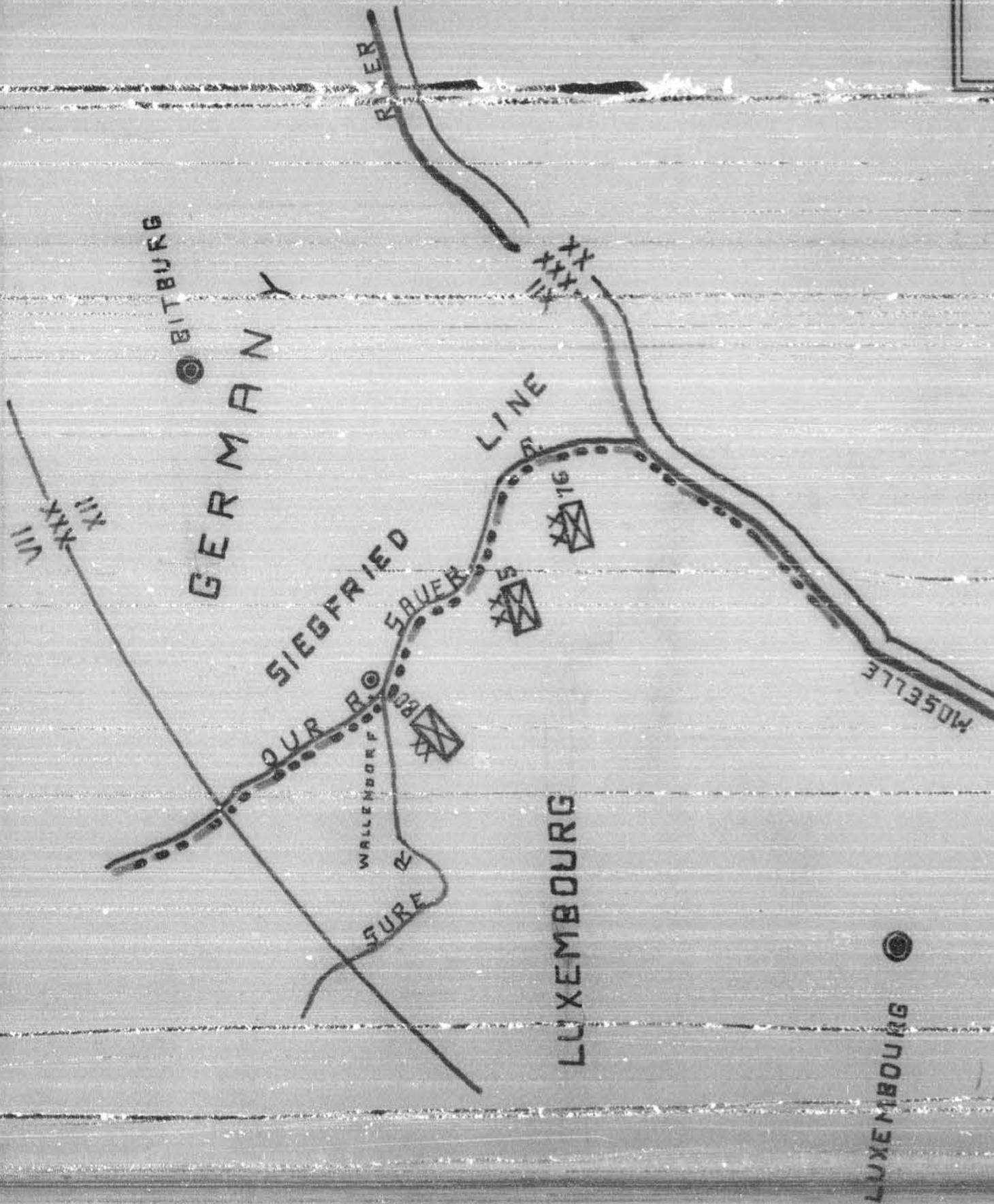
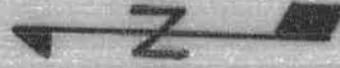
Some lessons brought out by this operation are:

- made* 1. A river crossing into an enemy fortified area at night requires much prior planning and preparation on the part of all concerned.
- ~~2. Every effort should be made to thoroughly brief~~
each participant in an attack in which overhead supporting fire is to be used.
3. In a frontal attack on an enemy fortified area all available weapons should fire on the enemy position regardless of whether he is visible.
4. In a difficult operation, both subordinate and higher commanders should strive to maintain close liaison.
5. If an attack is to pass through enemy occupied positions, attacking personnel should keep moving in order to present a poor target to the enemy.
6. Small units such as platoons and companies in attacking a fortified area, should clear that area of enemy as they advance.
- and* 7. In a river crossing operation, adequate preparation requires more than the usual number of medical personnel and supplies.
8. A mobile counterattacking force is a prerequisite for the successful defense of a river line against a determined enemy.

MAP I

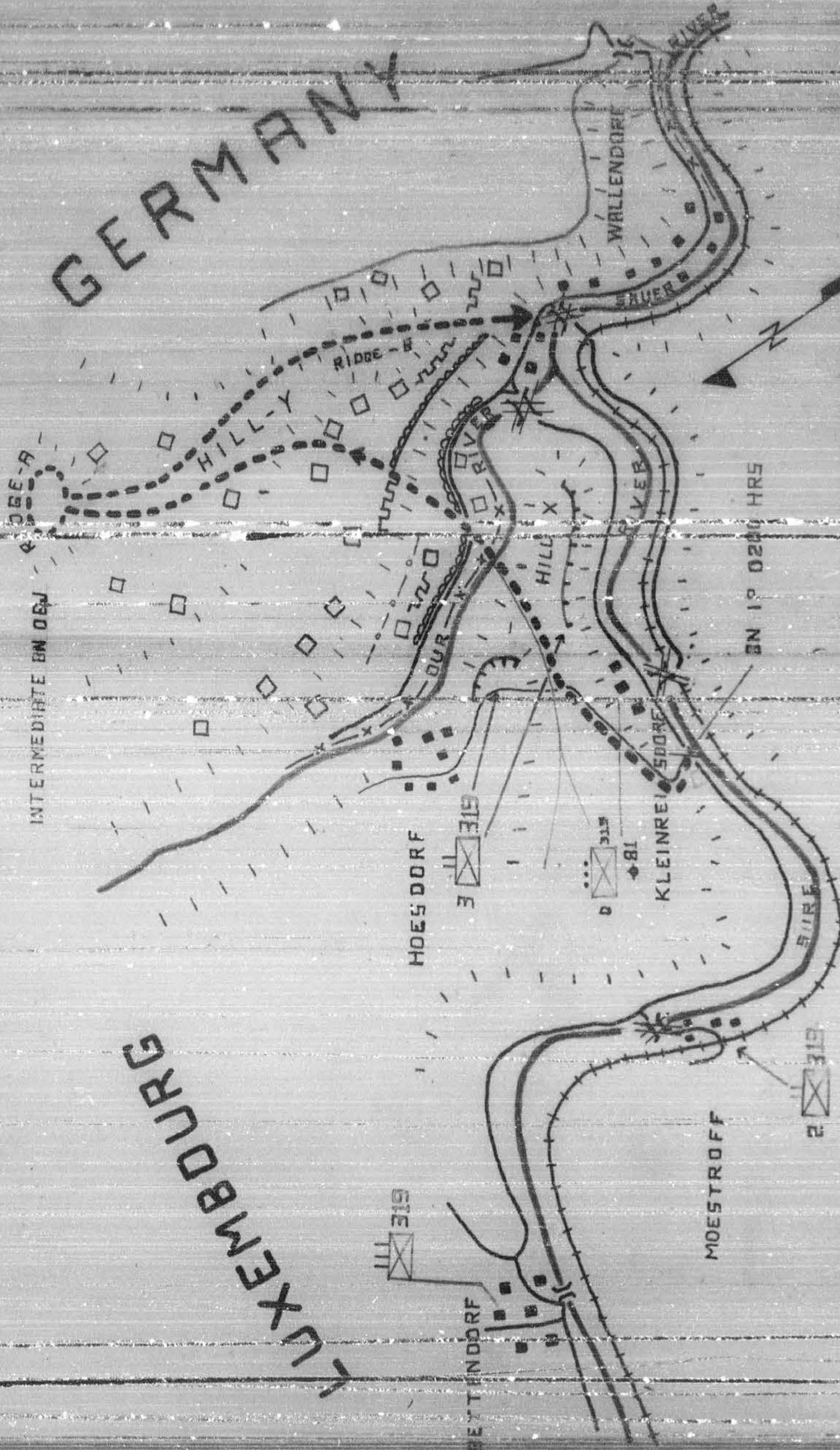
XII CORPS

7 FEB 45



GERMANY

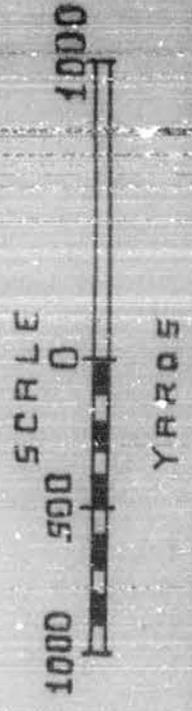
LUXEMBOURG



MAP II

LOCATION OF BNS - 319TH INF AND
 PLANNED ROUTE OF ATTACK
 7 FEB 45

NOTE: LOCATION DEFENSES
 APPROXIMATE ONLY



- LEGEND**
- PILLBOX --- O
 - MINIFIELD --- - - - -
 - BARBED WIRE --- - x - x -
 - LINE TRENCH --- - - - -
 - RETAINING WALL --- - - - -

INTERMEDIATE BN OBJ

BN 1P 020 HRS

III 319

BETTENDORF

MOESTROFF

2 319

MOESDORF

3 319

319 81

KLEINREIFFERSDORF

HILL X

OUR RIVER

SAUER

WALLENDORF

SAUER RIVER

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Map II - Location of Battalions, 319th Infantry and
Planned Route of Attack, 7 Feb 45

Map III - Battalion Situation 7-11 Feb 45

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OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST PLATOON, COMPANY B, 319TH INFANTRY
(80TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ASSAULT ON THE SIEGFRIED
LINE AT WALLENDORF, GERMANY, 7-11 FEBRUARY 1945.
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

INTRODUCTION

The day after the Third United States Army recaptured the last of the ground lost by the United States First Army in the Battle of the Bulge, 29 January 1945, the four corps of the Third Army were abreast the Moselle, Sauer and Our Rivers ready to crack the Siegfried Line. (1)

On 3 February 1945, XII Corps of Third Army was ordered to seize and secure a bridgehead over the Sauer River and be prepared to continue the attack east and northeast. (2) * The 5th and 80th Infantry Divisions of XII Corps were assigned this mission. (3)

The First day of February 1945, found the 319th Infantry of the 80th Infantry Division, attached to the 4th Armored Division for operational purposes only, on a one-hour alert status while located in various small towns in Luxembourg which served as rest areas in which to rehabilitate and re-equip personnel. (4) Units remained in their respective areas until 4 February during which time indi-

*The Our and the Sauer Rivers converge at Wallendorf, Germany to form the Sauer River. The unit whose operations provided the subject for this monograph actually crossed the Our River, as did the major portion of the 80th Infantry Division of which it was a part. However, historians and others, in reporting this operation refer to the Sauer and the Our, at this point, almost synonymously. (See Map II) (#)

(1) F - p. 30; G - p. 283; (2) E - p. 255; (3) C - p. 290; (4) A - Sect. VII, 1 Feb 45.

vidual and some crew-served weapons were fired. (5) Individual equipment was issued as required and training in small unit problems was conducted. Short passes (6 to 8 hours) were given to as many men as possible to allow them to visit Luxembourg City. (6)

At 040800A February 1945, the 319th Infantry began a motor march to the Bettendorf-Moestroff-Kleinreisdorf area to relieve CCE of the 4th Armored Division in that area. By 1500 hours the 2nd Battalion was in Moestroff, the 1st Battalion was in Kleinreisdorf, and the Regimental CP was in Bettendorf. With the coming of darkness the 3rd Battalion began relief of the 19th Armored Infantry, 4th Armored Division, in the vicinity of Bettendorf and the latter cleared the area by 2200 hours. (7) The regiment was thus in position to make further preparations for its mission of crossing the Our River early 7 February 1945, and seizing Wallendorf and the high ground to the north and east. (8)

This monograph will recount, in particular, the operations of the 1st Platoon of Company B (located in Kleinreisdorf at this time) in the crossing of the Our River into the Siegfried Line and the action during the ensuing four days.

GENERAL SITUATION

The Sauer and the Our Rivers are comparatively small streams flowing generally north-south between the Duchy of Luxembourg and the Siegfried Line, the German western frontier. In the vicinity of the confluence of the two streams,

(5) B - p. 2, D - p. 2, #; (6) #; (7) A - Sect. VII, 4 Feb 45, B - p. 1, D - p. 3; (8) A - Sect. VII, 4 Feb 45, B - p. 2.

the scene of the action covered herein, they are about the same width. Normally, the Sauer has a water gap of around 75 feet. "At this period it was a flood-swollen torrent with a deadly current. In addition, the Germans were powerfully emplaced on the heavily wooded far shores* in innumerable pill boxes and natural rock formations. ~~Also, the~~ steep banks were extensively barb-wired and mined and all approaches covered with direct artillery and machine gun fire."

(9)

This operation occurred during the thaw immediately following the Battle of the Bulge. Very little snow was left on the ground, rain fell almost daily and the earth's surface in this area was thawed to a depth of about 6 to 8 inches, which was, of course, mud. (10)

Units were disposed as shown on Map II. During the period 4-7 February both friendly and enemy activity was confined to patrolling and to harassing artillery and direct fire. (11)

BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK FOR 7 FEB 45

The 319th Infantry planned to attack with the 1st and 2nd Battalions abreast with the 2nd Battalion on the north or left. (12)

The attack of the 1st Battalion, with which we are main-

*While it may have been true that the opposite shores were wooded in the greater part of the regimental zone, much of that portion of zone in which this action took place was completely devoid of trees. (#)

(9) G - p. 290, #; (10) #; (11) A - Sect. VII, 4 Feb 45, D - p. 2, D - p. 3; (12) A - Sect. VII, 7 Feb 45, B - p. 2, D - p. 5.

ly concerned, was to follow the route outlined on Map II. The Battalion was to form in a column of companies at the eastern edge of Kleinreisdorf at 0200 hours, follow the route shown across Hill X*, and arrive at the crossing site at 0300 hours (H-hour). (For IP and proposed route of attack, see Map II). An artillery preparation was scheduled ~~to begin at 0250 hours and continue to H-hour. As an added~~ psychological factor, as well as for any casualties that might result, weapons of all units in the area which were within firing range of the objective were to open fire at 0230 hours and continue firing for 30 minutes. Great care was taken to insure that all participants were thoroughly oriented on all details of this plan.

After the battalion had effected a crossing, it was to infiltrate to Ridge A of Hill Y which was to be hastily organized, for at daylight an attack was to be launched, with Companies B and C as assault companies, on Wallendorf, itself. (15) (See Map II)

PREPARATIONS WITHIN THE BATTALION
5-6 February 1945

On 5 February the two assault battalions (1st and 2nd) practiced river crossing in assault boats provided and manned by Company C of the 305th Engineer Battalion, which was attached to the regiment for this operation. The 150th Engineer Battalion and the 1135th Engineer Group were in support of the regiment. The footbridge which was to have ~~the~~ *The designations of the hills which figure in this action are not those used in the actual operation. The 1st Battalion did not record them name or number, and the letter identification attached to each here is solely a means of facilitating reference.

been constructed by the 150th Engineers for practice crossing was not completed. This rehearsal took place in the vicinity of Moestroff. It was a "full dress" rehearsal with the boats loaded exactly as they were to be in the actual operation and every man fully equipped. During the night of the 5th and 6th, 150 men from these battalions carried assault boats from the trucks to their respective crossing sites where the boats were left during the day of the 6th.

(14)

The nature of the terrain and the number and size of the boats made it impossible to conceal them from the Germans during daylight. From the increased harassing artillery fire laid on the battalion positions during this period by the enemy, it is reasonable to assume that he was aware of an impending attack, and had he not been, the presence of the assault boats on the forward slope of Hill X could have left no doubt in his mind. However, he must have been reassured, when on the afternoon of the 6th at approximately 1400 hours, a sound truck from Division or higher Headquarters proceeded to the top of this hill and broadcast a message to the Germans, in gist, that the Americans were coming over and that it would be better to surrender. (15)

During the entire day of the 6th the presence of even one man on Hill X, the best and practically only point from which a reconnaissance of the route for the impending attack could be made, would draw immediate and heavy, large calibre, direct fire from the enemy. (16) This situation was doubt-

(14) A - Sect. VII, 4 Feb 45, 5 & 6 Feb 45 & 7 Feb 45; B - p. 2; D - p. 3; #; (15) #; (16) #.

less aggravated by the activity of the tanks and tank destroyers attached to the regiment (1 company each from the 702nd Tank Battalion and the 811th Tank Destroyer Battalion). From hull defilade positions on Hill X, tanks and tank destroyers would fire one or two rounds at known or suspected enemy positions on the opposite side of the river and then ~~hastily withdraw to complete defilade, never more than~~ seconds ahead of retaliatory fire. (17)

(NOTE: The facts hereinafter recorded are drawn from the personal recollection of the writer, except in certain instances which are appropriately noted.)

Since the preparations were probably about the same throughout the battalion, let us take the 1st Platoon of Company B as representative. It had a strength of 39 EM and 1 officer which was about the average for the other rifle platoons of the battalion.

By 1200 hours on the 6th the platoon leader had been informed of all details of the plan of attack. He, in turn, oriented his squad leaders and checked to make certain that each squad leader had briefed his men.

During the afternoon each man was issued 2 days K Rations, 3 hand grenades, and 2 extra bandoleers of ammunition. Extra batteries were carried for the SCR 536 radio, and more than the usual amount of oil was carried for weapons in contemplation of the type of operation and the fact that rain was ever present. Every effort was made to see that each individual was fully equipped.

Just after darkness on the evening of the 5th a 111111

designed to discourage fraternization was shown to the assembled battalion. On the afternoon of the 6th the company commander addressed the company and stated that Division G-2 had reported that eighty per cent of the Germans in the pill box infested area about to be invaded actually wanted to surrender.

On the evening of the 6th a hot meal was fed just prior to darkness during which time the company suffered a few casualties from enemy artillery which had become increasingly active as the day raced on and which continued to increase in volume on into the night. Immediately after the meal religious services were held for those who cared to attend and the remainder of the evening was spent in making last minute preparations for the forthcoming attack which jumped off according to the plan and schedule previously outlined.

THE ATTACK

At 0130 hours, 7 February 1945, according to plan, friendly artillery began to bombard the German side of the Cur River which was the Siegfried Line. The bombardment continued until 0300 hours which was the time appointed for it to lift.

At 0200 hours the Battalion moved out in route column and proceeded along the pre-determined route shown on Map II to the crossing site.

Order of companies was C, B, A with 1 platoon of the heavy machine guns of company D attached to each of the two lead companies. The 81mm mortars of Company D were in posi-

tion between Kleinreisdorf and the foot of Hill X. (See Map II) They had registered during the afternoon and at 0230 hours, along with all other weapons in the area, they were to fire in support of the attack.

The order of platoons within Company B was 2nd, 1st, 3rd, and 4th. Company and platoon command groups marched at the head of the units which they commanded and an interval was maintained which would permit visual contact with the man immediately preceding. This interval was, of necessity, short as the night was very dark and a light rain was falling. Each leader was required to wear a piece of luminous tape about 1 inch by 2 inches on the back of his helmet to facilitate control.

Words cannot describe the fury of the artillery bombardment which was falling on the other side of the river. As far as one could see artillery and mortar shells of all sizes were bursting constantly. So intense was the fire that the landscape was almost continuously illuminated and to make oneself heard was practically impossible.

All went well until the head of the column was just starting the descent of Hill X to the river. This must have been about 0230 hours for, at that moment, all of the small arms in the area opened up as planned. This noise added to that of the artillery preparation already in progress, created a din that defies description.

One of the machine guns of a friendly unit had been laid slightly too low and it was firing grazing fire with occasional tracers along the length of Hill X about 20 yards

to the right of the column. Someone unidentified perhaps thinking that the battalion had been surrounded, yelled, "GO TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL!" Never was a command more promptly obeyed. In a matter of seconds, except for the command groups and possibly a very few others, that which ~~had been~~ a well-organized column was a fleeing mob.

Almost en masse and in a quite disorderly fashion, the entire group executed a right flank to the reverse slope of Hill X. A few seconds prior to this, 3 or 4 light artillery rounds exploded near the head of the column and produced a few casualties. Although the friendly machine gun continued to fire, no one in this group was injured by it.

The reader can readily imagine the chaos which resulted from this untimely sounding-off. Caution was abandoned and leaders went about shouting for their men by name. This may seem to have been ill-advised, but it actually was not; for since the shouts could hardly be heard in the immediate vicinity, they surely could not be heard across the river several hundred yards away. Further, this was the only possible means of restoring organization.

After a time the units were reorganized, and Company C, the leading company, began its crossing. As previously stated, the river was at flood stage and its current was swift. This slowed the operation considerably. German artillery and direct fire began to land in the vicinity to further complicate matters. The column now moved toward the river in slow stages advancing only as the men loaded on boats manned by the engineers and were ferried across

the river. The current was so swift that the boats would be carried several hundred yards downstream before they could reach the far shore.

Companies B and C and one platoon of Company A had crossed the river at approximately 0630 hours when it became evident that daylight was going to arrive before the remainder of the battalion could be brought over. These units were in an assembly area on the river bank; an area which was completely exposed except for darkness. Neither friendly nor enemy artillery was active at this time and the scene was comparatively quiet. These units remained in this area unmolested for about 45 minutes while the battalion command group was crossing the river. This group, daylight, and German small arms fire arrived simultaneously. The fire was coming from enemy-occupied pill boxes many of which could not be seen because they were almost perfectly camouflaged.

The battalion (-) ~~might be said to have been~~ pinned down and several casualties were suffered. The entire group was lying on the ground almost head to foot -- no dispersion whatever.

Perhaps 2 or 3 minutes after the initial enemy small arms fire had been received and it became evident that the Germans were firing from the pill boxes, the battalion commander and the two company commanders suddenly jumped to their feet and in true Hollywood style, shouted and waved the unit forward to assault Hill Y.

The battalion (-) moved out in a line of skirmishers

with Company C on the right. (The writer is unable to find written reference to the fact that one platoon of Company A was present at this time. However, it is believed that the platoon was attached to Company C and that some time later in the day, when the remainder of Company A had crossed under a smoke screen, it reverted to its parent unit.)

The topographical crest of Hill Y was reached without difficulty except for the steepness of the slope and the fact that, as the crest was neared, an enemy machine gun which had been by-passed fired into the back of Company C. By 0825 the battalion (-) was digging in on the line shown on Map III. (18) Hill Y was quite steep and at this point the battalion was about 200 yards from the river. The assault was made with every man firing his weapon continuously. Leaders had to constantly encourage their men in order to keep them moving, so steep was the ascent.

Units were in the same relative position on Hill Y in which they started the assault. No perimeter was formed and the companies intrenched in a comparatively straight line. By this time enemy artillery including Nebelwerfer*, mortars, and small arms had become active again and inflicted a few more casualties.

As the day wore on several prisoners were taken and

*Nebelwerfer was a type of German rocket artillery. The shells made a screeching sound in flight, and so it was a psychological as well as a casualty producing weapon.

(18) A - Sect. VII, 7 Feb 45; B - p. 3.

others were seen to be wading the river to surrender to the American forces on the other side.

The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company B was called to the Company CP at approximately 1500 hours and there he was told of the plan for the night which was to form the perimeter shown on Map III. By 1600 hours this had been done.

The greater part of the 1st Platoon of Company B was near the foot of Hill Y, but the platoon leader was ordered to remain with the smaller portion of his unit near the top of the hill so that he would be nearer the Company CP since radio and wire communication were non-existent within the company. The dampness had rendered the SCR 536 radio inoperative, and wire had not been installed.

The remainder of Company A had crossed the river under a smoke screen during the day and the company was ordered to attack Wallendorf and outpost the high ground to the north and east. Company A reported the town cleared by 2015 hours.
(19)

During the night of 7-8 February the 2nd Battalion succeeded in crossing 27 men in addition to the part of Company F which had made the crossing the preceding night in the vicinity of Hoesdorf. (See Map III) Devastating artillery fire prevented more crossings and wrecked the boats of the 3rd Battalion which had been ordered to cross the river.

(20)

(19) A - Sect. VII, 7 Feb 45; B - p. 3; (20) A - Sect. VII, 8 Feb 45; B - p. 3 & 4; D - p. 7.

In the area of the 1st Platoon of Company B the night passed without incident other than artillery and Nebelwerfer fire. The most of this fire, however, was placed on the river line itself. Inclement weather continued.

On the day of the 8th of February a limited number of K Rations and blankets were secured by the platoon from the vicinity of the original crossing site. These had been ~~carried down to the river by the kitchen personnel of the~~ several companies of the battalion under cover of darkness and the engineers had brought as many as possible across the river under heavy artillery fire. The K Rations were issued only to those who were without food for re-supply was uncertain. The day was spent in improving positions and the weather remained unchanged. Enemy artillery and sniper fire continued. Again the bulk of the enemy artillery was concentrated on the river and possible crossing sites with the obvious purpose of preventing supply, evacuation, bridging, and the crossing of more American troops. It accomplished its mission.

The night of 8-9 February passed without noteworthy event in the 1st Battalion sector and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions made repeated attempts to cross the Our, but they were hampered by ever-present and well-directed enemy artillery concentrations. The 2nd Battalion did, however, succeed in crossing the remainder of Company F. (21)

Throughout the period 7-11 February the engineers, ~~both those in support and those attached,~~ attempted to

(21) A - Sect. VII, 8 Feb 45; B - p. 4; D - p. 7.

bridge the Our, but every try was defeated by the swiftness of the river current or enemy artillery or both. On 11 February all units on the German side of the river were still being supplied as well as possible by boat. (22)

At approximately 0600 hours 9 February the platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company B was awakened by a runner of the 2nd Platoon who informed him that these two platoons (1st and 2nd) were expected at the top of Hill Y prepared to move out in an attack in 30 minutes. (For LD, see Map III) A lone man without equipment would have done well to have climbed this hill in that length of time.

The battalion had now been across the river almost exactly 48 hours. This platoon had received a limited number of K Rations, but no ammunition and much had been expended in the initial attack on Hill Y. The supply of oil for weapons was almost depleted as much had been required because of the dampness of the weather.

K Rations were issued, blankets were piled hastily on position, and the 1st Platoon moved out followed by the 2nd Platoon. The two units arrived at the line of departure on Hill Y (See Map III) where Company C and the remainder of Company B were assembled. The platoon leaders reported to a very impatient company commander as the time was now about 0720 and they were some 50 minutes overdue.

The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon received the following attack order: "You see that high ground above Wallendorf? We are going to take that. The 2nd Platoon will

(22) A - Sect. VII, 11 Feb 45; B - p. 5; D - p. 10.

be on the right and your platoon will be echeloned to the left rear. Move out!"

The area over which this attack was to be launched was a curving ridge. It was relatively smooth, without trees, and except for pill boxes which were occupied by the enemy, there was nothing on the surface save an occasional shell hole to offer individual cover. There were several pill boxes visible within this area and others which were there could not be seen because of the camouflage.

Day was just breaking at this time and the attention of the company commander was called to a column of Germans on the horizon approximately 500 yards away in the direction of the proposed attack. A counterattack was feared and everyone took position behind the retaining wall which was the line of departure. The counterattack did not materialize and in 2 or 3 minutes the attack was on the way. It followed the route shown and it stopped at the point indicated on Map III.

Company B moved out as ordered to be followed by Company C. The platoon of heavy machine guns from Company D was still attached to Company B and they were to move out with the 3rd Platoon which was in support. The company command group followed the 1st Platoon. No time had been allowed for getting units organized into any formation for this attack and the 1st and 2nd Platoons moved out in a sort of open column with all men walking at top speed and firing on pill boxes or any other features which might harbor enemy soldiers. After an advance of about 200 to 300 yards in this manner.

enemy machine gun and rifle fire was received from the left flank of the column and it produced several casualties. The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon directed several of his men to fire on this group of enemy for they were plainly visible outside a pill box -- a machine gunner and several riflemen. This order was immediately carried out and the Germans started to abandon the position just as the company command ~~er ordered these men to stop firing on this group and~~ continue in the attack. The enemy forthwith resumed the position and the fire fight and continued to inflict casualties on the company.

Just after passing this position, the 2nd Platoon bore off toward the left of the intended route and the leader of the 1st Platoon, upon order of the Company Commander, directed his men to change their route of advance farther to the right. This was done and when the two platoons were abreast, they were hit with withering small arms, artillery, and mortar fire. The rifle and machine gun fire was intense, but no enemy nor enemy positions were visible. The fire came from all sides.

Actually, the Germans had allowed the column to get well within their position before they let go with all they had. Company C, and the Machine Gun Platoon of Company D were cut off and withdrew to their former positions and Company B was thus isolated in the position shown on Ridge B of Hill Y. (See Map III)

When the Germans opened up all men hit the ground and the leaders attempted to form a defensive perimeter. Little

could be accomplished in this direction and with a very little adjustment of position, all stayed as near the ground as possible and attempted to dig in.

The 1st and 2nd Platoons were in some semblance of a line with the 1st Platoon on the right. The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon and the platoon sergeant (a few minutes before he had been the platoon guide) took refuge in a shell hole which was about 50 feet in rear of the line. It could not be dug deeper so the dirt loosened by the shell burst was piled up around the crater for added protection. Word was received to, "Hold what you have".

A check revealed that the platoon sergeant, 2 squad leaders, and at least 2 men had been wounded and 4 others on the right flank of the platoon had been killed. All squads were now led by assistant squad leaders.

Nebelwerfer, artillery, and mortar concentrations rained on the position. The mortars were so close that the explosions could be heard as the rounds left the weapons. The enemy observation was such that if one stuck his hand out of a hole, it would be shot at. The shelling continued, but an expected counterattack did not come. Word was received during the morning that Company A would attack from Wallendorf and contact Company B. They were unable to get more than 100 yards out of town.

With the coming of darkness, all personnel got out of their holes and walked or ran around them in an effort to get warm. This unit had been across the river 60 hours now

without hot food or dry clothing and rain had fallen intermittently during the time. Further, though the position was just below the crest of a hill, the holes filled with water as though each was a spring. One could not dig to a depth of more than 6 to 8 inches and so the men had not stood in the water, they had lain in it for protection. It was necessary to bail the water out of these holes each 15 to 20 minutes and that only prevented one from being almost entirely submerged. Everyone on the position was as thoroughly wet as it is humanly possible to get.

No further mention has been made of the wounded. It was impossible to materially aid them. There were no medical supplies, and there was no available comfort of any sort. Only rain coats and shelter halves water soaked and muddy ones, were available with which to cover these men in an effort to keep them warm. This was futile since they were lying on the wet ground and rain fell occasionally. The platoon leader and the platoon sergeant visited each of the men in his position often during the night, but there was little in the way of encouragement to offer. Though there was no help in sight, not one complained. The only aid man remaining in the company had been left to man the battalion aid station.

At 2400 hours Company G had cleared three pill boxes and had contacted Company B. (23) In the meantime Company B had continued to be harassed by artillery and mortar fire as well as patrol action.

With the arrival of Company C it was decided to attempt to evacuate as many of the wounded as possible. One man from the 1st Platoon had to be carried. This required at least four men although it seemed that they could not be spared from the line.

No litter was available nor was there anything from which to improvise one except rifles and shelter halves. This is a difficult feat even under ordinary conditions, but with everyone and everything soaking wet, cold, and muddy it was next to impossible. There were few left on the position who were able to carry their one-quarter of the load which the wounded man represented, so the platoon sergeant was sent on this mission. This party departed to make their way through enemy territory to the battalion aid station at about 0100 hours on 10 February, but dawn came prior to their arrival and they were compelled to spend the day in a pill box in the enemy line.

Snow fell during this day (10th) as well as rain. Several attempts were made to supply the position by liaison plane, but the supplies fell into enemy hands on every occasion. The enemy continued all types of fire on the position, but it was mainly of a harassing nature now. Several harassing patrols contacted the company, but their fire was not often returned unless they came very close to the position.

Darkness came on the night of 10-11 February and the men again got out of their holes and moved about in an ef-

fort to get warm. Many were so cold and weak that they could take the low step out of their holes only after repeated attempts and some of those who attempted to run could not.

About 2200 hours the company commander, who with the advent of darkness had gone to the battalion CP, returned with the news that the company was to be relieved very shortly. In approximately one hour the relieving unit arrived. It was that part of Company C which was not already on position. Company B started the infiltration back through enemy lines for they had not yet been completely cut. Just how this was accomplished without serious incident is a matter of conjecture as it was almost impossible to maintain silence. Some men were wounded and others had frozen feet. To say that this group was cold, wet, and hungry would certainly constitute an understatement. They were soaked having lain in water for no less than 36 hours; they were almost frozen having been practically immobile and thoroughly wet in temperatures that were cold enough for snow for a like period; and they were half-starved, some of them having gone through this period with as little as one-third K Ration. The ground was rough and wet and the night was black. Some were so miserable that when an ankle was turned or one would stumble and have to use a little added energy to prevent a fall, he would cry audibly and unashamedly.

By approximately 2400 hours on the 11th the 1st Platoon was in a pill box in the same area from which it had moved

out on the morning of the 9th. Local security was posted and the men were made as comfortable as possible for the remainder of the night.

On the morning of the 12th reorganization of the platoon was begun and word was received that with the coming of darkness a composite platoon made up of the more able members of the 1st and 2nd Platoons would have to go back to the position which they had so recently left. This was to be done each alternate 24 hour period until further orders were received.

By the 14th of February 6 or 7 men in the pill box occupied by the 1st Platoon had frozen feet and were unable to walk. That night they were evacuated to the battalion aid station which was already filled to overflowing.

On the afternoon of 15 February Company B was relieved and moved to Wallendorf where the men received their first hot meal and clean clothing in 8 days. The 1st Platoon of Company B which had numbered 39 enlisted men and 1 officer at the outset of this operation now was made up of 12 enlisted men and 1 officer. Of the 27 casualties approximately 50 per cent were the result of enemy action and the remaining one-half were due to exposure.

By 12 February all 3 battalions of the 319th Infantry had succeeded in crossing the Our, and on that day the 3rd Battalion passed through the 1st Battalion and attacked northeast from Wallendorf. (24) The bridgehead was secured and the regiment continued to advance into Germany.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The crossing of the Our River into the Siegfried Line on the night of 6-7 February 1945, involved three distinct and difficult military operations, namely: a night attack, a river crossing, and an attack on a fortified position. It is my opinion that two days is insufficient time to plan and prepare for such an action. More time should have been allowed to permit a thorough reconnaissance and detailed planning to include, waterproofing of all communication equipment, main and alternate plans of attack, and means of re-supply across the river with due consideration to accomplishing the latter by air, if necessary. To cross a unit over a flood-swollen river into an enemy fortified position such as the Siegfried Line, when it is within the enemies capabilities to neutralize that river for further crossing and so isolate that unit, is to put it in much the same position as troops who might have parachuted into the enemy lines. Prompt re-supply and contact with friendly forces are the decisive factors in both cases.

From the enemy standpoint, his failure to launch a forceful counterattack during the first few days of this operation is the main reason for his defeat in this particular area. It is my belief that an aggressive and well-planned attack on the 1st Battalion, 319th Infantry, during the first three or four days of this action would have completely annihilated it due to the short supply of ammunition and the physical condition of the troops. The Germans, instead, attempted to accomplish this by fire alone.

The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company B should have insured that each of his men was familiar with all details of the fire support plan and so have helped to preclude the general rout which occurred on Hill X just prior to the actual crossing.

It will be recalled that in the attack on the morning of 9 February by Companies B and C, a group of enemy delivered small arms fire into the left flank of the column. The platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company B ordered some of his men to return this fire which was the only course of action open at the instant. When the company commander ordered this fire lifted, he should have directed others to return this fire and so neutralize the position.

Closer contact should have been maintained between the command post of Company B and its platoons regardless of who took the initiative in establishing it. This would have afforded more time for planning the attack on Ridge B of Hill Y. The cost of this attack might have been materially reduced by a well organized operation which would have provided for a methodical clearing of the area pill box by pill box. In the end this is actually what happened.

The circumstances of the attack on Ridge B, as it was actually executed, coupled with the maintenance of the position for the succeeding two days under heavy enemy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire and adverse weather conditions, can only indicate that the unit which accomplished it was a well-trained, well-disciplined organization with a high degree of esprit de corps.

LESSONS

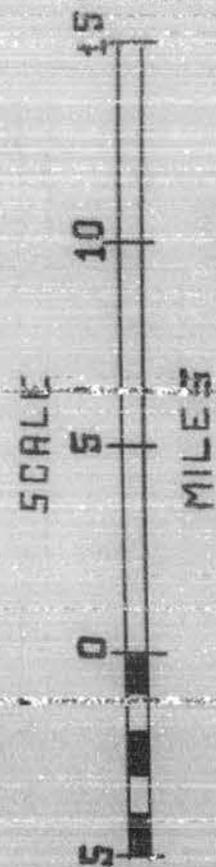
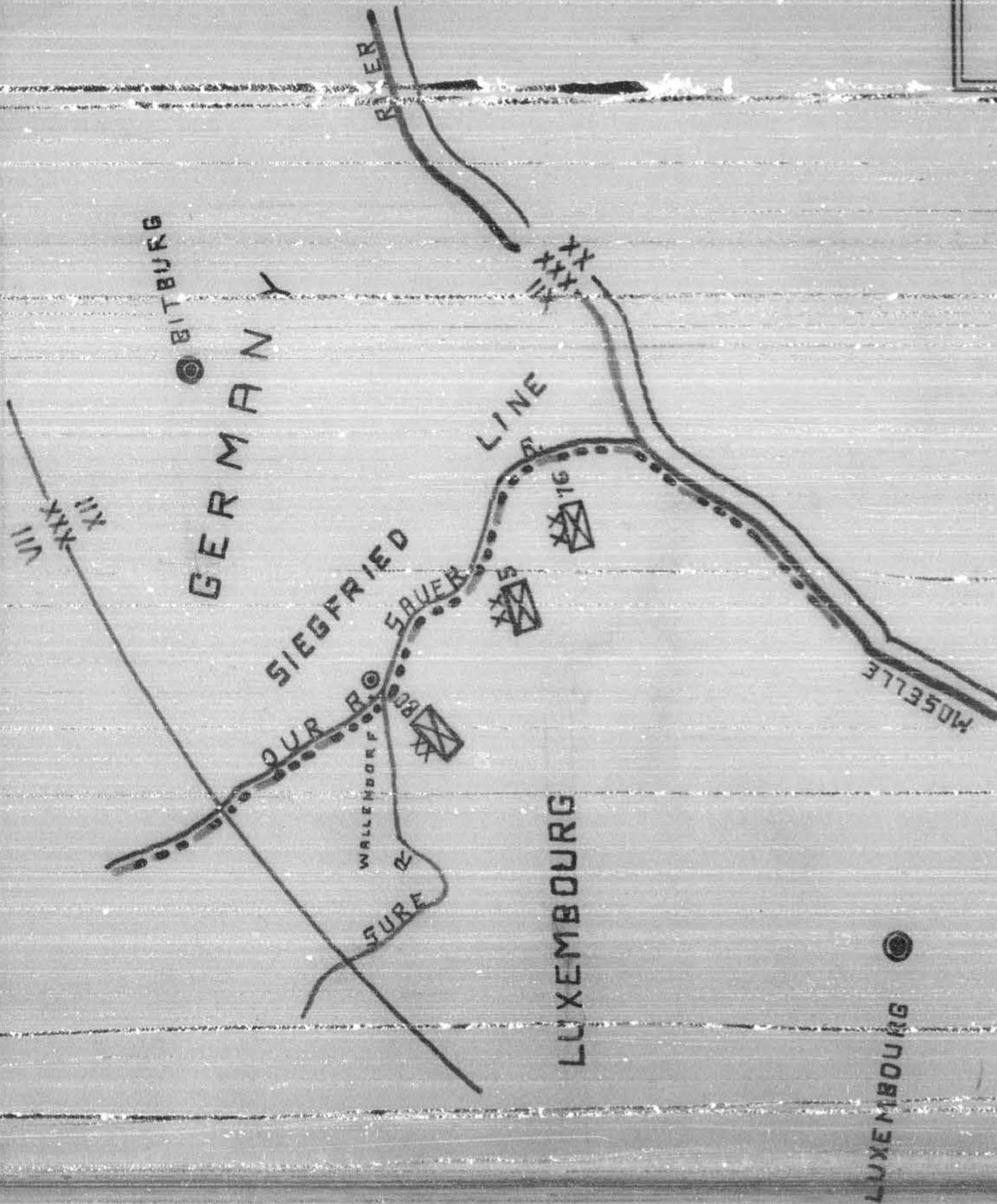
Some lessons brought out by this operation are:

- made* 1. A river crossing into an enemy fortified area at night requires much prior planning and preparation on the part of all concerned.
- ~~2. Every effort should be made to thoroughly brief~~
each participant in an attack in which overhead supporting fire is to be used.
3. In a frontal attack on an enemy fortified area all available weapons should fire on the enemy position regardless of whether he is visible.
4. In a difficult operation, both subordinate and higher commanders should strive to maintain close liaison.
5. If an attack is to pass through enemy occupied positions, attacking personnel should keep moving in order to present a poor target to the enemy.
6. Small units such as platoons and companies in attacking a fortified area, should clear that area of enemy as they advance.
- and* 7. In a river crossing operation, adequate preparation requires more than the usual number of medical personnel and supplies.
8. A mobile counterattacking force is a prerequisite for the successful defense of a river line against a determined enemy.

MAP I

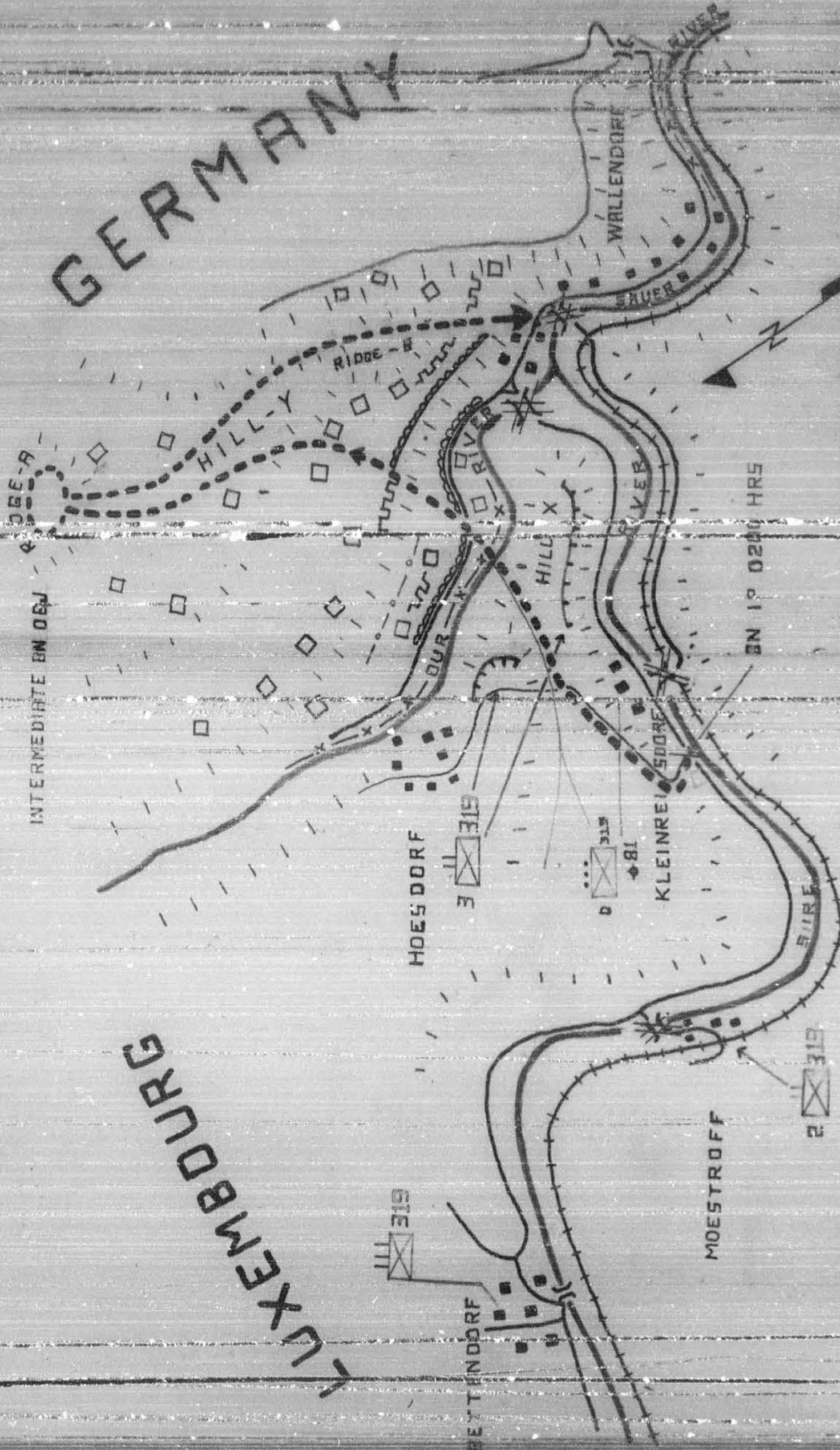
XII CORPS

7 FEB 45



GERMANY

LUXEMBOURG



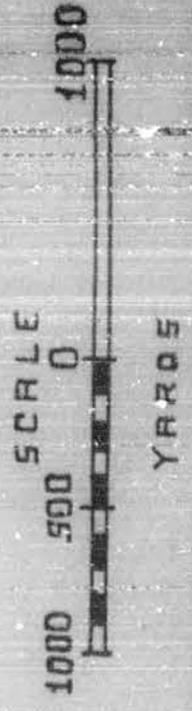
MAP II

LOCATION OF BNS - 319TH INF AND
 PLANNED ROUTE OF ATTACK
 7 FEB 45

INTERMEDIATE BN OBJ

BN 1P 020 HRS

NOTE: LOCATION DEFENSES
 APPROXIMATE ONLY



LEGEND

- PILLBOX --- O
- MINFIELD --- - - - -
- BARBED WIRE --- - x - -
- LINE TRENCH --- - - - -
- RETAINING WALL --- - - - -

