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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "E", 39TH INFANTRY,
(9TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT CHERBOURG, FRANCE,
22 - 27 JUNE 1944.
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY COMPANY
ATTACKING IN A TOWN.

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company "E", 39th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division during the battle for Cherbourg, France in the Normandy Campaign.

In order to bring the reader abreast of the actual situation it is necessary to discuss some of the events leading up to this operation.

After combat operations in Africa and Sicily the 9th Infantry Division moved to England where it received rest and underwent extensive training for the coming operations in Europe. The Division was completely re-equipped and a majority of its hospitalized personnel had returned when it embarked for the coast of France on 7 June 1944. (1)

During this operation Company "E", 39th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division was a part of the VII U. S. Corps, 1st U. S. Army, 21st Allied Army Group. Commanders involved were as follows: (2)

21st Army Group Field Marshal Montgomery
1st U. S. Army Lt General Omar N. Bradley
VII U. S. Corps Maj General Joseph L. Collins
9th Infantry Division Maj General Manton S. Eddy
39th Infantry Regiment. Colonel Harry A. Flynt
2d Bn., 39th Infantry Lt Colonel Frank Gunn

(1) (2) Personal knowledge.

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Co "E", 39th Infantry . . . Captain Preston O. Gordon
1st Platoon, Co "E" . . . 1st Lt Kenneth Hill
2d Platoon, Co "E" . . . 2d Lt Benjamin J. Kiger
3d Platoon, Co "E" . . . 2d Lt William Goodrich
4th Platoon, Co "E" . . . 1st Lt Edward Kuboosh

GENERAL SITUATION

Mission of the 21st Army Group

not necessary

The intention of the 21st Army Group was to assault simultaneously, beaches on the Normandy Coast immediately north of the Carentan estuary and between the Carentan estuary and the river Orne, with the objective of securing as a base for further operations a logement area which was to include airfield sites and the port of Cherbourg. The 21st Army Group was formed by the Eastern Task Force composed of the British Second Army, and the Western Task Force composed of the 1st United States Army. (See Map A)

(3)

Mission of the 1st United States Army

not necessary

The mission of the 1st United States Army was to launch a simultaneous assault on Utah and Omaha Beaches on D-Day and capture all objectives within its zone of action. It was then to advance as rapidly as possible and capture the city of Cherbourg. For this mission the 1st Army had been assigned the V and VII United States Corps, plus the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions. (See Map A) (4)

Mission of the VII Corps

The VII United States Corps was to assault Utah Beach

(3) A-1, p. 19; (4) A-4, p. 102.

on D-Day, capture all objectives in its zone of action, and advance on and capture Cherbourg with the minimum of delay. (5)

Positions of VII Corps Units on 22 June 1944

Landings were made 6 June 1944 on Utah Beach by units of the VII Corps and after much difficulty Corps was in a position to launch a coordinated attack on Cherbourg from the rear. The mission of capturing the port city of Cherbourg was assigned to the 4th, 9th and 79th Infantry Divisions. (See Map B) (6)

4TH INFANTRY DIVISION PLAN OF ATTACK

The 4th Infantry Division on the right had as its primary objective the Tourlaville area, guarding the eastern approaches to the city. (See Map B)

The 22d Infantry on the right had the mission of clearing the coast approaches into Cherbourg, and to capture Digosville, where it was to be pinched out by the 8th Infantry.

The 12th Infantry was the center regiment of the 4th Division and had the primary objective of the division, the Tourlaville area.

The 8th Infantry Regiment to the left of the 12th Infantry had the mission of capturing La-Glacierie where it was to be pinched out by the 79th Infantry Division. (7)

(5) A-4, p. 104; (6) A-3, p. 171; (7) A-3, p. 173.

79TH INFANTRY DIVISION PLAN OF ATTACK

The 79th Infantry Division with a narrow front had as its boundaries the Trotebec River on the right and the La Divette River on the left. (See Map B)

The division plan called for the 313th Infantry on the right to constitute the main effort of the division astride the Cherbourg - Valognes highway.

The 314th Infantry, the center regiment of the division, had the mission of capturing Tallevast, La Mare a Canards, and Fort du Roule.

The 315th Infantry Regiment on the left of the division had the mission of capturing Les Flaques, Hardinvast and Martinvast. (8)

9TH DIVISION PLAN OF ATTACK

The 9th Infantry Division on the left of VII Corps had as its right boundary the La Divette River and as its objectives the Bois-du Mt. du Roc area, Octeville, Equeurdreville and Querqueville. (See Map B)

The 47th Infantry Regiment on the right had as its objectives the capture of Boguenville, Sideville and Bois-du Mt. du Roc area. After the capture of these objectives the regiment was to be prepared to continue in its zone into the heart of Cherbourg. (See Map C)

The 60th Infantry on the left of the 47th Infantry was to attack with battalions echeloned to the left and rear.

(8) A-3, p. 177.

This action was necessary because of the wide frontage of the division, and the enemy situation in that area was not known. (See Map C)

The 39th Infantry had been committed on the Division right flank on orders of the Corps Commander to determine enemy locations east of the La Divette River. This entire action was in the zone of the 315th Infantry, 79th Infantry Division. The 315th Infantry had not been able to keep abreast with the regiments on their right and left.

In the early morning of 22 June 1944 the 39th Infantry received orders to disengage the enemy to its front and move to an assembly area in the vicinity of Vestiville, France. They were to be prepared upon order to pass through the 47th Infantry and continue the attack on Cherbourg.

The 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry was ordered on 23 June 1944 to clear out enemy positions by-passed by the 47th Infantry in the vicinity of Boguenville and to establish a road block to the east.

On 23 June 1944 the 39th Infantry received orders from Division to move to the right and abreast of the 47th Infantry and continue the attack on Cherbourg. (See Map C)

(9)

THE 39TH INFANTRY REGIMENT PLAN

The 39th Infantry Regiment was the right regiment of the division and had as its right boundary the La Divette River and as the left boundary it had inclusive the Vaste-

(9) A-3, p. 179; Personal knowledge.

not on map
ville - Cherbourg highway. The time of the attack was 0800 hours and the line of departure was the road between road junction 148 and 121. Immediate objectives were target areas 16, 17 and 18. (See Map C)

The regiment plan called for the 3d Battalion on the right and the 2d Battalion on the left, astride the Vasteville-Cherbourg highway. It was not anticipated that the 3d Battalion would be able to stay abreast of the 2d Battalion because the left regiment of the 79th Infantry Division had not as yet cleaned out the resistance that had been holding them up. The 1st Battalion had been detached from the regiment and constituted the division reserve. (10)

2D BATTALION PLAN

not on map
The 2d Battalion plan called for F Company on the right and rear to maintain contact with the 3d Battalion on their right. "E" Company was on the left, astride the Vasteville-Cherbourg highway. G Company was to be in reserve and send patrols along all roads leading to the east. (11)

THE ENEMY SITUATION

Targets areas 16, 17 and 18 were known flak positions, thought to be occupied by an Anti-Aircraft Battalion and elements of the German 77th Division. The area of Octeville, St. Sauveur and the city defenses of Cherbourg were to be defended by elements of the 709th, 91st, 77th and 243d German Divisions. General von Schiliben, the German

(10) A-3, p. 182; Personal knowledge; (11) Personal knowledge.

High Commander for the defense of the port had ordered that any man that withdrew from the front would be shot on the spot and that the port city must be held at all cost. (See Map B) (12)

COMPANY "E" ATTACK - 24 JUNE 1944

The attack order was given to the Company Commanders of the 2d Battalion by Lt Colonel Gunn at approximately ^{p-20} 24~~00~~~~00~~ June 1944.

After receiving the order the Company Commander of Company E ordered the cooks to prepare a hot breakfast to be fed at 0600 hours. He then left instructions to have the platoon leaders report to the Company Command Post to receive the attack order. (13)

(not on map.)
This order gave the responsibility of the Vasteville-Cherbourg highway to the 1st Platoon. The 3d Platoon was to be on the right of the company zone and were to maintain contact. The 4th Platoon was to follow the 1st and 3d Platoons at approximately two hundred yards and the 2d Platoon was to follow the 4th Platoon at one hundred yards. Contact initially with the enemy was not expected because it was thought by regiment that elements of the 47th Infantry were to our front, but their exact locations were not known. This created some confusion because the men had no desire to become engaged with friendly troops. (14)

There was no opportunity for the Company Commander or platoon leaders to make a reconnaissance because of the dark-

(12) A-3, p. 148; (13) (14) Personal knowledge.

ness and the shortage of time before the attack. Therefore all reconnaissance was made from maps. (15) *what*

The company crossed the line of departure at 0800 hours with a thought in mind of each individual that perhaps they would spend the night in Cherbourg. During the morning the attack went as expected, no enemy was encountered. The advance was delayed once by some enemy action in the zone of F Company. This delay held the advance up until approximately 1200 hours. (16)

Contact was made with E Company, 47th Infantry at approximately 1300 hours and this information was passed back to the Battalion Commander. (17)

At 1325 hours the platoon leaders of the 1st and 3d Platoons reported enemy movements in the small village about three hundred yards to their front, this was known as immediate objective sixteen. (18)

The 1st and 3d Platoons were halted before being detected by the enemy to allow the mortars and light machine guns to go into a position to support the attack. It was decided, however, that no preliminary fire would ~~fall on~~ *be used* ~~the enemy~~ but an attempt would be made to enter the outskirts of the village before the Germans detected ^{our} ~~their~~ presence. (See Map D) (19)

This plan called for the 3d Platoon to take advantage of a hedgerow and a concrete wall to move to the right of the village and work around to the road on the opposite end of the town to prevent the enemy from withdrawing. The 1st

(15) (16) (17) (18) (19) Personal knowledge.

Platoon was to slip down a deep ditch along the road and gain possession of the first two buildings. The 3d Platoon moved out first, as the distance it had to travel was greater, the 2nd Platoon and light machine guns would occupy a position astride the road leading into the village and support the attack by fire should the 1st and 3rd Platoons need it. (20)

Contact was made with Company E, 47th Infantry who had good fields of fire on the village, they would support the attack upon call. (21)

At 1400 hours the 3rd Platoon reported that they had reached the road and were able to block any attempt of the enemy to withdraw or reinforce his positions. The movement of the 1st Platoon went as expected and by 1415 hours they were in the first houses. By the time the 1st Platoon occupied the houses on the edge of the village the 2nd Platoon began to move through the town completely surprising the Germans. A fire fight broke out but lasted only about fifteen minutes. The 1st and 2nd Platoons by this maneuver had killed five Germans and captured 32 plus all of their equipment. Two Americans were wounded in this action by small arms fire. (22)

After sending the prisoners to Battalion, the Company searched the town and reorganized for their next objective, which was target area 17. The Company advanced rather rapidly for about three hundred yards, No enemy was encountered but a few rounds of enemy artillery and mortar

(20) (21) (22) Personal knowledge.

fire fell about two hundred yards to the rear of the company. (23)

Next in the zone of action would be target area number 17. (See Map D) Although the enemy artillery should have given the troops ^{of Co. F} advance warning that their movement had been detected, they had pushed forward until the scouts were not over one hundred yards in front of the forward platoon. This action gave the German defenders an opportunity, so they held their fires until the 1st Platoon was crossing a hedge row. (24)

As the Germans opened up with Flak guns and machine guns, on the 1st and 3rd Platoons, mortar and artillery began to fall upon the 2nd Platoon. The 2nd Platoon and the machine gun section was ordered to the right flank on a sweeping movement, but were unable to get ~~so~~ further forward than the right of the 3rd Platoon. By this time the 60 mm mortars of the company were in position and had started delivering fires on the German positions. (25)

In the meantime the Battalion Commander had been notified of the situation and fires were being directed on target area number 17 by the 26th Field Artillery Battalion. These friendly fires stopped the enemy mortars and allowed the Company a chance to withdraw their wounded and prepare for the second assault on this position. (26)

During this time the 81 mm mortar platoon of H Company had taken up positions and were delivering fires on target

(23) (24) (25) (26) Personal knowledge.

area number 17. The Battalion Commander had ordered F Company to make contact with the E Company right platoon and assist with the second assault on target area number 17. (27)

By the time the attack was ready to jump off it was dark and allowed greater freedom of movement. With the aid of the fires from the 26th Field Artillery Battalion, the 81 mm mortar platoon of H Company, the 60 mm mortar platoons of Companies E and F, the men were able to close in on target area number 17, and by 2400 hours the position was clear. (28)

During this second assault Company E suffered only two men killed and four wounded. The enemy had lost approximately thirty men killed and over 200 captured. (29)

Upon Corps order the division was halted for the remainder of the night to allow other units to catch up. (30)

The next morning Companies G and F were to lead the assault with Company E following by leaps and bounds. During the day several men from the French Forces of the Interior came into the company area and gave valuable information as to German defensive plans and dispositions. At approximately 251400 June 1944 enemy artillery fires fell on the company position from positions in the right and rear of our present location this was an indication that the enemy pocket in the zone of the 79th Infantry had not been cleared out.

From the company observation post these gun positions were located and this information was passed back to Regiment.

(31)

(27) (28) (29) Personal knowledge; (30) A-3, p. 187;

(31) Personal knowledge.

*reference was the
Company?*

*long
involvement*

On the night of 25 June 1944, Lt. Kuboosh organized a small patrol and led it into the town ^{what town?} to seek information on German road blocks. He returned at 0300 hours with two German prisoners and the desired information. (32)

Something wrong in date
What was Company?

~~ON 25~~ approximately 26 June the Battalion Commander called the Company Commander of Company E to the Battalion Command Post and gave the company the mission of capturing, as its immediate objective, the St. Sauveur area and as the final objective for the company, the city hall. (See Map E) The Company Commander called the platoon leaders together at 0500 hours 25 June 1944 and gave them the company plan of attack. This plan called for the 2nd Platoon to attack astride the Rue President Loubet. The 1st Platoon was to attack down the Rue Gambetta, turn right on Rue Voltaire and join the 2nd Platoon at the junction of the two streets. The 3rd Platoon was to protect the right flank of the company and send a contact patrol down Rue Ednest Renan to Le-Mont-Quentin where they were to contact the 3rd Battalion and return by Rue Berthelot. (See Map F) Upon the junction of the 1st and 2nd Platoon, the 3rd Platoon was to pass through and continue the attack down President Loubet to Notre Dame Church, then on Rue de Gendarmes to Place de La Fontontaine. From there they would use Rue Vielle to the city hall. The 60 mm Mortar section of the Company would support the attack initially from the junction of Rue Delalie and Rue Waldeck and would displace by section in order to support the attack. The light machine guns of the

(32) Personal knowledge.

company would be in support of the 1st Platoon and the section of heavy machine guns from H Company would be in support of the 2nd Platoon. A section of tank destroyers were assigned the mission of giving direct support to the company, but could not join in the attack because the Germans had built concrete obstacles in the streets along the company zone of action. The Engineers were on their way from Regiment and just as soon as the roads had been cleared the tank destroyers would join the company. (33)

*not on map
7700 in Co.*

The terrain along the company area was rolling, but the company occupied a hill that gradually dropped off to the beaches through the heart of the city. On the right was a large valley made by the La Divette River. Generally speaking the ground was of rock. The company was protected from its right flank by the line of buildings along the street. (34)

COMPANY "E" ATTACK - 26 JUNE 1944

reference to I.D.?

The company crossed the line of departure as planned at 26 June 1944. The 1st Platoon made steady progress although they were running into scattered rifle fire coming from within the buildings along their advance. The platoon immediately began to work from house to house cleaning them out as they moved. It was found that the best weapon to use against enemy inside houses was the hand grenade, fired from the adapter on the M-1 rifle. Another extremely good weapon was the 2.36 rocket launcher, but the resupply of this

(33) (34) Personal knowledge.

ammunition was very difficult. (35)

From the very start the going was extremely difficult for the 2nd Platoon. They were receiving a considerable amount of machine gun fire from the valley to their right flank and from their immediate front. They were able to take advantage of the houses to the right for protection against the fires from the valley but it was a matter of clearing each house out, one by one, on their way to the road junction. At times it was necessary for this platoon to blow the walls³ of the house in order to have protection for their movement. (36) (See Map F)

The contact patrol from the 3rd Platoon was immediately taken under machine gun and mortar fire from the valley and after several attempts to flank these German position this patrol was ordered to revert to platoon control. It was decided to leave this valley to the 3rd Battalion as they were moving fast around to our right. Resistance was very stiff in both platoon areas but some how the men were able to advance, moving from door to door and through the houses themselves. (37)

Rain fell throughout the morning causing much difficulty in keeping radio contact with the forward platoon over the SCR 536. It was necessary to have the communications personnel constantly drying out the radios and changing batteries. It was also found that the SCR 536 range was reduced considerably when operating from within a building.

(35) (36) (37) Personal knowledge.

Although the range was effected on the SCR 300 radio, because of the buildings, no trouble was encountered by the rain. At times it was necessary to transmit messages to the two forward platoons by runners. (38)

By 0800 hours the 1st Platoon reported that they had been completely stopped about one block from the corner of Rue President Laubet by machine gun fire coming from their front. The platoon leader reported that he was going to move a squad through the house to the left of the road, and around the back to get a better position to attack this machine gun nest from the rear. They also reported that there were several houses to their front on fire. (39)

The 2nd Platoon had reached a point approximately one hundred yards from the road junction } and was receiving heavy machine gun fire from their front, it had also become necessary to blow holes in several walls to let men pass. One squad had driven a group of German soldiers out of a house into a tunnel on the side of the hill. It was thought that they would be able to force the German soldiers into surrendering in very short order. The 2nd Platoon requested permission to send one of their prisoners into the tunnel and see if they would surrender. The request was approved and the German prisoner went into the cave but he did not return. (40) (See Map F)

The 1st Sergeant brought Major General Manton S. Eddy, Commanding General 9th Infantry Division, and Major General

(38) (39) (40) Personal knowledge.

Cecil R. Moore, Chief Engineer for the European Theater of Operations, forward to the Company Commander. The Company Commander reported and was informed by the Division Commander that he and General Moore were particularly interested in the house to our front and the cave under it. He also made himself clear that he did not want to interfere with the mission of the company. (41)

The 2nd Platoon was still trying to move into a position to fire into the entrance of the first tunnel when they caught a group of German soldiers going into another entrance. The 1st Platoon had met some resistance on their flanking movement but had managed to cross Rue President Laubet and had driven a group of enemy back toward the 1st Platoon. (42)

In about fifteen minutes after the report had reached Regimental Headquarters that the Division Commander was in the company area the entire company was alive with officers. The Regimental Commander and part of his staff and the Battalion Commander and his staff were on hand to add to the confusion that already existed. (43)

Meanwhile the section of tank destroyers had come forward and had been directed to take up positions so that they could fire into the mouth of the tunnels. The enemy had carefully employed machine guns in the mouth of each of each of these tunnels and it was impossible to get a rifleman in a position to deliver accurate fire. After the com-

(41) A-7, p. 1; Personal knowledge; (42) (43) Personal knowledge.

mander of the tank destroyer section reported that he was in position to fire, the men guarding these entrances were withdrawn a few yards and the tank destroyer opened fire. They fired a few rounds in each entrance then the order was given to cease fire. (44)

The Company Commander then directed Private Beuleuh, who spoke fluent German, to move to the side of the tunnel and order the Germans to surrender. He was instructed to tell them that if they did not surrender we would blow the entrances up and leave them there. After Private Beuleuh yelled inside the cave, a German Lieutenant came out carrying a white surrender flag. He was followed in about three minutes by over five hundred German soldiers and sailors, including General Von Schliehen, commander of all forces in the peninsula and Admiral Hennecke in charge of the Port of Cherbourg. (45)

During this period of less than six hours the company had captured over 600 prisoners and had lost only two men killed and seven wounded by German fire. (46)

The German prisoners were formed on the road in columns and the march to the rear began. As for the company it was only on its immediate objective therefore reorganization took place and the company moved out toward its final objective, the City Hall. (47)

The resistance between St. Sauveur and the City Hall consisted mainly of German snipers who were usually taken

(44) Personal knowledge; (45) A-6; Personal knowledge;
(46) A-9; Personal knowledge; (47) Personal knowledge.

care of by the French people themselves. When the need arose, for the company to fire into positions occupied by snipers it was usually done with the 76 mm gun on the tank destroyer, which proved to be very effective for point targets. (48)

The company arrived at the City Hall by approximately 1700 hours and spent the night in the hotel directly across the street. Relief of the company was completed on the afternoon of 27 June 1944, by a unit of the 4th Infantry Division. (49)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation, it is my opinion that an objective as important as the tunnel area, which housed the German Headquarters, should be made known to the attacking unit. The first knowledge that the Commander of Company B had of the extreme importance of this position was upon the surrender of the German General and his staff. This knowledge must have been known to the Division Commander because of his presence in the Company Area with other high ranking officers.

All units must make every effort to keep abreast of the units on either flank. This is necessary to maintain pressure upon the defender and will cause all available men and fire power to be put to the best use.

There was a considerable amount of confusion in the first attack, due to the fact that the location of all units

(48) (49) Personal knowledge.

was not known. Friendly unit locations must be kept up to date at all times to allow freedom of movement and in order to keep from being surprised. If a friendly unit is thought to be in your zone of action, patrols should be used to locate their position before an attack is made.

It is my opinion that members of the French Forces of the Interior should have been used to infiltrate behind the German positions and seize key terrain features. This would have reduced casualties and speeded the capture of the port by at least twenty four hours.

The presence of high ranking officers in a company area causes much confusion. This practice must be kept to a minimum and if it becomes necessary for superior officers to come forward they should bring only those members of their staff necessary to accomplish their mission.

Much credit must go to the 2nd Platoon on their flank-
ing of the first enemy position. The action called for men to crawl on their hands and knees over four hundred yards to get behind the German positions. Had their movement been detected the outcome of this engagement might have proven fatal to this platoon. The enemy on the other hand apparently did not expect an attack and had no local security out. During this attack contact was made with a unit of a different Regiment to effect coordination and supporting fires had the need arisen.

The attack on the enemy cave areas was very aggressive and did not give the enemy time to reorganize once he had started his withdrawal. This action caused a quick surrender

*effort need analysis in
Co. level in needed*

of the German General who had issued the order to hold at all cost, and to shoot on the spot any man found withdrawing.

LESSONS

1. Surprise is important and measures must be taken by all units to gain surprise whenever possible.
2. Communication by radio is difficult in towns.
3. All precautions should be made to protect your radio from rain.
4. Control in town fighting is difficult. *N.B.O.*
5. All important objectives should be known to the unit charged with the responsibility of capturing it.
6. The use of the rifle grenades and the 2.36 rocket launcher against enemy locations in houses is very effective.
7. Once the enemy starts to withdraw, do not give him a chance to reorganize.
8. The night attack against a fortified position enables the attacking unit greater freedom of movement and tends to confuse the defender. *as well as attacks*
9. Supporting Engineers must work hand in hand with the attacking infantry in clearing road blocks and blowing walls to allow the infantry to pass.
10. It is impossible to defend a cave position without anti-tank weapons.
11. Infantry, Engineer, Artillery and tank units must work hand in hand during town operations.