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OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 327TH GLIDER
INFANTRY (101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN
THE DEFENSE OF BASTOGNE, BELGIUM
20 - 26 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Commander)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN THE DEFENSE

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 2

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OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 327TH GLIDER
INFANTRY REGIMENT (101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION)
IN THE DEFENSE OF BASTOGNE, BELGIUM
20 - 26 DECEMBER 1944
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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this monograph is Operations of the 2d Battalion 327th Glider Infantry; 101st Airborne Division in the defense of the key city of Bastogne, Belgium. Here the 101st Airborne Division, Combat Command B, 10th Armored Division and other smaller attached units were encircled by eight German Divisions in the counter-offensive launched against the First U.S. Army, 16 December 1944. (1)

Conditions in mid December made it necessary from the German view to launch this counter-blow, in order to forestall the Allied plans to mount a final operation aimed at the heart of Germany. This offensive power fell mainly on the VIII U.S. Corps, which was holding a front of 88 miles along the eastern boundary of Belgium and Luxembourg, running generally parallel to the Siegfried Line. This sector had been quiet since the middle of September and was used as a refitting area for battle-weary troops, and for orientation of newly arrived divisions. (2)

Von Rundstedt had picked this same Ardennes area in 1940 to smash through to France and knew that the country, though hilly and wooded contained a good road net, and that with cold dry conditions would favor rapid movement of armor across

(1) A-9; (2) A-4, p. 39; A-1, p. 1

country. He also knew that this sector was lightly held and would offer the most chance of success of any section of the long Allied front. (3)

VIII Corps units holding this extended front were the 4th, 28th, and 106th Infantry Divisions, 14th Cavalry Group and the 9th Armored Division less Combat Command B. The 9th Armored Division units were mainly attached to the Divisions. When the German attack commenced 16 December 1944 it was successful in its initial stages against the VIII Corps, due to the strength of the attack and also due to lack of a sizeable reserve in the area. After the thin crust of the VIII Corps was broken the situation became fluid and German spearheads were rapidly splitting the American First Army. These spearheads seemed to be aimed at Liege. (4)

Although the exact situation was vague, at 1100 hours 17 December 1944, SHAEF ordered the move of its strategic reserves, the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions in the direction of Bastogne, a key communication center in the path of the on-rushing German Army. The orders of the 82d Airborne Division were later changed, in that it would assemble in the vicinity of Werbomont and be attached to V Corps which held the sector to the north of VIII Corps. The 101st Airborne Division would be attached to VIII Corps whose headquarters and service installations were already evacuating Bastogne. (5)

(3) A-4, p. 39; (4) A-1, p. 5; (5) A-3

The 101st Airborne Division was located at its base camp in Mourmelon-le-Grand, near Rheims, France. This Division had just returned from a hard 73 day campaign in Holland, and its members were now preparing for a pleasant Christmas Holiday, with some exploration of Paris as the passes were rotated throughout the command. Replacements had not been received since the Holland operation and there were many vacancies in the ranks. Equipment was in Ordnance for repair and on unfilled requisitions because at this time the priority of supply for this unit was very low. A period of training and reequipping had been instituted as preparation for future airborne operations, probably this time in Germany itself.

(6)

The 327th Glider Infantry was alerted at about 0200 hours 18 December and told to be ready to move at 1200 hours, or as soon thereafter as trucks became available. A hectic half-day followed during which orders for the move were issued, equipment drawn, and ammunition distributed and loaded. Some items of individual equipment were not available as well as some organic vehicles, some officers and men were on pass, and it was certainly an incomplete combat unit that ~~was ready~~ to move to the scene of battle. Transportation for the move did not become available until about 1600 hours that afternoon and it was dark when the convoy left Camp Mourmelon. The vehicles were ten-ton semi-trailer trucks used by the base

(6) A-2

sections for supply, that had been rerouted, many of them while on supply missions, to provide transportation for this movement of troops. (7)

The 327th Combat Team, (the 463rd Parachute Field Artillery Battalion being the other member) was the last unit of the division to leave Camp Mourmelon. Driving was difficult throughout the night due to fog and early the next morning, 19 December, as the serials approached Bastogne traffic jams developed which caused long delays. The primary causes of most of the traffic trouble were the vehicles of the corps installations moving to the rear and the turning of the large trucks into assembly areas of the 101st Airborne Division. (8)

The assembly area for the 327th Glider Infantry was initially near Flamierge. (Map A) This area was reached about 0900 and a defense of this area planned. The regiment moved about 1600 hours into a more compact assembly area near Mande St. Etienne. The situation was not clear to members of the regiment at this time, but from this assembly area the battalions would move to match their skills with the enemy. (9)

In discussing the actions of the 2d Battalion of the 327th in the narrative of this monograph no attempt is made to keep the reader oriented as to the actions of the rest of the regiment since, each battalion was given a defensive sector and the other battalions' actions were not related to those

(7) Personal knowledge; (8) A-1, p. 19; (9) Personal knowledge

of the 2d Battalion. The units adjacent to the 2d Battalion were not members of the regiment although they did come under the command of the regimental commander after 24 December. (10)

ORGANIZATION

At the time with which we are concerned in this monograph the glider infantry battalion was organized into three rifle companies and a battalion headquarters and headquarters company. Each rifle company consisted of two rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. The rifle platoons, had three 12 man squads and a 60-mm mortar squad. The weapons platoon had two sections, one of two light machine guns, and one of two 60-mm mortars.

Battalion headquarters company had a supply and pioneer section, a squad of intelligence scouts and two weapons platoons. One platoon of four heavy machine guns, and one of six 81-mm mortars. Four 37-mm antitank guns from regimental headquarters company was the normal attachment to a battalion.

Officers of the 2d Battalion 327th Glider Infantry as follows:

Battalion Commander	Lt. Col. Roy Inman
Executive Officer	Maj. Robert B. Galbreath
S-1 & Headquarters Co. CO	Capt. Saul Madansky
S-2	Lt. Thomas Niland

(10) A-1, p. 131

S-3	Capt. Ellie Ganier
CO Company E	Capt. Robert Lemon
CO Company F	Capt. James F. Adams
CO Company G	Capt. R. Hugh Evans (11)

Another unit to which I shall refer as Team O'Hara, is a group from Combat Command B, 10th Armored Division, organization as follows:

Commanding Officer: Lt. Col. James O'Hara, (also commanding officer of 54th Armored Infantry Battalion)

54th Armored Infantry Battalion (less Companies A and C)

Company C, 1st Tank Battalion

One platoon, Company C, 55th Armored Armored Engineer Battalion

One platoon, Company D, 3d Tank Battalion (light tanks)

One platoon, Troop D, 90th Reconnaissance Squadron (12)

Other units mentioned in the narrative are elements of the 101st Airborne Division.

2D BATTALION IS COMMITTED

By dark 19 December the 2d Battalion had closed into its assembly area in the vicinity of Mande St Etienne. The situation at this time was no clearer to members of the battalion that it had been in Mourmelon, the base camp, except that it

(11) Personal knowledge; (12) A-1, p. xiii

was known that the 501st Parachute Infantry had moved to the east of Bastogne and was already heavily engaged with the enemy. This action had actually developed as a meeting engagement with the 501st moving out of Bastogne to the east to develop the situation. The two other parachute regiments of the division were taking up positions to defend Bastogne from the northeast and north. (13)

At 0400 hours 20 December 1944 the 2d Battalion, was ordered to move immediately to Marvie (Map A) and relieve Company A, 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion. This company was outposting the area to the southeast of Bastogne and to the west of Team O'Hara which had established a road block on the Wiltz Road, on the south flank of the 501st Parachute Infantry. (14)

The battalion commander, S-2, and S-3 started immediately for Marvie and contact with the engineers in this area, leaving the executive officer to move the battalion, on foot, as rapidly as possible. The fog was thick by this time and it was difficult to find the road out of Bastogne which it was necessary to pass through. Sentries at the street intersections in the city were of no help, and due to rumors of Germans in American uniforms, were ready to shoot if not satisfied with the appearance or reply of a challenge of any approaching party. (15)

Dawn was breaking when the head of the battalion reached Marvie. The battalion commander had not been able to make a

(13) A-1, p. 1-98; (14) A-1, p. 99; (15) Personal knowledge

reconnaissance and even now the fog was so thick that very little could be seen although it was getting light. (16)

The plan for the defense was of necessity made on the map. With the aid of the engineers who had seen the ground the area was broken down and assignments made to the companies for defense. Guides furnished by the engineers enabled the units to move rapidly to their assigned areas and organization began. (Map B) (17)

It was necessary to commit the entire battalion to the main line of resistance, except for one platoon, since the area assigned for defense now included not only the defense of Marvie but to the west to include the Bastogne-Arlon road, a front of over 2500 yards with fields of fire of from good to poor. Since the glider battalion had only six rifle platoons this was an extremely large order. G Company was given the narrowest frontage in the center of the battalion so that one platoon could be held in reserve north of Marvie. There was little information available on which to make any estimate of the situation, and the engineers had informed the battalion commander that there had been no enemy activity so far in this area. (18)

The fog had lifted somewhat by about 0800 and it was possible to see the area. Marvie was a small village of possibly 100 inhabitants, who farmed the adjacent countryside.

(16) Personal knowledge; (17) A-5, p. 8;

(18) Personal knowledge

A small stream divided the town, and the streets to the north and south rose rather sharply from the creek bottom. The southern end of the street was almost on the top of a hill which afforded observation down the valley which turned to the east and along which ran the road to Wiltz. This hill also afforded good observation across the valley to the south for about 500 yards to the high ground, which was thickly wooded. Team O'Hara's position was on equally high ground east of Marvie. The ground to the west was high and after rising sharply from the stream on the south leveled along a flat ridge running north to Bastogne. The south end of the ridge was thickly wooded to the east of the Arlon Highway.

F Company was given the mission of protecting the west flank of the battalion, this wide ridge and the Arlon Highway. One platoon of G Company to defend the hill in the center, which for convenience we will call Hill 500, also the south of Marvie. E Company to defend Marvie from the fields to the southeast and also to make coordination with Team O'Hara.

(Map B)

The reconnaissance of all company officers was hastily made and the battalion began to dig its fox holes and make more concrete plans for the defense. The battalion commander was making a reconnaissance of his own in order to adjust or change the plan. He had talked with the regimental commander and Colonel O'Hara and was beginning to understand part of the situation. However he was wounded before he could impart

much of this information to the battalion staff. (19)

At about 1115 hours 20 December Marvie became the target for fire from enemy self-propelled weapons located in the woods on the high ground to the south. This shelling was neither concentrated nor heavy and did not serve as a "tip off" of immediate attack. The front lines were not bothered by this fire since they were about two hundred yards from the edge of the town and apparently had not been picked up by the enemy. Only local security had been sent out in front of the men digging in the position. (20)

About 1125 hours four enemy tanks and six half-tracks came out of these woods and proceeded along the narrow farm road between the fields heading for Marvie. They apparently did not know that infantry was in the town and were after four light tanks of Team O'Hara that had been screening this area from Hill 500. The light tank commander asked and received permission to withdraw from Colonel O'Hara, and only their speed saved them from being fired on by the infantry since everyone had been alerted that the Germans were using some American tanks, and at this time very few men knew that these tankers were actually on the position of the 2d Battalion. (21)

Two of Team O'Hara's medium tanks were located on his right flank covering the area to the south of Marvie and when the German armor presented its flank the two mediums opened

(19) Personal knowledge; (20) Personal knowledge;

(21) A-1, p. 101

up. They quickly knocked out two Mark IV's and a half-track. The riflemen of E Company knocked out one Mark IV with a rocket launcher and the half-tracks made a dash for Marvie where the infantry jumped out taking refuge in buildings. The half-tracks turned and tried to run back to the woods from which they had come, but not without the loss of at least one more on the way back. Some sharp infantry fighting followed this attack, but the infantry was repulsed and twenty enemy of the Panzer Lehr Division had been captured inside the town. These infantrymen were the ones that had jumped from the half-tracks inside Marvie. The majority were captured by one messenger on his way to the 2d Battalion Command Post also in Marvie. (22)

The battalion commander and the G Company commander were wounded during this brief encounter, ^{and} about twenty-five men had been killed or wounded. These wounded were the last to reach evacuation hospitals before the division was entirely encircled. (23)

The problem confronting the battalion now was continued development of the defensive position, adjusting the positions of weapons and finishing the fox hole digging which was interrupted earlier. Supply of ammunition, bed rolls and equipment which had not been moved from the assembly area at Mande St Etienne, was slowly being moved in a 3/4 ton weapons carrier belonging to the supply section. The kitchen and baggage trucks

(22) Personal knowledge; A-1, p. 101; (23) Personal knowledge

had been withdrawn by the Regimental S-4, to send out to army dumps for ammunition and rations. These trucks made one trip before the roads were completely cut to the rear. The last road out of Bastogne was cut the night of 20 December 1944. (24)

THE ULTIMATUM

The weather changed during the night of 20 December from wet and muddy to freezing cold; during the night it began to snow. The hard ground made cross country movement of armor possible. During the next few days there was to be much suffering from the cold and not only the inconvenience and fatigue of fighting in the snow were to harrass the American troops but the distinct tactical advantage would accrue to the enemy due to his white camouflage suits which were warm and allowed free movement of the body. (25)

The battalion S-4 had been unable to move all of the individual rolls from Mande St Etienne prior to the enemy's intervention in that area and as a result part of G Company and all of F Company were to be without overshoes, and blankets for the next few days. Although higher commanders had expected the 101st Airborne Division to be surrounded at Bastogne no indications of this had been made to the 2d Battalion, otherwise more effort would have been put forth to move these supplies more rapidly. (26)

21 December was marked by little enemy activity although

(24) Personal knowledge; Statement of Maj. Paul Mize, S-4, 327th, made 22 Feb. 1948; A-1, p. 106-7;

(25) A-1, p. 106 and personal knowledge; (26) A-1, p. 107

pressure and some patrolling was felt by the 2d Battalion. K rations were supplemented by potatoes and hams found in Marvie. Fire units from field ranges were used in the company areas in an effort to provide some facilities for hot food and water. Plans were made to bring a few men at a time into houses to warm themselves and dry out their shoes and clothing. Clean or dry socks became a rarity and although all commanders tried to prevent frozen feet and trench foot some cases developed later. However the men withstood a tremendous amount of cold and pain with very little complaint.

The right flank of the battalion was given additional strength by attaching the platoon of G Company which had been held in reserve, to F Company in order to protect the right flank of the battalion. The 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion was covering part of a gap which extended to the northwest, neither they nor the 2d Battalion had sufficient troops to close it. Good firm contact was never made here although the ground was open and during the day could be covered by fire, at night some contact patrolling was possible though difficult through the snow drifts. The battalion reserve now consisted of administrative and supply personnel. (26)

22 December began uneventfully, but about 1100 hours F Company reported enemy massing for attack against its right flank, along the Arlon Highway. The terrain in this area formed a sort of bowl with F Company on the upper slopes.

(26) A-1, p. 119; personal knowledge

One house made a strong fort along the road protected by automatic weapons in front and flanks. This house was built on the hillside overlooking the bowl and the extremely thick brick walls of the basement, which was a cow barn having about a dozen cows was not only warm but as strong as a small fort. A fifty caliber machine gun, and a light machine gun here kept the enemy at bay for six days even though he continually subjected it to direct fire from self-propelled guns. The cows stayed right here during the whole battle, were fed and watered by the combat soldiers and in turn kept the barn very warm and comfortable. (27)

This strong point was supported by three medium tanks from Team O'Hara and an armored infantry 81-mm mortar as well as a section of 81-mm mortars of the 2d Battalion. The tanks were deployed in depth on the position, it being impossible to find firing positions on the forward slopes from which the tanks would have sufficient protection from direct fire. From their position in rear they could take care of enemy armor that might overrun the front lines and could also fire to the right of the battalion in the event any envelopment of this flank should be attempted.

This then was the position ^{at 10:00} F Company ~~had just~~ reported the enemy was getting ready to attack. After a short exchange of fire a large white flag was seen coming up the road from Remoifosse. There were four men with it. The F Company men

(27) A-1, p. 117

thought this group was coming in to surrender and informed battalion of it. However these men including a German Major and Captain had brought a letter addressed to the American Commander at Bastogne requesting surrender of all American troops, threatening annihilation if the terms were refused. The Commanding General's answer to this was simply "Nuts" and the German officers arrogantly returned to their own lines.

(28)

During the lull provided by the truce awaiting the Commanding General's answer to this surrender ultimatum, men of the 2d Battalion had cleaned up, redistributed ammunition and now, with an answer as infuriating as "Nuts" might prove to be, tightened their belts and waited for a fanatic attack. It was felt that the Germans would certainly retaliate in this area, and soon.

The area of most concern was the left of the F Company position. This was perhaps the most vulnerable spot in the whole area because the woods were dense and the line was pushed forward close to the creek bottom to gain slightly better fields of fire. The riflemen were spread thinly through these woods and had only their Browning Automatic Rifles for automatic support. However since the Germans had so far been road bound and unwilling to leave the support of their armor it was felt that the adjustment of strength to improve this condition would make other areas already under pressure too vulnerable to risk.

(28) A-5, p. 20

The remainder of 22 December was quiet although F Company did receive uncoordinated attacks by small units from the direction of Remoifosse. The expected attack did not develop until it was nearly dark 23 December and then it developed with a fury into a battle that lasted most of the night. (29)

THE CRITICAL PERIOD 23-24 DECEMBER

Interrogation of Lt. General Fritz Hermann Bayerlein, Commanding General of the Panzer Lehr Division and Major General Heinz Kokott, Commanding General of the 26th Volksgrenadier Division of the German Army, by Colonel S.L.A. Marshall, Historian of European Theater of Operations brought out the fact that General Kokott was then, 23 December, in command of the forces attacking Bastogne and that on Corps order the attack was launched the night of 23 December against the southern perimeter of the Bastogne defenses by the 26th Volksgrenadier Division and the 901st Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the Panzer Lehr Division attached. The 901st was the unit to attack in the area of the 2d Battalion. (30)

The German attack on Marvie started about 1725 and was preceded by a heavy shelling from both artillery and self-propelled guns. The Germans clothed in snow suits worked in close to Hill 500 during the preparation and when the artillery lifted, assaulted, still covered by well planned supporting fires. It was nearly dark and doubtful if Team O'Hara's tanks could see

(29) A-5, p. 21; (30) A-1, p. 174, 197

the self-propelled guns, but they were busy in their own area so that very little fire support was obtained from this direction.

The 101st Airborne Division Artillery was feeling the pinch of the ammunition shortage, being down at times to ten rounds per gun. Although a small resupply had been dropped by parachute on 23 December, the supporting artillery could only be fired at definite and profitable targets. The Commanding General was forced to instruct the Division Artillery: "If you see 400 Germans in a 100-yard area, and they have their heads up, you can fire artillery at them - but not more than two rounds." (31)

The attackers initially concentrated on Hill 500 where the weight of their supporting fires had been massed. It appeared that this part of the German attack had been well planned and executed. The supporting weapons were well sighted and the small infantry teams worked in on all sides of the G Company defenders, splitting them at several points. After about one hour of bitter fighting here, Hill 500 was in German hands, including most of the defenders who had held their positions as long as possible and attempted to maintain the position at all cost.

One incident worthy of special mention here, since it accidentally played an important role in the defense of Marvie, occurred just as the German attack got underway. During the day Colonel O'Hara had agreed to place a towed 57-mm gun on Hill 500 since it offered excellent fields of fire, and since the 37-mm antitank guns of the infantry battalion were not

(31) A-1, p. 134, 137

proving capable of covering much of the area. This gun was going into position when the German attack started and being still attached to the half-track the driver started rapidly for the rear. However, by the time he had crossed the stream in the center of Marvie, the infantry mistaking the identity of the vehicle and remembering the previous entrance of half-tracks into Marvie, opened up with everything they had, knocking out the half-track. This tragic mistake perhaps saved Marvie later that night since the half-track partially blocked the street, forcing any vehicles passing to move against the stone fences on the other side of the road.

A few men escaped from Hill 500 but the majority were killed or captured. Lt. Morrison, the platoon leader on the hill, said after he was released from his German captors at the end of the war, that the artillery fire placed on the forward slopes of Hill 500 while he was being evacuated as a prisoner was very effective. The artillery had not been able to fire often but when it did the massed fires of the Division Artillery were used.

By about 2030 hours F Company was asking for help from Battalion Headquarters, due mainly to the fall of Hill 500. F Company was heavily engaged all along its front and the left of its position was insecure due to the weakness of the defense in the woods and the now open left flank. The left of the F Company line was overrun at about 2100 hours and the enemy had penetrated to the F Company Command Post which put up a brief defense with hand grenades and withdrew to the vicinity of the

three tanks backing up the platoon astride the Arlon Highway. The F Company Commander organized what men he could get together, into a defensive line, defending toward the woods that had just been taken by the Germans. (32)

The seriousness of the situation in the 2d Battalion area resulted in the formation of a force of about forty men from A Company, 501st Parachute Infantry, being sent to aid Company F. This force, in addition to Company F, was placed under the command of the Executive Officer, 327th Glider Infantry, since control of the 2d Battalion sector was so difficult from one location. (33)

By combining the small force from the 501st Parachute Infantry with the few men of Company F who had managed to make their way from the woods, a block was formed limiting this part of the penetration. (Map C) Two batteries, D and E, of the 81st Antiaircraft Battalion (armed with 50 caliber machine guns) were attached to the 327th Glider Infantry at this time and these were placed in position southeast of Bastogne around the head of the stream running through Marvie. They also prolonged the second defensive line set up in the F Company sector and had good fields of fire extending to Marvie, thus giving some depth to the position. These adjustments, if no further penetrations were made prior to daylight, would make it unhealthy for the Germans to move closer to Bastogne. There was no cover in this bowl and the commanding ground around it was occupied by American troops except for Hill 500.

In the F Company Area the German attack continued throughout the night, but instead of trying to exploit their breakthrough

(32) A-5, p. 26; (33) A-1, p. 127, Personal knowledge

the enemy concentrated on the strong position held by the platoon astride the Arlon Road. This platoon fought heroically, fighting off tanks and infantry with only their own weapons.

At Marvie the situation was also critical. The enemy was working slowly and methodically from house to house, infantry supported by tanks. The tanks would fire phosphorous shells into a house and after it had thoroughly burned the infantry would ~~advance~~ ^{move} another building. Their advance was slow and at 2400 hours the enemy was still held south of the stream and the E Company lines were firm.

Several houses in Marvie were burning and the light of these fires was proving of distinct advantage to the defenders, who from the shadows within and under buildings and stone fences, were able to see the enemy while the fires partially blinded him.

At about 2400 hours Team O'Hara had dispatched two tanks to Marvie to aid in stopping the German armor. The rocket launchers had been very ineffective up to this time, since the enemy tanks were cautious and well protected by infantrymen.

The plan for the employment of the tanks was based on the fact that the enemy armor could only cross the stream at one point, this being the one street in Marvie having a bridge over the small stream. The banks were too steep for armor to ford the stream elsewhere, especially at night. The two tanks were placed behind buildings so they could cover the area of the bridge and that street (Map C) but not be seen by enemy armor on Hill 500 or immediately across the stream to the south. It was estimated that there were six German tanks in the area

and the two American tanks could only survive by picking good positions. Infantry protection was provided for these tanks.

Disruption
The tanks did not have long to wait until a Mark IV came charging across the bridge and was forced to slow at the knocked out half-track previously mentioned. One American tank fired and knocked out this enemy tank, totally blocking the street. The gun of the other American tank jammed and it returned to O'Hara's position. However, the one tank continued to render valuable assistance and before dawn the enemy had retired, failing to exploit his gains.

Although the German attack of 23-24 December against the 2d Battalion had been well coordinated and well planned, it was the only attack against the surrounded division that night of any consequence. This enabled the supporting artillery to mass its fires at critical times and even though the ammunition supply was low, the heavy massed fires when delivered made the Germans believe that the artillery was well supplied. (34)

Now the enemy was to make another mistake by shifting his attacks to the forces defending Bastogne from the north and west who were fresh and waiting anxiously instead of continuing the attack against a greatly weakened position such as the 2d Battalion was now holding. Or with the troops at the enemy's disposal he could have attacked from several points at once, thus dividing the artillery effort and taking advantage of the lack of reserves.

(34) A-1, p. 195

RELIEF

In most respects this brief story is complete in detailing in a general way the actions of the 2d Battalion on this position near Marvie. This is due to the fact that the remainder of the time spent in these positions was relatively quiet. 24, 25 and 26 December ~~were~~^{are} spent in watchful waiting. Some enemy pressure was maintained especially against F Company, but in comparison to the previous period it was light. Air power made itself felt during this period, as the skies had cleared and the enemy was not able to display his armor and vehicles so freely.

The American Air Force did attack Marvie twice during this period. The reason for this might have been the German vehicles that were knocked out in the area. Panels were nevertheless displayed very prominently.

The sounds of battle from the south were also getting closer all the time, and on the evening of 26 December the first tanks of the 4th Armored Division broke into the perimeter of the 101st Airborne Division, to the west of the F Company position.

Although the 2d Battalion was not relieved from its positions until the night of 29 December, the enemy was now too busy in this area taking care of his flanks and rear to mount any more coordinated attacks, and the local patrolling and exchange of fire hardly marks itself as an incident. Air resupply had been coming in and the defenders were becoming stronger all the time.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In the analysis and criticism of this operation there appear to be many lines and forms a discussion might take. Let us first look at this operation from the effects certain outside influences had on the actions.

Normally an airborne unit is thoroughly briefed before an operation and learns to expect considerable information of friendly and enemy units before it is committed to action. In this action we see a battalion committed to a position knowing practically nothing of the situation, and originally only vague ideas as to the mission. The organization of this position was undertaken without sufficient protection from the front and it was probably luck that the results were not more serious. Had the German attack of 20 December been in more force and made with more coordination, it might well have been successful.

While the unit was at its base camp, although it was naturally in strategic reserve by just being in the theater of operations, it was by no means immediately ready for combat. Weapons and equipment needed replacing, but the priority for supply was so low that nothing could be done to bring the supply situation up to combat standard. The basic load of ammunition was on hand which is about all that can be said of the unit's readiness for action.

The size of the area assigned the 2d Battalion for defense was obviously more than it could handle in the face of a well supported and aggressive enemy. However, no specific criticism

can be leveled against anyone on this score since other battalions were assigned areas just as large and reserves throughout the entire division area were very small. The perimeter of the defensive position had to be pushed out far enough to give the artillery room, to gain dispersion of all the installations in Bastogne, and to keep observed artillery fire off of Bastogne. This caused overextension of the front line units. However, all this certainly brings out the point of what happens when adequate supports and reserves do not exist. The tools that the 2d Battalion Commander had to influence the action amounted to the supporting fires, and these had to be used very sparingly due to the ammunition shortage.

Another outside influence - the tables of organization for the glider infantry rifle company with two rifle platoons. This organization does not fit well the standard employment of units as advocated and practiced by the American Army, and too often areas of responsibility are assigned without regard to the capability of a specially organized unit, but rather with the capability of a unit with a standard organization.

The distinct advantage enjoyed by the enemy due to his being equipped with snow suits enabled him to move with greater ease than could the American soldiers dressed in their dark clothing. The enemy made good advantage of this in the attack of 23 December. In addition to the advantage of the snow suits, the disadvantage of not having them was greater. Dark army uniforms make good targets on snow-covered ground.

Keeping warm was as great a job as defending against the

enemy. The loss of overshoes and blankets from the battalion supply dump was hard to excuse. With the transportation available they could not be moved rapidly, but they could have been carried by the soldier on the march to Marvie. Commanders in this unit had found that overloaded soldiers are apt to lose a lot of equipment, and to prevent this possibility the plan was to haul the bedrolls.

The failure of the Germans to realize that their initial attack of 23 December had been successful and to exploit the breakthrough rapidly and vigorously clearly shows that an attacker must be prepared to take advantage of any weakness uncovered or caused by his action and not to become so engrossed in the enemy strength that the weakness remains unexploited. Had a large German force moved through this breach in the 2d Battalion, the battle might have taken on a different complexion.

Another comment on the German attacks is appropriate since, although the attack on the 2d Battalion was in force, it was not in force comparable with the forces available to the German Commander, and it was on a comparatively narrow front considering that this perimeter of the 101st Airborne Division could have been attacked from several points at one time. This piecemeal form of attack the enemy used allowed the concentration of artillery on his point of attack and kept the Germans from finding that there was a critical shortage of artillery ammunition since when the artillery fired it was done in mass and volume.

This battle was essentially one of squad and platoons.

The company and battalion commanders had put the units in position, tried to aid them with what facilities they had, but when the enemy came up to fight it out it was all up to these small unit leaders on the ground. Their mission was to hold at all cost, and the chain of the division perimeter was very little stronger than its weakest squad.

An important criticism to be made of the original organization of the battalion's defensive position is that it was not covered from hostile observation, and the German attack of 20 December was able to gain considerable surprise. I do not believe that in this case it was possible, or at least feasible, to send a covering force out far enough to deny the enemy observation of the position; but some attempt at patrolling or a more general local outpost system should have been developed to provide some warning of enemy activity.

Another comment on the organization of the position. Alternate and supplementary positions for platoons were not developed, nor were plans made for enemy penetrations of the position. Adequate planning for any such eventuality might well have made the position much more secure.

Withdrawal plans were not made and in my opinion should not have been made. There was no place to withdraw, since that would just confine the unit to a more concentrated area and make the whole position that much more vulnerable to artillery or air attack. The mission was certainly to hold the ground at all cost, and each soldier knew this, and acted accordingly.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons that can be pointed out as a result of this experience are:

1. The organization of a defensive position should always be covered from hostile observation. If this is not possible, it must be covered to prevent surprise.
2. To give the defense flexibility, adequate reserves and supports are required.
3. The general doctrine of the defense "to hold the position at all cost" is sound and the American soldier will do all in his power to comply with this concept.
4. Units in defense should prepare supplementary positions for occupancy and make plans to meet any emergency.
5. A night attack with its limited objectives is difficult to exploit immediately.
6. Winter warfare, meaning operations in snow, requires special camouflage measures and clothing.
7. Units in strategic reserve, or any other tactical reserve, must be immediately ready and available for action.
8. Units must not dump supplies in unprotected areas, regardless of whether or not they are considered rear.
9. Piecemeal attack does not uncover defensive weakness to the same extent as a well coordinated attack, and is more expensive of ^{by} men and equipment.