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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION
289TH INFANTRY (75TH INFANTRY DIVISION)
AT GRANDMENIL, BELGIUM
25 DECEMBER 1944 - 7 JANUARY 1945
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of Operation Described: BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 289th Infantry, 75th U. S. Infantry Division, in the vicinity of GRANDMENIL, BELGIUM, 25 December 1944 - 7 January 1945, during the Ardennes Campaign.

A short resume of events leading up to this operation is necessary in order to orient the reader.

The Allied Armies, from the time they had landed on Omaha and Utah Beaches, 6 June 1944, had relentlessly pushed the German Armies back across France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Holland until by 15 December 1944, the line ran generally along the West German border. The Allies were still on the offensive and were heavily committed on both flanks while the center of the line in the rugged Ardennes Sector was being lightly held.⁽¹⁾

The Allied High Command was aware that the German reserves were being concentrated opposite the weakly held Ardennes Sector and that the enemy was capable of a major counter-offensive. However, a counter-offensive by the enemy of any major proportions was not anticipated and the Allied Commanders were relying upon the mobility of the Allied Reserves to cope with any situation that might arise.⁽²⁾

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt launched an all-out attack at dawn, 16 December 1944, nine days prior to the beginning of the operation covered by this monograph. The attack was made by the German Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies against the thinly held Allied line in the Ardennes Sector. The two Panzer Armies quickly overran the weak Allied defenses in that area and sped westward toward the MEUSE RIVER. By 25 December, the German assault had assumed the proportions of a huge bulge penetrating the Allied lines approximately sixty miles in depth and thirty-five miles in width at the base.⁽³⁾(Map A)

(1) A-1, p.70,71. (2) A-1, p.71. (3) A-2, p.103,127

The Panzer Armies within the bulge were frantically trying to crash through the defenses on the North to seize LIEGE, BRUSSELS, and ANTWERP wherein lay the supplies and the centers of communications, the life blood and the brains, of the Allied Armies in the North. (4)

The German threat became so great along the overextended right flank of the First United States Army that units were being committed piecemeal in an effort to halt the enemy assault. Such was the manner in which elements of the 75th U. S. Infantry Division were committed for their first combat action.

GENERAL SITUATION

It became apparent on 24 December 1944, that the VII U. S. Army Corps, to which the 75th Division had been attached, was bearing the brunt of the German assault. The best enemy information available indicated that the Germans were massing their forces for an attempted breakthrough in the GRANDMENIL-MANHAY area which, if accomplished, would allow the 2nd SS Panzer Corps to push through on a good avenue of approach toward LIEGE. To meet this threat, the Commanding General, VII Corps, issued orders to the 3rd Armored Division to establish a strong defensive position with Combat Command A tying in firmly with the 7th Armored Division (XVIII Airborne Corps) near GRANDMENIL on the East and Combat Command R tying in with the 84th Infantry Division on the West near MELREUX. (5) (Map B)

REGIMENTAL SITUATION

The 289th Regimental Combat Team was attached to the 3rd Armored Division 24 December and at 1330 hours initiated a move by foot and motors from PALENCE, BELGIUM to a forward assembly area in the vicinity of BRISCOL, BELGIUM. Midway between PETIT-HAN and BARVAUX, a conglomeration of vehicles from the 3rd Armored Division began a shuttle movement of the marching foot troops. Darkness had closed in before the last elements of the Combat Team had arrived at

(4) A-1, p. 74; (5) A-2, p. 120; A-3, p. 225; A-4, p. 16, 19

FANZEL. The 3rd Battalion occupied an orchard on the edge of town. It was a clear, cold, moonlit night and it was not long until a heavy frost covered the ground. (6)(Map B)

Colonel Douglas B. Smith, Commanding Officer 289th Combat Team, received the Combat Team mission at 2000 hours 24 December from Headquarters, Combat Command A, at HEYD, BELGIUM. In accordance with VII Corps plans to establish a strong defensive line in the 3rd Armored Division area, Combat Command A gave the 289th Combat Team the mission of seizing, organizing, and defending a frontage of approximately 10,000 yards, running South and West from GRANDMENIL to EREZEE. At the time the order was received, Combat Command A had elements holding GRANDMENIL and had a number of road blocks established several thousand yards South of the GRANDMENIL-EREZEE highway. (7)(Map B)

The Regimental plan was for the three battalions to shuttle by motor in the order 3rd Battalion, 2nd Battalion, 1st Battalion, to assembly areas immediately South of the GRANDMENIL-EREZEE highway. The Battalions were to occupy positions as follows: 3rd Battalion on the East in the woods immediately West of GRANDMENIL, 2nd Battalion in the center near BRISCOL, and 1st Battalion on the West near ERPIGNY. At dawn, the Battalions were to move forward and organize the assigned main line of resistance, three Battalions on line. No enemy contact was anticipated in occupying the assigned main line of resistance due to the 3rd Armored Division's screening force to the front of the position. (8)(Map B)

BATTALION SITUATION

The 3rd Battalion loaded onto 2½ ton trucks in FANZEL at 0130 hours 25 December and moved to BRISCOL. Considerable delay was encountered enroute due to congested traffic and inadequate traffic control. The Battalion detrucked at BRISCOL at approximately 0230 hours. The Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Harry H. Pretty, was met by a Captain from the 3rd Armored Division who stated that MANHAY had fallen to the enemy and that enemy infantry and

(6) A-5, p. 1; Personal Knowledge; (7) A-5, p.1; A-6, p.6; A-3, p.226-227

(8) Personal Knowledge; Statement by Major Donald D. Dunlop, then Regimental S-3, 289th Infantry, 29 December 1947.

armor were attacking GRANDMENIL. It was not known whether the enemy had infiltrated into the woods West of GRANDMENIL, the proposed assembly area for the 3rd Battalion. The situation was extremely fluid.(9)

Lieutenant Colonel Pretty assembled the Company Commanders and available Staff Officers, made a hasty map study, and issued a brief oral order to the assembled group. Weapons carriers were to be released to Company control at once. The Heavy Machine Gun Platoons of Company M were to be attached to the Rifle Companies, one platoon to Company I and one platoon to Company K. A temporary Battalion Command Post (rear) was to be established in BRISCOL until a daylight reconnaissance could be made of the area and further information could be gained as to the situation in the vicinity of GRANDMENIL. The Battalion Anti-tank Platoon was to remain in BRISCOL prepared to move forward on order. The Battalion was to move East on the highway toward GRANDMENIL as rapidly as possible. I Company, as the Advance Guard, was to be followed by K Company, L Company, Mortar Platoon M Company, in that order. Upon reaching the point where the trail joined the highway 2000 yards West of GRANDMENIL, the Battalion was to turn right, follow the trail through the woods and take up a defensive position on the high ground in the edge of the woods overlooking GRANDMENIL, I Company on the left, K Company on the right, L Company in reserve, control initially to be by radio.(10)

MOVEMENT TO CONTACT

It was approximately 0300 hours, when the Battalion, on foot, moved out from BRISCOL into the cold, uneasy night. The moon had set and the temperature had dropped to several degrees below freezing.

American tanks from the Task Force that had been holding GRANDMENIL began to withdraw through the Battalion as it marched forward in the darkness. A tank crew informed the Battalion Commander that the Task Force had been forced

(9) A-3, p.226; Personal Knowledge.

(10) Personal Knowledge.

out of the town by German armor and infantry, and that if more tanks came down the road they would be enemy. (11)

The Battalion Commander abandoned his previous plan of occupying the woods South of the highway. To meet the threat of enemy armor using the highway as an axis of attack to the West, he decided to place the Battalion astride the road in the previously planned formation with I Company extending approximately 200 yards on either side of the road. The position selected was on the crest of the ridge at a horseshoe bend in the highway 1200 yards West of GRANDMENIL. At that position, the left flank of I Company would be resting on the edge of a deep and very precipitous ravine. (12)(Map B)

The Battalion was halted when it reached the crest and the men moved into the ditches on either side of the road. A battery of artillery to the left rear of the Battalion began to place time fire on GRANDMENIL. One piece was laid incorrectly and its rounds were bursting directly over the heads of the men in the Battalion. Several casualties had occurred, including Captain Jessie Wingo, Company Commander of Company L, before this fire could be corrected. (13)

An extremely brief and limited reconnaissance having been made in the darkness, the companies began to move off the road into position. A column of enemy tanks, led by a captured American Sherman tank, came up the highway from GRANDMENIL and hit the Battalion before the companies had completed clearing the road. When fired upon, the tanks left the road and with all guns blazing, overran the Battalion position. They had broken through the Battalion and were proceeding toward BRISCOL when a "bazooka" man from Company K scored a direct hit, knocking out a German Mark IV tank. The remaining tanks, realizing that they would be at a disadvantage on the narrow roadway without Infantry support, withdrew through the Battalion, again spraying the area with (11)(12)(13) Personal Knowledge

all weapons. (14)

The Battalion Executive Officer, Major Eugene O. McDonald, was on his way forward from the Command Post when his jeep ran headon into the leading Sherman tank. When the tank opened fire on the jeep, the Executive Officer escaped by diving into the roadside ditch and then circling back to the rear along the brushy hillside. (15)

It was estimated that nine enemy tanks had hit the Battalion position. Some men reported counting as many as seventeen. (16)

The Executive Officer of Company K had been wounded by tank machine gun fire and several Enlisted Men had been killed or wounded.

ON THE DEFENSIVE

Came the dawn, and the hastily reorganized Battalion dug-in in earnest, fearful of an immediate counterattack, knowing that if it did come it would this time be supported by Infantry. Dead and wounded were evacuated. A platoon of 3rd Armored Division tanks came up to support the Battalion. The Battalion Anti-tank Platoon took up positions a short distance to the rear to add depth to the anti-tank protection. A small minefield, covered by "bazooka" and small arms fire, was placed across the highway in front of the position. (17)

Communications were extremely poor. For some unknown reason, the SCR 300 radios would not operate from one Battalion flank to the other. The Battalion wire crew worked feverishly all Christmas Day trying to establish wire communications to the rear. The reorganization of the tank units in rear of the Battalion kept the wire line broken continually. Due to this lack of communications, the forward Command Post was established directly in the front lines. (18)

Six American P-38 airplanes, each carrying two 500 pound bombs, arrived over the position about 1200 hours and proceeded to expend all their 50 calibre ammunition and bomb loads upon the Battalion. Their aim was excellent. They

(14) A-5, p.2; A-6, p.6; Personal Knowledge; Statement by Captain Edward B. Conway, then Commander, Company K, 289th Infantry, 25 December 1944.

(15) Statement by Major Eugene O. McDonald, 29 December 1947. (16) A-7, p.17;

(17) (18) Personal Knowledge.

succeeded in knocking out one Sherman tank; detonating the minefield; blowing up a Battalion 2½ton truck loaded with ammunition; and inflicting a number of casualties including the Battalion Motor Officer. The Battalion had not been notified of a pending air strike in that vicinity. (19)

Shortly after this attack, orders were received to send a company to block the lower road leading Northwest out of GRANDMENIL. Company L was dispatched on this mission. (Map C)

A short while later, an artillery liaison plane flew low over the Battalion and dropped a message. A column of troops, unidentifiable by the pilot as friend or foe, was marching Northwest across the valley to the left of the Battalion. The Battalion Commander, realizing that the pilot had seen Company L moving to the lower road, took no action but made a mental note to use the artillery liaison planes in the future as a source of current information that might be of value to the Battalion. (20)

TO THE OFFENSIVE

Tanks from the 3rd Armored Division attempted to enter GRANDMENIL about 1600 hours but were quickly forced back to the Battalion position. Task Force McGeorge of Combat Command B, attacked down the highway at 2200 hours with a company of tanks and a company of Armored Infantry to retake GRANDMENIL but was repulsed by extremely heavy anti-tank and automatic weapons fire from within the town. (21)

The Regimental Commander reenforced Company L on the lower road with a platoon of 57 mm. anti-tank guns from the Regimental Anti-tank Company, a platoon of Tank Destroyers from the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the Regimental Mines Platoon. (22)

The Battalion Commander was alerted at 0030 hours 26 December to have one company on the upper road prepare to assist Task Force McGeorge in capturing

(19) Personal Knowledge; A-7, p.17; A-8, p.2. (20) Personal Knowledge.

(21) Personal Knowledge; A-3, p.226. (22) A-9, p. 13.

GRANDMENIL. Company K was selected for this mission. (23)

All available fragmentation and white Phosphorous hand grenades in the Battalion were turned over to K Company and issued to the men. Due to the poor transmission and reception of the SCR 300 radios in that area, the Battalion SCR 284 radio was released to Captain Conway, Company Commander of Company K. A spare SCR 284 was borrowed from Regiment so that the company would have communication with the Battalion. (24)

The attack jumped off at 0430 hours with K Company leading. By 0615 hours, the company was in the town in the midst of a fierce house to house fire fight. Intense anti-tank, small arms, and automatic weapons fire forced the attackers to withdraw and reorganize shortly after daybreak. K Company had suffered severe losses. (25)

While K Company was reorganizing, I Company was moved over to occupy the positions in the woods South of the highway formerly occupied by K Company. These positions blocked the probable approaches of enemy Infantry and could deliver supporting fire for the tanks that were covering the highway. (26)

Sixteen enemy tanks moved out of GRANDMENIL at 0900 hours and engaged the road block on the lower road. The road block repulsed the attack, knocking out two enemy tanks while suffering the loss of one of the self-propelled Tank Destroyer guns. (27)

The Battalion was detached from the Regiment during the morning and attached to Combat Command B. About noon, Company L was ordered to return to the upper road. The Company came under machine gun and other small arms fire shortly after leaving positions at the road block. This fire was coming from the Southeast and was believed to be from the enemy tanks that had withdrawn after attacking the road block. To avoid this fire, Company L had to move to the upper road by a circuitous route which considerably delayed its arrival at the position on the upper road. (28)

(23) Personal Knowledge; A-5, p.2; A-7, p.17; A-8, p.2; A-3, p.226. (24) Personal Knowledge. (25) A-5, p.2; A-7, p.17; A-8, p.2; Statement by Captain Edward B. Conway, then Commander Company K, 26 December 1944. (26) Personal Knowledge. (27) A-9, p.14. (28) A-6, p.6; Personal Knowledge.

CAPTURE OF GRANDMENIL

Word was received at 1345 hours for the Battalion Commander to report to Brigadier General Truman E. Boudinot, Commanding General, Combat Command B, at a point about one-half mile back along the highway to receive an attack order. Company L had not as yet arrived at the Battalion position.

The Battalion Commander and the S-3 proceeded immediately to the designated point and at 1355 hours received a brief oral order for the attack of GRANDMENIL.

The Battalion, reenforced with tanks from Combat Command B, was to attack at 1415 hours with two companies abreast, seize the town of GRANDMENIL, and set up a defensive position to secure the vital road center. A five minute artillery preparation was to be fired on the town beginning at H-5. (29)

The Battalion Commander protested the time of attack. He had been allowed twenty minutes in which to prepare his unit for an attack against a strongly defended position. He was a half mile from his troops, one company was somewhere in the woods enroute to join the Battalion, and his remaining companies were deployed in a defensive position.

There was no compromising; H-hour remained unchanged. The Battalion would attack at 1415 hours.

Fortunately, on the return trip to the Battalion position the Battalion Commander and the S-3 met Lieutenant Thomas S. Eubanks, who had taken over command of Company L. Lieutenant Eubanks had proceeded his company, which was still moving through the woods toward the highway about a quarter of a mile to the North.

The following order was issued to Lieutenant Eubanks: "The Battalion, reenforced with tanks, attacks GRANDMENIL at 1415 hours following a five minute artillery preparation. If your company continues to move, it will

reach this highway about the time a group of tanks are moving along it in the direction of GRANDMENIL. Company L will accompany these tanks into town. Upon capture of the town, the Battalion will defend it at all costs. Your company, during the attack and for the defense, is responsible for the left half of town, this highway inclusive. Company I will be on your right."(30)(Map C)

Similar orders were issued to Captain Robertson, Company Commander of I Company, except that Company I was to attack down a small trail leading into GRANDMENIL from the West, Company I responsible for the right half of town, the highway exclusive. Company K in reserve, was to follow Company I on order. (31)(Map C)

The artillery preparation began to fall as the Battalion Commander completed issuing his orders. Somehow, the companies managed to start the attack on schedule.

The terrific artillery preparation had so stunned the enemy defenders that the attacking companies were able to reach the outskirts of town before receiving heavy opposition. A bitter house to house struggle ensued for the remainder of the afternoon. Enemy, equipped with "burp guns" (machine pistols) and machine guns were located where they could fire along the streets in the village, creating a murderous crossfire at each intersection. (32)

The Company Commander and the Executive Officer of Company I, Captain Robertson and Lieutenant Frank Donovan, were both wounded almost simultaneously. Captain Robertson was caught by a burst of machine gun fire and Lieutenant Donovan was hit by rifle fire. Lieutenant Eugene F. Phillips, one of I Company's Platoon Leaders, took command of the Company. (33)

The Battalion Observation Post, located on the open hillside West of GRANDMENIL, observed a platoon of enemy tanks moving from MANHAY toward GRANDMENIL. Artillery fire was brought to bear on these tanks, setting the lead tank on fire and causing the others to withdraw back into MANHAY. (34)

(30, 31) Personal Knowledge. (32, 33) Statement by Lieutenant Eugene F. Phillips then Commander Company I, 27 December 1944. (34) Personal Knowledge.

Some of the defenders attempted to withdraw across the open ground to MANHAY shortly before dark. Again, the Battalion Observation Post called for artillery concentrations in that area, catching the Germans in the open and inflicting heavy casualties. (35)

Enemy snipers infiltrated into the woods North of the highway during the Battle. These snipers harrassed troop movements along the GRANDMENIL-EREZEE highway for two days before they were all rounded up. One sniper, armed with a "burp gun", opened fire on the Observation Post late in the afternoon but inflicted no casualties. (36)

As darkness settled down and visibility became poor, the Command Group made plans to move into GRANDMENIL. The wire crew was to accompany the Command Group into town, laying wire as it went. A line to the rear had been established by hand carrying the wire across the rough terrain and laying the line several hundred yards to the side of the highway. The Battalion Anti-tank Platoon was alerted to move into GRANDMENIL and occupy defensive positions facing to the South and East.

As the Command Group prepared to move into town, a message was received that Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Stearns, Regimental Executive Officer, 289th Infantry, was on his way forward to take command of the Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Pretty was to return to the Regimental Command Post and get some much needed sleep (he had had no rest for three days). Lieutenant Colonel Stearns arrived immediately thereafter and assumed command. Lieutenant Colonel Pretty ignored the order to return to the Regimental Command Post and moved into GRANDMENIL with the Command Group. The Battalion had control of the town by 1800 hours and immediately set about preparing its defense. (37)

It was known that many of the enemy were hiding in buildings within the town. Each building had to be systematically cleared before it could be

(35, 36) Personal Knowledge. (37) Personal Knowledge; A-3, p.226; A-5, p.2; A-2, p. 121.

occupied. Company K and a platoon of Company A, 275th Engineers (75th Division) that had been attached to the Battalion, were given the mission of mopping up. Approximately 180 prisoners had been secured by 1000 hours 27 December. Enemy dead was estimated to be about 100. German losses in armor in the immediate vicinity (including the three tanks lost at the road blocks Northwest of the town) amounted to one Mark III tank, two half-track Armored Personnel Carriers, and fifteen Mark IV tanks. (38)

Captured Prisoners of War stated that a reenforced Battalion of the 2nd SS Panzer "DAS REICH" Division had been defending the town.

The Battalion losses in personnel for its first forty-eight hours of combat were 130 Enlisted Men and 7 Officers. The 7 Officers included the Battalion Motor Officer, all three Rifle Company Commanders, the Executive Officers of Companies I and K, and a Rifle Platoon Leader from Company K. Captain Conway, Company Commander of Company K, had wrenched a knee so badly during the attack by Company K the night of 25-26 December that it became necessary to evacuate him early in the morning of the 27th. Lieutenant Donald W. Applegate took command of the Company.

DEFENSE OF GRANDMENIL

Lieutenant Colonel Stearns returned to the Regimental Command Post on the morning of 27 December and Lieutenant Colonel Pretty again assumed command of the Battalion. (39)

The orders were to hold GRANDMENIL at all costs. Therefore, began a period of defensive organization that progressed until the Battalion was relieved 4 January 1945.

An all around defense of GRANDMENIL was established. I Company dug-in just forward of the edge of town on an arc extending from the GRANDMENIL-MANHAY highway on the left to a point at the road fork 500 yards Southwest of

(38) A-3, p.224; A-8, p.2; Personal Knowledge.

(39) Personal Knowledge.

GRANDMENIL. The left platoon discovered that it was digging-in in the midst of an old American anti-tank minefield of which there was no record, so consequently was drawn back to the forward edge of town. I Company dug-in on an arc extending from the GRANDMENIL-MANHAY highway on the right (highway inclusive) to a point North of the cemetery. K Company, in a reverse slope defense, dug-in facing to the Northwest and tied in with Companies I and L on the flanks. (40)(Map C)

The Regimental Mines Platoon laid a mine belt completely around the town and an accurate recording was made. The mines were not buried and were later recovered when the Allied counter-offensive began in January 1945. Daisy chains of anti-tank mines were placed across all roads and trails leading into town. (41)

The platoon of Engineers attached to the Battalion, placed a double bank wire concertina inside the mine belt. The platoon also spent a considerable amount of time searching for buried American mines that were scattered throughout the area and were causing casualties.

Cattle and horses were continually wandering into the village detonating the mines in the mine belt. They were herded into the cemetery and a detail fed and watered them daily. Needless to say, members of the Battalion enjoyed fresh milk and an occasional steak.

Since the Germans had so frantically defended this area, it was surprising that they made no direct attack against GRANDMENIL to retake it. Occasional artillery and mortar fire placed on the town was the limit of their activity. However, the enemy had other plans by which he hoped to regain possession of this vital road center. (42)

(40) (41) Personal Knowledge. (42) A-3, p. 224.

SEIZURE OF AISNE RIVER LINE

The accomplishment of the initial mission of Combat Team 289 was left solely in the hands of the 1st and 2nd Battalions after the 3rd Battalion had become engaged in the vicinity of GRANDMENIL. It would have been a difficult task for the two Battalions to accomplish had the 10,000 yard frontage been on ideal terrain. It soon proved to be an impossible task in the dense woods that covered the assigned sector.

The two Battalions tied in with adjacent units on the outer flanks of the sector, but a 1000 to 1500 yard gap existed in the center between the two.⁽⁴³⁾
(Map D)

Two Battalions of the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment (12th SS Panzer "Hitler Jugend" Division) infiltrated through this gap during the night of 27-28 December. Their mission was to cut the GRANDMENIL-EREZEE highway in the vicinity of BRISCOL and recapture GRANDMENIL by attacking it from the West, thus allowing the main German attack to continue to the North.⁽⁴⁴⁾

These two German Battalions attacked SADZOT between 0100 and 0200 hours 28 December. They were repulsed by the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion (attached to 3rd Armored Division) and after an extremely bitter fight withdrew to the dense woods in the gap between the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 289th Infantry.⁽⁴⁵⁾(Map D)

Many attempts were made during the next few days to wipe out the enemy pocket and close the gap, but all were unsuccessful.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The 3rd Battalion in the meantime continued its defense of GRANDMENIL. Replacements totaling 130 Enlisted Men and 4 Officers were received by the Battalion on 1-2 January 1945. On 2 January, Company K moved to SADZOT as Regimental Reserve, arriving at SADZOT at 0400 hours.⁽⁴⁷⁾

(43) A-5, p. 2,3. (44) A-3, p.223,224; A-5, p.3; Statement by Major Donald C. Flint, Regimental S-2, 289th Infantry, 1 January 1945. (45) A-3, p.227; A-5, p.3. (46) A-3, p.228; A-5, p. 3,4,5. (47) A-5, p.5; A-8, p.2.

The counter-offensive of the First United States Army against the Germans in the Ardennes salient began at 0830 hours 3 January 1945. Elements of the 84th U. S. Infantry Division and the 2nd U. S. Armored Division made a passage of lines through Combat Team 289 and pushed to the South, bypassing the enemy pocket at SADZOT. (48)

Company K, on 3 January, moved to a defensive position on the ridge line running Southwest from CROIX ST. JEHEME and established contact with 1st Battalion on the right with patrols. (Map D)

The 3rd Battalion was relieved in GRANDMENIL on 4 January by elements of the 291st Infantry Regiment (75th Division) and at 1430 hours began marching toward SADZOT, arriving there just at dark. The Battalion's mission was to close the still existing gap between 1st and 2nd Battalions. (49)

The Battalion (less K Company) ate a hot meal and then moved South out of SADZOT under command of the S-3. The Machine Gun Platoons were attached to Companies I and L. The formation was single file, L Company leading with one squad as point. The Battalion Operations Sergeant, Staff Sergeant Irving Hart, an experienced woodsman from Connecticut, was lead man of the point. There was to be no loss of direction on this move. Each company had detailed two men to assist the wire crew in laying wire forward with the Battalion. (50)

The Battalion moved forward slowly over the rough, narrow, snow-covered trails. It had snowed heavily since 27 December and the trails were covered to a depth of about 12 inches. Upon reaching CROIX ST. JEHEME, I Company turned right and proceeded down the ridge line and made physical contact with the left flank of Company K. The 3rd Platoon of Company I bent East at CROIX ST. JEHEME to make physical contact with Company L 200 yards to the East. From that point on, Company L left the trails and fire breaks and marched by compass through the dense woods. The platoons of Company L dropped off the tail of the column on order and then extended from the drop-off point back in the direction from which they had come, following the trail they had made in the deep snow until

(48) A-2, p. 130; A-5, p. 5. (49) A-5, p. 5; A-8, p. 5. (50) Personal Knowledge.

contact was made with the unit on their right. Just as it seemed that L Company's line would become overextended, the Operations Sergeant stumbled in the darkness and fell into a fox hole occupied by a sleeping doughboy of Company E. Contact had been made. The gap was closed. (51)(Map D)

A coordinated attack by Companies C, E, K, and L, under command of Lieutenant Colonel Pretty, jumped off at 1615 hours 5 January to seize the AISNE RIVER line. Company I, as a reserve for the attacking force, remained in position blocking the head of the draw between Companies K and L. (52)(Map D)

Company K overran some dug-in machine gun emplacements killing several of the enemy and capturing 20, while suffering the loss of one man wounded. (53)

The attacking companies had reached the river line by 2400 hours 5 January, and by 0230 hours 6 January were in contact with each other. At 0930 hours Company I moved forward astride the draw, meeting no resistance, and went into position between Companies K and L. (54)(Map D)

Extracts from the Morning Report of Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 289th Infantry, for 6 January 1945 tell the story - "Mission Accomplished: Companies maintained position on river line Rau dit sous l'Eau". (55)

The Battalion's operations in that sector were over. It pulled out of the line 7 January 1945, assembled at SADZOT at 1400 hours, and departed therefrom at 1430 hours in a blinding snow storm for DEIGNE, BELGIUM and further combat. (56)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

A study of this operation reveals that the 3rd Battalion in its first combat action made a change in plans while marching to an assembly area which resulted in a meeting engagement with enemy armor. This meeting engagement however, prevented the enemy from reaching and overrunning rear installations and possibly prevented him from opening routes by which he could continue his main attack to the North and Northwest.

(51) Personal Knowledge. (52) A-5, p.6; A-8, p.2. (53) A-8, p.2; Statement of Lieutenant Donald W. Applegate, then Commander, Company K, 6 January 1945. (54) A-5, p.6; Personal Knowledge. (55) A-8, p.2. (56) A-5, p.6; A-8, p.3.

Although the GRANDMENIL-MANHAY area was an area critical to both the enemy and the Allies, the 3rd Battalion did not arrive in the vicinity of GRANDMENIL until approximately fifteen hours after it began its move forward from PALENCE, BELGIUM - a distance of about twenty miles. Had the 3rd Armored Division motorized the 3rd Battalion at PALENCE and transported it to GRANDMENIL, the Battalion could have then defended the town rather than having to attack a few hours later to regain it. This would also have allowed the Battalion at least two hours of daylight for reconnaissance.

The enemy is to be criticized for his failure to have Infantry troops accompanying his armor when he hit the 3rd Battalion early Christmas morning. Although he had penetrated through the Battalion, he dared not continue further without Infantry support.

The principle of mass was violated when units were committed piecemeal in the attack on GRANDMENIL. It was not until the afternoon of 26 December that the entire Battalion was committed to the attack. This delay allowed the enemy to build up his strength and organize his defenses, resulting in additional casualties being suffered by the Battalion when it was eventually committed.

Dissemination of information was extremely poor. The Battalion was not notified of a pending air strike in that area and therefore, was taken by complete surprise when the P-38's bombed and strafed the position. Information as to adjacent and supporting units was lacking. Enemy information generally was, as often as not, faulty. This lack of information was to some extent due to the rapidly changing situation.

Considering the existing conditions of terrain and enemy situation, the frontage assigned to the Combat Team was entirely too much to be adequately defended. Had it not been for the timely commitment of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion and the outstanding fighting qualities displayed by that unit, the enemy penetration near SADZOT might possibly have isolated the 2nd and 3rd Battalions.

There was no coordination between the tank units and the Battalion for the

attack on GRANDMENIL. This was due to three reasons. First, no time was allowed for coordination between units. Second, there was no communication between the tanks and the Infantry except through higher headquarters or through personal contact. Third, there was the question as to which unit commander was in command of the attacking forces. Consequently, each unit made its own attack, both attacks being made simultaneously with each unit knowing that the other was there for support.

It is common knowledge that a thorough reconnaissance materially assists the commander in making correct decisions. Also, it has a direct bearing on the outcome of any operation. Yet, throughout the operations in this area, no time was allowed by higher headquarters for subordinate units to perform this vital function.

Requiring the Battalion to initiate an attack within twenty minutes from the time the order was issued to the Battalion Commander and under the conditions that existed at that time was inviting defeat. That the Battalion was able to initiate the attack on time and then carry it through to a successful accomplishment of its mission is an excellent indication of the leadership and fighting ability of the Officers and Enlisted Men of the Battalion.

A criticism that should be made, although it had no bearing on the outcome of the operations, is the fact that American troops previously in GRANDMENIL had failed to recover or properly record buried mines in the area, thereby causing several casualties in the Battalion that otherwise would not have occurred.

It is the opinion of the author that the operations of the Battalion in this area were entirely successful. It effectively blocked further enemy penetration in this area; it denied the use by the enemy of two good highways, one leading to the West, the other to the Northwest, by which he could continue his main attack; and, it successfully attacked, seized, and firmly secured the critical anchor point of the VII Corps left flank. Had not the above been accomplished, the counter-offensive, launched by VII Corps on 3 January 1945, probably would have been materially delayed.

Further, the Battalion, in the matter of a few hours, closed a gap in the lines of the 289th Combat Team that had existed for ten days and then was the contributing factor in the elimination of the small but stubborn pocket of enemy resistance South of SADZOT.

The Battalion, a rookie in combat, had met the enemy's best on the field of battle under adverse conditions and had emerged victorious.

LESSONS

1. Flexibility of plans is essential to the successful outcome of an operation. This is particularly true in a rapidly changing situation.

2. Simplicity of plans greatly facilitate their timely and proper execution by subordinate leaders.

3. Troops should always be committed in sufficient strength to accomplish the mission. Units should never be committed piecemeal unless it is absolutely necessary.

4. A high rate of casualties is to be expected among leaders of rifle units, especially within the Rifle Company. Officers and Enlisted Men must be prepared to instantly assume command of higher echelons, when necessary, if success in combat is to be obtained.

5. Wire crews in the Battalion Communications Platoon must be augmented by men from the Rifle Companies if continuous wire communication is to be established and maintained.

6. In the attack, observation of the enemy's routes of communications is desirable. If obtained, great advantage accrues to the attacker in using observed supporting fires to prevent enemy reenforcement or withdrawal.

7. The means of Air/Ground identification must be made known and available to front line troops at all times.

8. Artillery Liaison planes can be a source of current and vital information to front line unit commanders.

9. In the attack, assault echelons must move as near to the objective as possible before supporting artillery fires lift. Once the artillery fires lift,

the assault echelons must close rapidly onto the enemy position.

10. Mines placed in an area must either be removed or accurately recorded as prescribed by regulations. This will prevent casualties among friendly units that may later occupy that area.

11. In combat, fragmentary orders are the rule rather than the exception.