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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1949-1950

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 18TH INFANTRY  
(1ST INFANTRY DIVISION) AT SANS LE BRUYERE, BELGIUM,  
WEST OF MONS, 4 - 5 SEPTEMBER 1944  
(NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: BATTALION DEFENSE OF A ROAD HUB  
DURING PURSUIT OPERATION

Major Robert E. Murphy, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 1

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 18TH INFANTRY  
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the action of an Infantry Battalion, (2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry, First Infantry Division) in a defensive type of operation while engaged in general pursuit. The operation occurred in and around the village of SARS LE BRUYERE (about 15 KSW of MONS), Belgium during the hours of darkness 4 - 5 September 1944.

It will be recalled that on 19 August 1944, two days after the FALAIS ARGENTIAN gap was finally closed around the remainents of the German fifth and Seventh Panzer Armies, all that remained of the German forces of NORMANDY, the Third US Army reached the SEINE at MANTES-GASSICOURT. This rapid advance by Third Army placed a bridge head across the last natural barrier west of the MEUSE, in the American sector, upon which the retreating Germans could expect to defend with any hope of success. The Third Army spread out along the west bank of the SEINE cutting the retreating Germans off from their few remaining bridge sites and ferry points. (See Map A) (1)

Through this action and the constant pounding by the tactical Air Corps the enemy lost the majority of its infantry units and much of its armor and transport.

By 20 August the majority of first Army had been pinched out of the FALAIS pocket and were free to move eastward. At this time the enemy were counterattacking the British Second Army from outside the pocket in an effort to free the troops entrapped.

20 - 23 August first Army moved eastward. XIX Corps on the left flank swung north to vicinity of EVREUX behind the German divisions battling the

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(1) A-1, p. 143

British Second Army. V Corps advanced in the center of the Army Zone with Paris as an objective. VII Corps on the right flank swung south of Paris crossing the SEINE on the north flank of the Third Army. (See Map A) (2)

Movement of XIX Corps to EUREUX placed them directly across ~~to~~ the main escape route of the retreating Germans from in front of the British Second Army.

The Germans in attempting to hold off the Second Army and fight their way through XIX Corps lost another five divisions which added to the allied claim of eleven divisions destroyed or captured in FALAIS pocket brought the total to 16 divisions destroyed. (3) This coupled with the staggering losses in material and equipment lead Allied Supreme Commander to conclude that the German Seventh Army had been eliminated, and to assume that the German Fifteenth Army had been greatly depleted in both men and material.

(4) It was therefore planned to drive northeast with the British Second and the American First Armies in an attempt to drive to the RUHR and prevent the withdrawal of the German Fifteenth Army to the west wall. (5)

This plan was placed in operation on 26 August when First Army attacked northeast in order to bridge the MARNE and AISNE rivers and gain contact with the British Second Army. The army advanced in an inverted V formation, VII Corps on the east flank, XIX Corps on the west and V Corps following in rear of the other two on the point of the V. (See Map B)

The VII Corps, with which we are concerned, consisted of the 3rd Armored Division and the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions, crossed the AISNE river in the vicinity of SOISSONS and proceeded in the direction of LAON which was taken after considerable fighting on 30 August. (6)

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- (2) A-1, p. 145
  - (3) A-1, p. 146
  - (4) A-2, p. 50
  - (5) A-2, p. 62
  - (6) A-1, p. 151

During this entire advance the First Division was constantly over-running groups of retreating enemy who would surrender after a brief exchange of fire. Often German and American columns would meet on cross roads much to the surprise of both. Several times an American column cut through German columns having arrived at a crossroad to coincide with an interval between march units and vice versa.

On 31 August Corps was ordered to continue the attack to the northeast with MONS, BELGIUM as the objective and maintain contact with V Corps on the left. The enemy was estimated to still have 120,000 troops west of the BELGIUM border. However they were making no apparent attempt to hold, and appeared to be solely under orders to break contact and reach the German frontier before the Americans.

MONS was captured by elements of the 3rd Armored Division at 1900 hours 2 September. The remainder of the Corps was disposed with the 9th Division covering the right flank and the 1st Division extending from AVESNES southwest in contact with the V Corps on the left flank. (7)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION (See Map B)

Late on 2nd September VII Corps was ordered to change direction to the east and secure crossings across the MEUSE river between NAMUR and GEVET. (8)

No gasoline was available to move the 3rd Armored Division in time for this attack, therefore Corps planned to implement the order by advancing the 9th Division via PHILIPPEVILLE to NAMUR; relieve the 3rd Armored at MONS with elements of the 1st Division and have it push through to the MEUSE when gasoline became available.

The 1st Division plan was to relieve the 3rd Armored with the 26th Infantry, move the 16th Infantry, which until now was Division reserve, up the MAUBEUGE-MONS road behind the 26th. The 18th Infantry was to take the town of BAVAI, a very important road hub connecting many of the exits to the east. (See Map C)

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(7) A-5 Film D-34 (TIS Library)

(8) A-1 p. 154, A-5 Film D 42 (TIS Library)

As stated before the Germans strategy appeared to embody a complete disengagement and retreat to the east with all possible haste. The enemy forces immediately west of VII Corps began their withdrawal through MONS area the early hours of 3 September. The result was fantastic in the extreme. The enemy appeared to have no knowledge whatsoever of the present<sup>ce</sup> of American troops in the area. Columns began streaming through the Division zone of action in administrative formations. Their transportation consisted for the most part of horse drawn vehicles; most of the horses confiscated from French farmers. Most of the motor transportation had been taken from the German Fifteenth Army to supply and re-equip the Fifth and Seventh in NORMANDY. (9)

The 26th Infantry in its advance up the MAUBEUGE road ran into the flank of an enemy column in administrative formation and killed and captured hundreds. The 16th Infantry following them captured 2,000 during the day with a loss of three men wounded.

#### DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 18TH INFANTRY

The 18th Infantry jumped off at 0800<sup>3500?</sup> with the 1st and 3rd Battalions in column, 1st Battalion leading. The 1st Battalion entered BAVAI from south at 1000 hours, just as a large convoy of Germans entered from the west. The Battalion shot up the column with TD's and captured some 200 of the enemy. The firing had hardly died down when another column entered from the direction of LE CAPEAU and fighting continued well into the afternoon. That evening the 3rd Battalion was moved into town and the two battalions proceeded to consolidate their positions. The town received a fairly heavy shelling from enemy batteries located east of town in the early evening, however, no further counter move by the enemy was attempted. (10)

Regiment was ordered by Division to hold BAVAI until the situation clarified.

2nd Battalion was moved into an assembly area southeast of the FORET

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(9) A-2, p. 39 - 40  
(10) A-3, p. 55; A-5, film D 42

DE MORVAL in the late afternoon. During the night the 32nd Field Artillery, the supporting artillery of the 18th Infantry, had its positions surrounded in the BORS DE LA ALNIERE, and a task force of one platoon of Infantry and two tanks was sent from the 2nd Battalion to their assistance. This action netted 165 prisoners.

The following morning at 0830 hours the Battalion was ordered into an assembly area in the vicinity of NEUF MESNIL where it closed at approximately 1030 hours. Shortly thereafter the Battalion received orders to block the road leading east into BAVAI from the FORET DE MORVAL. The Battalion Commander ordered F Company, reinforced with one MG platoon and one section of 81 millimeter mortars from H Company and the Antitank Platoon from Headquarters Company to accomplish this mission. F Company arrived on position shortly after noon and proceeded to dig in. (11)

At 1530 hours Commanding Officer 2nd Battalion received the following order from the Regimental Commander: (12)

2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry reinforced with 2nd Platoon, Company B, 745th Tank Battalion, less Company F reinforced, will proceed NE on the BAVAI - SARS LE BRUYERE road, feel out the enemy forces in the area, and secure and defend the CR of SARS LE BRUYERE. The Battalion will gain and maintain contact with elements of the 26th Infantry in the vicinity of LA BOUVERIE.

IP: Junction MAUBEUGE - SARS LE BRUYERE roads in BAVAI.  
Cross IP at 1730.

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

As stated before the Battalion, less F Company and elements of H Company, was in an assembly area in the vicinity of NEUF MESNIL. (See Map C)

Some replacements had been received while in a rest area in the vicinity of BAGNOLLES, FRANCE at close of the FALAIS pocket and the Battalion was about 80 or 85% of its authorized strength. The Battalion had been pursuing a disorganized enemy for almost three weeks, capturing great numbers and

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(11) Personal knowledge; statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson, then Battalion Commander, October 1949.

(12) Message cited is not true copy but in general form used in 18th Infantry at that time. Content is personal knowledge and from statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson.

killing many more, with very little fighting and with almost no casualties sustained. Moral<sup>e</sup> was very high, however, many of the old timers who had been through AFRICA and SICILY were beginning to incline toward over cautiousness, especially when they compared the German forces confronting them now with the last day of the African campaign when the 18th Infantry received one of the worst defeats in its history less than 24 hours before the enemy forces capitulated. Many seemed to believe the war was in its closing stages and certainly were not in favor of becoming a casualty this late in the game. (13)

In the Division area intelligence reports located five enemy divisions, the 6th Parachute, the 18th GAF, the 47th, 275th and the 348th Infantry Divisions. These Organizations were almost up to strength in manpower but were very short of equipment and material, especially transportation. A few armored vehicles were known to be in the area but were in no great number nor were they very aggressive. To sum up the enemy situation it can be said that although he had plenty of troops available he seemed unable to co-ordinate or organize any type of defense. Their intelligence on the American positions or plans was apparently nil, nor was their knowledge of their own units much better. At one road junction two enemy columns met and became entangled. During the confusion our Air Corps caught and destroyed them both. (14)

The terrain in this section of FRANCE and BELGIUM is for the most part gently rolling and dotted with forests, some of which are quite extensive and heavy.

The weather for the first week of September was clear and warm during the day, cooling off somewhat at night, but not enough to be at all uncomfortable.

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(13) Personal knowledge

(14) A-6 p. 271 - 273

## THE BATTALION PLAN

There was no question of enemy being along the route of the Battalion since the 1st and 3rd Battalions in BAVAI had received some shelling early in the morning and had seen enemy troops northeast of BAVAI during the day. Considering these facts the Battalion commander decided upon the following plan. (15)

All remaining units of the Battalion were to be motorized.

The order of march was G Company with the platoon of tanks attached followed by Headquarters, including the kitchen and train, the remainder of H Company, Cannon Company, 18th Infantry, and E Company in that order. The command group accompanied G Company.

F Company and the attachments from H and Headquarters Companies were to remain in present location in accordance with the Regimental order.

G Company was to proceed the main body in advance guard formation by 15 minutes. Upon reaching BOIS d' AUDENARDT they were to send out flank patrols to make sure the route was clear for the passage of the main body.

E Company was to employ a rear guard formation at the rear of the column.

It was decided considering the knowledge of the enemy that our greatest threat upon reaching SARS LE BRUYERE would be from the north and west. Therefore from a map reconnaissance G Company was directed to take north and north-east sector extending from the DOUR road on the northwest side of town to the MONS road to the northeast. <sup>E?</sup> G Company upon reaching town was to take up positions extending southwest from DOUR road around the village to the railroad entering town from the south. (See Map C)

Cannon Company was to go into positions on the east edge of town and outpost this area.

The Ranger Platoon was to constitute the Battalion reserve and remain in the vicinity of the Battalion CP.

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(15) Personal knowledge; statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson

H Company Commander was directed to reconnoiter for positions on the perimeter for its remaining MG Platoon, and positions for the 81's from which they could support both companies.

The Battalion was short about one half its basic load of ammunition, however Regiment had sent to Army for replacement. This replacement joined the battalion at BAVAI. (16)

The Battalion was motorized.

Supply and evacuation had been normal through the entire operation across FRANCE with the exception of gasoline. Several times since the last week in August transportation in excess of organic had to be left behind because of shortage. However, the operation had slowed down at the BELGIUM border allowing resupply to be accomplished.

MOVEMENT TO SANS LE BRUYERE (See Map C)

G Company, the advance guard, and the CP groups left NEUF MESNIL at approximately 1700 hours and arrived at the IP in BAVAI in the neighborhood of 1720 hours. The main body was following at the stated interval under command of the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Frank Galacicco. Upon reaching the IP the Battalion was met by the Regimental Commander who told the Battalion Commanding Officer that the French had reported a German Regiment bivouaced in the BORS d' AUTENARALT but this information was discounted greatly, at least by the author and, it is believed by the Commanders concerned because of the fluxuation of the situation and the apparent veracity of previous native reports. There was no question of the intentions of the French inhabitants but they were proven to exaggerate to extreme. However, the advance guard was notified of the report and ordered to proceed with caution. (See Map C) (17)

Many small forests lay along the six and one half mile route and a great

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(16) Statement of Captain Alexander Pavlak, then 1st Lieutenant, Battalion S-4, on 20 December 1949

Statement of Chief Warrant Officer Cecil Booth, then Assistant Regimental Ammunition Officer, on 20 December 1949

(17) Personal knowledge; statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson

deal of time was consumed by the advanced guard assuring that the way was clear for the main body. It was very near 2000 hours when G Company approached the near edge of BOIS d' <sup>P</sup>AUTENARDT. Flank guards were sent out to cover an area of about 300 to 400 yards on either side of the road and the advance guard proceeded to scout out the route.

The road was almost jammed by dead horses, vehicles and men of a German column caught by our Air Force earlier in the day.

As the column approached the far edge a fusilage of rifle and automatic fire stopped the advance. Word came back from the point that a group of enemy of unknown strength were in position at the far edge of the woods. G Company deployed one Platoon and 160 enemy surrendered. (18)

The Battalion proceeded on into SANS LE BRUYERE without incident, closing at about 2100 hours. (See Map D)

G Company proceeded directly to its sector, placed road blocks on the three main roads in their area and heavily outposted the remainder.

E Company upon arrival in the village took up positions covering the northwest, west and southwest sector, placing road blocks on the west road to DOUR and the BAVAI road on which the Battalion had entered.

H Company Commander emplaced the machine gun Platoon to cover primarily the E Company sector since these two roads were main paved roads and were considered the principle route of entry into the town from what was considered the most dangerous direction. The two sections of mortars with the Battalion were split, one in each Company area, however the fires of both sections were capable of being massed in either sector. (19)

The Tank Platoon was placed in position in the center of town with one tank in position to cover the DOUR, the LA BOUVERIE and the road east connecting with the BLAREGNIES - MONS road. Two tanks were placed to cover the BAVAI road behind the intersection with the west DOUR road. (20)

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(18) A-3, p. 55 numbers PW taken in this action at 140. Eye witnesses agree on 160.

(19) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Marion L. Farrar, then 1st Lieutenant, Mortar Platoon Leader, on 20 October 1949

(20) Personal knowledge

Cannon Company went into position as directed by the Battalion defense order but were too late to register prior to the action.

The only suitable place for the motor pool was in an orchard just north of the BAVAI road in E Company sector.

The CP was established in a large building resembling a castle near the center of town. The building had a walled in court yard with a moat surrounding the wall. The rambling house was large enough to accommodate the entire CP installation and the aid station. The Adjutant was directed to establish the CP in that manner. (21)

Communication with Regiment because of the distance was to be by radio, but proved to be sporadic upon reaching town. However, because of a complacent attitude upon the part of all concerned no attempt was made to correct this at this time.

The Communication Platoon was directed to run wires to all Companies and the Tank Platoon.

By 2200 hours all road blocks had been established and the troops were on position in the process of completing digging in. Wire had been laid to all Companies and shifts had been organized for the night operation of the CP.

#### NARRATION

##### GERMAN COLUMN REPORTED (See Map D)

The first indication that the night at SARS LE BRUYERE might not be entirely peaceful came at approximately 2230 hours when a telephone call from the Commanding Officer, Company E reported that a listening post established several hundred yards out on the BAVAI highway heard a horse drawn column in the forest to their front. The report was received at the Battalion CP with a great deal of skepticism in view of the fact that the Battalion column had cleared the forest in question less than two hours previously. (22)

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(21) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson

(22) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson

Since the Company Commander of E Company was new and known to be rather excitable, the Battalion Commander directed the S-3 to go to E Company CP and attempt to clarify the report.

Upon reaching E Company the Battalion S-3 was told that the listening post had just reported a foot column emerging from the woods on the same road the Battalion had used. The E Company Commander had ordered the listening post to return to the Company positions and had alerted the Company.

The S-3 suggested E Company also withhold their fire until the column had come close to the position in order to prevent their deployment. These instructions were given.

H Company was notified of the situation and the Company Commander stated he had one section of mortars in position to engage the BAVAI road but the remaining section was in position to cover G Company sector. It was decided not to change the direction of fire of this second section until the situation developed, but to alert them to the possibility. (23)

The Battalion S-3 then called the Battalion Commander and notified him of the situation and what he had done so far. The Battalion Commander approved and directed the S-3 to return to Battalion CP while he alerted Cannon Company, the tanks, and G Company.

On the return route the S-3 stopped at G Company CP and notified Captain Jerferies of the situation.

Upon arrival at Battalion he found the Battalion Commander and Executive Officer looking over the overlays of the position. Everyone was extremely calm and just a little elated. It was yet impossible to conceive of anything but a small isolated group of Germans attempting to use the Battalion MSR as an escape route.

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(23) Personal knowledge

THE FIRST GERMAN ATTACK (See Map E)

At approximately 2300 hours a terrific fusilage of small arms fire was heard from the direction of E Company Platoon astride the BAVAI road. Soon, however, the American fire was interspersed by the unmistakable purr of German machine guns and machine pistols. Almost with a snap it became apparent that this group of Germans were not of the same category as those the Battalion had been encountering for the past several weeks.

At about 2315 hours a call of the Commander of Company E stated that our initial fire had caught the column on the road as intended but that they had dispersed rapidly on either side and were now in the process of launching an attack with at least a company deployed on either side of the road. What was more the attack was supported by artillery fire. At least two guns were firing straight down the road. (24)

Upon completing this call the Battalion Commander requested the Artillery Liaison Officer to determine if E Company's Forward Observer was in position to support the defense. The Liaison Officer returned shortly and notified the Battalion Commander that the Forward Officer of E Company was not on the air, nor could the Liaison Officer get through to the Artillery on his radio.

The S-3 contacted Cannon Company and asked if they were firing any missions. Captain Penick replied he was firing all guns at maximum elevation and charge one and was still landing well behind the assaulting enemy.

While talking to E Company, Lieutenant Colonel Williamson learned that a heavy fight was in progress along E Company's entire front. Communication with the 2nd Platoon astride the BAVAI road had gone out and the 1st Platoon reported enemy enveloping their left flank. Upon receiving this information he directed the S-3 to send a patrol from the Ranger Platoon, Battalion reserve, to the ridge west of the CP to determine the extent of this movement.

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(24) Personal knowledge and statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson and Captain Farrar.

He then directed H Company to reinforce the fires in front of E Company with their second mortar section. (25)

Although the night had not been dark and visibility was good for well over 200 yards, the moon came up about now lighting the landscape almost like day.

The patrol reported back with information that some enemy could be seen moving south and east. The Battalion Commander directed the Ranger Platoon Leader, Lieutenant Parker, to take his Platoon and extend the left flank of E Company's 1st Platoon southeast along the ridge. The Platoon moved out immediately and went into position as directed. (26)

THE PENETRATION (See Map E)

Upon returning from the Ranger Platoon position the S-3 met two liter squads and followed them into the Battalion Aid Station. Doctor Hammer, the Battalion Surgeon was working on the stump of a soldier's leg. When asked how the casualties were running he grunted, "about thirty here, and plenty more out there". This was the first real indication that things might not be going all in our favor. (27)

On entering the CP, the S-3 received a telephone message from Commanding Officer Company H, who reported that his 1st section of the 1st Platoon (machine gun) had been overrun and he had lost a jeep loaded with ammunition and the driver to a daisy of mines pulled across the road by E Company.

Immediately following this call one came in from E Company Commander reporting that his position had been penetrated in the BAVAI road area in the sector of his 2nd Platoon. The remainder of the Company was so hard pressed that there was nothing he could do about it, and since his CP was directly behind this Platoon he was moving. He would check in later. (28)

This information was relayed to the Battalion Commander.

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- (25) Personal knowledge
  - (26) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson
  - (27) Personal knowledge
  - (28) Personal knowledge

Just as this was being done the Battalion Motor Officer came into the CP. He had been hit in the arm. He reported that the enemy had overrun the motor pool capturing three kitchens and the basic load of ammunition. He had left the Motor Sergeant with about twelve men fighting the Germans from positions behind a hedge on the east side of the motor pool. He didn't believe there were more than 20 of the enemy there.

Lieutenant Colonel Williamson then directed the S-3 to go to G Company and have Captain Jefferies organize his right Platoon to counterattack using the BAVAI road as an axis to restore E Company's position. A two tank section was to be attached to the Platoon for the attack.

Earlier in the evening the Battalion Commander had sent an officer to the town of LA BOUVERIES to contact the 26 Infantry and attempt to get fire support from the 33d Field Artillery. The Battalion Liason Officer was in contact with them on his radio and they had consented to fire by map coordinates. The fire was to support the counterattack. (29)

On the way to G Company CP the S-3 picked up the Tank Platoon Sergeant not being able to find the Platoon Leader. Upon reaching G Company the Commanding Officer informed the S-3 that he had talked with the Battalion Commander and the 3rd Platoon was being assembled. It was decided to attack with one squad deployed on either side of the road. The two tanks were to move down the road gunning their motors and firing. The support squad was to follow the tanks. It was estimated the Platoon would be ready to jump off around 0115 hours.

#### THE COUNTERATTACK (See Map E)

The Artillery Liason Officer had found himself a position in a building from which he could see beyond the edge of town and proceeded to register the 33rd Field Artillery as much by sound as by sight. (30)

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(29) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson

(30) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson

G Company Platoon moved out accompanied by the tanks on time. They had hardly started in good shape when it became apparent that the Germans wanted no part of this new force and soon began to withdraw after firing a few rounds. As they withdrew they were caught by a combination of Artillery fire from the 33rd Field Artillery and small arms from the elements of E Company still in position.

By 0200 hours the 3rd Platoon of G Company had restored the position and was tied into the 1st and 3rd Platoons of E Company. The remaining men of the 2nd Platoon of E Company that could be found were incorporated in the 1st and 3rd Platoons. (31)

H Company re-organized its 1st Platoon remanning the two lost guns that had been discovered.

#### SECOND GERMAN ATTACK

Things remained fairly quiet except for desultory exchanges of fire along E Company's front until approximately 0400 hours when another attack was launched just south of the BAVAI road. This attack was supported by Artillery direct fire and mounted by about one Company. It was pressed hard and succeeded in penetrating some of the positions of the 3rd Platoons of E and G Companies and overrunning one of H Company's guns for the second time. (32)

However, heavy mortar fire was brought down on the penetration and with terrific rifle fire on both flanks. The Germans were forced to give up their slight advantage and withdraw. By 0430 hours all was again quiet.

#### THE SURRENDER

By 0500 hours it had become quite light and the Battalion S-3 went to E Company's area to check the positions. Upon reaching the edge of town a group of Germans and Americans carrying white flags were seen approaching town on the BAVAI road.

The S-3 met them and found the Americans were members of the Regimental

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(31) Personal knowledge

(32) Personal knowledge; statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson

ammunition train who had come into town with the Battalion but had left before dark. They had run into the German Columns and had been taken prisoners on its march toward SANS LE BRUYERE. The group informed the S-3 that the German Commander wished to arrange a surrender but had been badly wounded and could not come into town himself. The S-3 directed the group to lead him to the German Commander. (33)

Before leaving he notified E Company Commander to call Battalion and tell them of his plans.

The group then proceeded for about six hundred yards out the BAVAI road to a small farm on the south side of the road. Here the group was met by a German Major who identified himself as the Regimental Surgeon and informed the Battalion S-3 that the Regimental Commander had instructed him to arrange a surrender. The Regimental Commander and his Adjutant were both in the house suffering from wounds received during the night.

The Surgeon stated that the 1st Battalion of his Regiment had few men left after the fight and that the 2nd and 3rd Battalions had by-passed to town to the north during the night. He demanded as terms of surrender he be furnished assistance in caring for his wounded as he was all but out of supplies.

Since the Geneva Convention had already committed him to these terms the Battalion S-3 accepted and returned to town with 493 German prisoners, not counting the wounded.

This night's operation resulted in the complete disorganization of an entire German Infantry Regiment and its accompanying battery of Field Artillery. Thus the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry appreciably lowered the strength that the German high Command could muster for the all important defense of the SIEGFRIED LINE.

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(33) Statement of Chief Warrant Officer Booth; personal knowledge

In all 845 of the enemy were accounted for as follows: 493 prisoners taken in the surrender, 260 wounded enemy personnel evacuated through the Battalion Aid Station and 92 enemy dead counted on the battlefield. (34)

The enemy material captured was also tremendous: six 105 MM gun-howitzers (horse drawn), over 200 horses and more than 100 wagons loaded with supplies, ammunition and equipment.

Our own casualties amounted to 15 men killed and 58 wounded. On its face this does not seem to be excessive considering the victory, however, the percentage increases when the reader recalls this was only a two rifle Company under strength Battalion. It is with this in mind that the casualty list on both sides begins to indicate the fierceness of the fighting.

During this operation Private First Class Geno Merle, a machine gunner in the 1st Platoon, Company H earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. His gun was in position just to the right of the BAVAI road. In the first attack with his assistant gunner killed he continued to fire, using swinging traverse, until the enemy flanked his position on both sides. He then slumped to the bottom of the emplacement feigning death. When the counterattack was launched he again manned his gun killing many of the retreating enemy. During the second German attack at 0400 hours he repeated the entire act. Although he was turned over several times with bayonets he succeeded in convincing the Germans he was dead. (35)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. THE BATTALION MISSION

The mission of the battalion to secure and defend the cross road of SANS LE BRUYERE appears to be a little ambitious when assigned to an under-strength Battalion, less one rifle Company, and five miles from its parent unit. This seems especially so since both the 1st and 3rd Battalions had been in contact with enemy forces in the direction of the Battalion objective.

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(34) Personal knowledge; statement of Lieutenant Colonel Williamson

(35) A-6 p. 309; personal knowledge

The objective itself would have taxed the strength of a full sized Battalion, however it probably could have accomplished the assignment with much less chance of failure.

however, on the other side of the ledger, certain risks had to be accepted. In view of the type of fighting the unit had been engaged in for the past weeks, and the moral and equipment of the enemy, the risk did not appear too great.

Nevertheless the assumption of any risk, I believe, was unnecessary considering that F Company could have been relieved by one of the six rifle Companies in BAVAI without appreciably weakening the defense of that town.

The entire Regimental plan appears to be <sup>1</sup>pregnated by an under estimation of the enemy capabilities.

## 2. ARTILLERY SUPPORT

The 32nd Field Artillery was to support the Battalion in its defense of SARS LE BRUYERE. No forward displacement was contemplated nor attempted in spite of the fact that the artillery positions were 3 to 4 miles southwest of BAVAI and the Battalion objective lay 5½ miles east of that town. This made a total distance of between 8 and 10 miles from the battery positions to the Forward Observers. Apparently no consideration was given to communications which were well known to be faulty in excess of 5 miles.

A little thought upon the part of the planners, and a request to Division would have given the battalion support from the 33rd Field Artillery which had batteries in position that could and later did fire for it.

This is another indication of complacency upon the part of all concerned.

## 3. EARLY CONDUCT OF DEFENSE

Allowing the enemy to initially approach very close to the battalion position before opening fire probably saved the day. This forced the Germans to mount their attack with the utmost haste and allowed no reconnaissance and only a minimum employment of supporting weapons. The surprise was such that he never recovered fully and quite probably resulted in his being unable to

make any use of the advantages which he later gained.

#### 4. THE ENEMY ATTACK

Although organized under extreme difficulty (in an open field under heavy fire) the German attack was well co-ordinated and pushed home with energy. It succeeded early in establishing a considerable penetration. Several enemy were eliminated within 400 yards of the battalion's north perimeter. In spite of this and the fact that the Germans had two more battalions with which to do so, no attempt was apparently made to reinforce the penetration. Considering the co-ordination of the enemy and the facility with which they mounted their attack it is hard to conceive why this was not done. Their action in this respect saved the battalion from complete defeat and gave us a victory.

#### 5. E COMPANY COMMANDER

Communication with the 2nd Platoon went out during the first stages of the German attack and although his Company CP was less than 200 yards from this position the Company Commander made no attempt to re-establish it. Nor is there any indication that he tried to find out what was happening in this sector.

This failure caused the battalion Commander a great deal of embarrassment. Had he known earlier the situation of this Platoon he most certainly would have been able to move troops to limit the penetration. As it occurred, without this knowledge, there was no way of limiting the penetration, and had the enemy re-inforced his breakthrough there would have been no possibility of mounting a counterattack.

#### 6. EMPLOYMENT OF RESERVE

Troops are prone to ex<sup>SP</sup>eragate reports rendered while engaged. This was true of the report from 1st Platoon of E Company regarding the envelopment of their left flank. Confirming the report by patrol<sup>me</sup> was definitely the thing to do, but failure to completely analyze the patrol report resulted in prematurely employing the Battalion reserve.

In view of the patrol<sup>SP</sup> report, confirmed by later developments<sup>SP</sup>, that the enemy was moving southeast of the Battalion position should have indicated that outposting the ridge would have been sufficient. This could have been done with Battalion Headquarters Company troops of which there were plenty in the CP.

Thus a great deal of time would have been saved in organizing the counterattack, and use of troops from the primary defense would not have been necessary.

#### 7. TANKS

The tanks were emplaced so deep in the position that they were unable to engage in the defense at all except in the counterattack. Thus no advantage was taken of their terrific fire power.

In view of the effect tanks had on the enemy when they were used in conjunction with the counterattack it is believed that their use on the primary positions would have prevented the penetration if not stalled the initial attack.

#### LESSONS

1. To under estimate the capabilities of the enemy in planning an operation is apt to be fatal to success.
2. The limitation in the capabilities of an organization from which organic units have been withdrawn must be considered when committing that organization to combat.
3. In planning any operation the capabilities and limitations of the equipment to be used must be considered.
4. A Commander must be constantly on the alert to capitalize on any advantage gained by his troops.
5. Every effort must be made by a Commander to rapidly re-establish communication or contact with a lower unit.
6. To prevent wasting reserves their employment must be analyzed and considered in every respect.

7. Tanks are powerful weapons either in defense or offensive and their employment must not be slighted.