

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

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "F" 376th INFANTRY  
(94th INFANTRY DIVISION), AT OCKFEN, GERMANY,  
22 - 24 FEBRUARY 1945  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: ASSAULT RIVER  
CROSSING AND THE ATTACK OF A TOWN

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph describes the combat operations of Company "F", 376th Infantry, 94th Infantry Division, during the period 22-24 February 1945, in an assault river crossing and the capture of a town.

About two months previous to this period, the German forces had launched the famous Von Rundstedt offensive in the Ardennes region, necessitating General Patton's Third Army's executing an abrupt move to the north to counter this enemy thrust. After a successful campaign, the Third Army again poised itself for movement to the east, regrouping in the manner shown on map "A". (1)

Earlier, in January, the 94th Division had been assigned to the XX Corps, which had remained disposed on the Army's south flank during the Battle of the Bulge, and had been engaged in probing the enemy defenses in the Saar-Moselle Triangle. (2). Between these two major rivers, the Saar and the Moselle, there existed a line of defensive works known as the Siegfried Switch, or the Orscholz Reigel, deriving its name from the town of Orscholz, situated in the middle of the defense band. The main Siegfried Line position was located on the eastern side of the Saar, at right angles to the Switch Line.

During the month of January, the 94th Division had been engaged in limited objective attacks of not more than battalion-

(1) A-6, P. 41, G-3 Sec.; (2) A-1, P. 82.

reinforced strength, to preclude the enemy's moving his units then in the vicinity to reinforce the large scale German counter-offensive in the Ardennes. (3). These attacks were extremely costly in personnel, and in only a few instances were the advances commensurate with the loss of manpower. *end*

However, on the 19th of February, XX Corps launched an attack with the mission of clearing the Saar-Moselle Triangle, and obtaining bridgeheads over the Saar River. The 26th Infantry Division and the 3rd Cavalry Group, already occupying bridgeheads across the river near Saarlautern, were to aggressively defend, while the 94th Infantry Division and the 10th Armored Division, then in Corps reserve, were to clear the triangle and prepare to continue the attack to the east after crossing the Saar. (4)

The Corps plan depended on a breach of the Switch Line defenses by foot troops, and then the commitment of the armor to exploit the breakthrough. Field Order No. 16, dated 19 February, stated that the 94th Division would prepare to attach one Regimental Combat Team to the 10th Armored Division, and to pass the armor through the infantry troops then on line in the assigned sectors after a suitable breach had been made. It appeared evident that the 376th RCT would be designated for this duty, since it was the left-most regiment in the 94th zone, and since the terrain almost dictated the employment of armor in the left portion of the triangle. It would be well at this juncture to analyze the ground over which the operation was planned and which affected both Infantry and Armored Divisions. (See Map B).

(3) A-1, P. 84; (4) FO 16, XX Corps.

The high terrain within the triangle proper runs generally north, and divides the sector into two sections, approximately equal in area. Because of the relative elevation of this Munzinger Ridge, it commanded terrain both to the east and west. Naturally both the Moselle and Saar Rivers may be termed as critical terrain features, since both formed natural barriers to movement, and are well adapted to enemy defensive operations. East of the Saar River, and at only a short distance from the river, the ground rises steeply, and forms another north-south ridge, in reality the first high ground of the Hunsruck mountain range, which extends east and north-east. Throughout the Triangle and the Saar Valley, streamlines lace the ground and in many instances present rugged terrain. However, most of the streams are fordable by foot troops, although their often steep banks prohibit vehicular movement.

(5).

Observation throughout the sector is excellent; by the choosing of double observation posts widely separated, a large portion of any particular sub-area can be scanned. Air observation posts are especially effective in this terrain, although concealment is afforded by the woods. About 1/3 of the Triangle itself and even more of the eastern half of the Saar Valley, is covered with woods. Typical of German forests, these wood masses are kept clear of underbrush, offering excellent maneuverability within the forests. Military cover is provided by terrain faults especially on the eastern half of the Triangle and in even more profusion on the eastern side of the Saar.

(5) Annex 1, XX Corps plan for reduction of Triangle, 30 Dec 44.

Because of the ground conformation, obstacles to movement are likewise profuse, generally characterized by steep banks and deep narrow valleys. On the western half of the Triangle, armor can be well employed, but movement for heavy vehicles is limited greatly on the eastern side of the Munzinger Ridge. The road network is excellent, despite its being a result of means of travel for rural inhabitants between the many towns in this section of Germany. The main arterial highway runs northeastward from Munzinger and Kirf to Saarburg, thence in the direction of the confluence of the Saar and Moselle Rivers, and slightly farther northeast to the communication center of Trier, the oldest city in Germany. (6)

Great variations in ground elevations are evident, and on a great many of these steep banks the inhabitants have planted vineyards and hop groves which are difficult for traverse by infantry; the soil in these "fields" is not soil in the strictest sense, but instead a rather deep layer of shale-like substance which is slippery and sharp. (7) *ew*

The coordinated Corps attack jumped off at 0400 19 February; (See Map C) artillery support was withheld until the very hour that the foot troops crossed their lines of departure, in order to obtain surprise. By close and detailed coordination by artillery commanders, a most effective fire plan was devised. Initial targets were known enemy CP's; the fire then jumped to hostile artillery batteries, thence to an isolation of the battlefield. (8). Attacking infantry troops encountered only slight resistance from the 256 VG Division and 416 Infantry

(6) A-1, P. 81; (7) Personal knowledge; (8) A-2, P. 65.

Division, and the attack progressed smoothly and efficiently. At this time it would be well to bring out the point that during the night of 17-18 February, all of the assault companies of the 376th Infantry had been assigned replacements (or "reinforcements", as they were then called), reassigned from service troops in the Communication Zone. (9). Co. F, for example, received some 40-50, and the men of the company were non-plussed to discover that in some instances these radar-repair technicians and salvage depot troops did not know how to load the M-1 rifles with which they had been armed. Despite these difficulties and without the great benefit derived from working as a team, the troops did a creditable task.

Upon resuming the attack at 0700 20 February, the 376th RCT was attached to the 10th Armored Division, and since this monograph will deal with a company in that regiment, no further mention will be made of the action of the remainder of the 94th Division. (10). Although attached to the armored division, the assault troops of the 376th Infantry had little contact with the spearheads of the armor. In the zone of action of the 2d Battalion, the first and last contact with armor until the infantry had crossed the Saar was made in the town of Kreuzwiler, on the morning of the 20th when a column of tanks, reconnaissance vehicles and command vehicles clattered through the village streets. Following in the wake of this column, the battalion deployed with three companies abreast, sweeping the zone along the east bank of the Moselle, meeting only slight and isolated resistance. As far as Co. F was concerned, this was a mop-up operation conducted in the most gentlemanly manner. Upon

(9) Personal knowledge; (10) A-1, P. 265.

reaching the line as far north as Wincheringen, the battalion was consolidated, and moved northeastward to Mannebach, still on foot. Arriving there in the small hours of the morning of the 21st, the company was billeted in stone-cold houses and bedded down. It seemed evident at this time that the regiment would be employed to cross the Saar, although this plan was not yet voiced by authority.

Later on the 21st, there was little doubt left that such would be accomplished. The order from the battalion commander specified that the regiment would begin crossing at 0400 on 22 February and that the 2d Battalion would cross after the 1st and 3rd, capture the town of Ockfen, and be prepared to defend until pinched out by the 1st and 3rd Battalions converging on the regimental objective farther to the east. (See Map D) (11). From a glance at the map then in the hands of unit commanders, it was most evident that the other two battalions would of necessity have to seize their objectives before other troops could be expected to seize the town, nestled between two overtowering ridges. During daylight of the 21st, as many reconnaissances as possible were made from the observation post near Ayl, and the company alerted to move from Mannebach to Ayl during the early night of 21-22 February. Platoon leaders (One officer and three NCO's) were oriented at the observation post, but due to the conformation of the ground, very little of Ockfen could be seen.

The remainder of the 21st was spent in reorganizing the company, and in the issuing of what clothing and supplies were available, as well as equipping every man with ammunition and

(11) A-7, P. 140.

grenades. As much rest as possible was given the members of the company, since it appeared that the crossing of the 2d Battalion would immediately follow the other two battalions who were to paddle across the river during the blackest hours of the 22d.

During that night, too, the supporting non-divisional engineers encountered no little trouble in obtaining assault boats and transporting them to the crossing site of the 376th Infantry. At 0400, no boats were available, and a necessary delay was occasioned in obtaining more --- from whence, no one appeared to know. Ten hours later, sufficient boats were on hand to begin the 1st Battalion crossing, but in the broad daylight of the 23d, and despite the fog-eil smoke screen manufactured on the river bank by the 81st Chemical Company (SG), the assault was beleaguered by artillery and mortar fire from the enemy side of the river. Balmy spring zephyrs whisked away the artificial fog bank, and enemy fire knocked out several of the generators; with now an unimpeded view of the crossing site from the enemy observation posts, more accurate fire rained down --- the few available boats were destroyed, and many casualties inflicted on the 1st Battalion. (12). This attempt was abandoned until more river crossing equipment could be delivered. At about 2300 the assault plan was again put in action, and the 1st and 3rd Battalions traversed the river and scaled the far banks, encountering rather heavy opposition from the pillboxes of the Siegfried Line. (13). By working tediously and faithfully, these units succeeded to some degree in occupying their initial objectives.

(12) A-7, P. 140; (13) A-1, P. 343.

From the town of Ayl, the fighting on the slopes of the enemy's shore sounded far away, but from about 0200, the sound appeared less and less distant, as the companies moved to the crossing site. Co. F was in the lead, followed by Co. E. Both companies were in a column of platoons to move down the long smooth slope to the river; at some 600-800 yards from the bank, the slope leveled off in flat unbroken terrain. Guides had been posted along the route in order that the companies would reach the bank in the most expeditious manner, but in spite of these precautions, the move was slow, and necessitated the maximum of control in the utter darkness. Nearing the shore, boat teams were formed, and a general plan to disperse the troops was undertaken so that no remunerative target would be given the enemy. After seeing that the first platoon was loaded and shoved off on the river, the company command group crossed, immediately followed by the weapons platoon, then the 2d, and finally the 3rd. Sporadic mortar fire at this time inflicted several casualties on Co. E, but Co. F was not affected. By 0300 most of the battalion had crossed, and the companies had been organized sufficiently to move toward Ockfen. (See Map E). With Co. F leading in a close column through the natural fog and blackness, the troops marched rather uncertainly southward along the road toward the underpass through which the road to the town led. (14)

When the underpass was reached, the company commander of Co. F, then near the head of the column, sent several men from the leading platoon forward to search for anti-personnel mines

(14) Personal knowledge.

and wire entanglements, for this was an ideal place for these obstacles. The only item encountered at the underpass was a wagon without horse, squarely across the road and trail junction beyond the tunnel. This rather odd piece of equipment was thoroughly examined for booby traps and demolitions, but none were found. From an examination of the map at this point, it will immediately appear to the tactician that the underpass, being virtually the only direct approach to the town and the Ockfen Valley, could easily have been destroyed or blocked, offering a rather formidable barrier to free movement. However, be things as they were, it was a simple matter indeed to lead the column up the trail toward the town. Some eighty to one hundred yards up this lane was located the town mill, and it was here that the first enemy troops were met. No shots were fired, however, because of the dense fog and darkness. The column was halted here for some time while patrols were sent to reconnoiter the two buildings, one of which had been indicated on the overprinted map furnished to the companies, as an enemy pillbox. Not all of these were pillboxes however; some were merely civilian houses, and some were actually non-existent. While these patrols were out, the entire battalion closed up in a tight column, with heavy weapons crews almost intermingling with the two forward rifle companies.

At the same time, the first light of day appeared, suffused through the fog and mists, and an ingrained urge in each individual caused him to seek whatever cover and concealment was possible in these close quarters. Fortunately no enemy fire was received, probably because the enemy forces were concentrating what little strength they had left on the hills on

either side of the Ockfen Valley. Two prisoners were taken near the mill buildings, but were unable, in a hasty interrogation, to furnish any information about the Germans to the immediate front. Indeed, the enemy situation was confused, to say the least.

Many of the fortresses on the east side of the river (See Map D) were being manned by remnants of Fortress Battalions, in the main composed of old men and a heterogeneous collection of artillery batteries, equipped with Russian guns and some German howitzers. Of the two infantry divisions encountered by the 94th Division in the Triangle proper, there remained only a few groups of men and their exact locations not clear: Of the 416 Infantry Division (reported on 19 February as having 3000-4000 troops), the 712 Regiment was scattered and consisted of about 60 men; the 713 Regiment had been resolved into two 40-man platoons; and the 714 Regiment into a 30-man Kampfgruppe. The 256 VG Division (also of 4000 men on the 19th) had suffered almost as heavily: Each of the regiments, the 456, the 476, and the 481, had only enough survivors to combine into 100-man groups. The artillery of these beaten divisions was of low combat efficiency, and consisted of about 2/3 of their weapons, and conceivably was much lacking in personnel. (15). How difficult it must have been to attempt any sort of coordinated defense with these straggling clumps of soldiers!

Although the fog hanging in the Ockfen Valley did not clear enough to be able to see the town itself from the mill, Co. F resumed its attack in a column of platoons which converged with leading elements of Co. E at the first few build-

(15) A-8.

ings on the near edge of Ockfen. (See Map E). Immediately behind the leading platoon, the company commander of Co. F entered the nearest house just in time to observe several tanks supported by 150 infantrymen moving down the village streets. (16). Typical of German communities, Ockfen had no recognizable system of blocks, and observation was thus almost impossible. As the tanks drew closer, it seemed advisable that the rest of the company, and the rest of the battalion, be advised not to project themselves into the very face of this sudden counterattack; upon the recommendation of company commander of Co. F, the battalion commander ordered that troops presently in the town be withdrawn. The two platoons withdrew with much haste. Due to the lack of a well-planned scheme of retrograde movement, and to the demoralizing effect of the sudden appearance of enemy armor, the impetus of the withdrawal carried several men of both companies all the way back across the Saar. Obviously these men were lost to the companies for several hours.

During the rest of the morning, and the very early part of the afternoon of the 23d, reorganization was effected on the bluff to the northeast of the mill, where further visual reconnaissance of the town could be made. In a rather informal conference in a communication trench, the battalion commander stated that if possible, he would procure an artillery concentration of some strength, and the town could then be taken with little effort and few casualties. His request met with such whole hearted approval both from Regimental Headquarters and Division Headquarters of the 10th

(16) A-6, P. CLXXI, G-2 Sec.

Armored Division, that he was promised a heavy volume of fire. It must be borne in mind at this time that the crossing of the armor had been delayed beyond the normal expectations, and a rapid development of the bridgehead was most desirable. Through command coordination with XX Corps Artillery, the battalion was promised a concentration from eight field artillery battalions, and the regimental Cannon Company. With a designated time of 1400, the initial salvo for this "Time On Target" operation would fall on the town, and the fire would continue for fifteen minutes. (17). By a hasty fragmentary order, Co. F was designated to assault on the left of the main street of the town, and Co. E on the right. The battalion Heavy Weapons Company would support the advance with mortar fire sealing off the town from its eastern exits, and with machine guns firing overhead fire from the overwatching hillside. The plan moreover called for the two assault companies to advance closely under the artillery fire, entering the town at the time the artillery lifted, clear the town with dispatch, and set up a perimeter defense. Co. G at the same time was to seize a large winery on the bluff north of Ockfen, and protect the battalion from attack from that direction.

A few seconds before 1400, the troops waiting expectantly in the trenches heard the dull thump of the 155 mm guns far to the rear, then the 8 inch howitzers, the 155 howitzers, the 105 howitzers, and finally the close 81 mm mortars of Co. H. (18). The weird whispering of the shells through the

(17) Personal knowledge; (18) A-7, P. 150.

air was eerie enough, but when all the shells hit Ockfen at precisely the same moment, it appeared to be pure magic, for the roofs of buildings sprang into the air, dust clouds rose in billows, and there was a tremendous roar. In the occasional few seconds of comparative silence, the chattering of Co. H's machine guns seemed insignificant, but all the troops realized that this close fire was further neutralizing the target. After some three or four minutes of this rampage staged by the artillery, the battalion commander felt that further expenditure of ammunition would be an anticlimax; after a hasty conversation over the battalion radio, he notified the two rifle companies that the preparation would last only ten minutes. (19).

About 1409 the company commanders of E and F Companies gave the forward signal, and the troops spilled out of the trenches, and trotted toward Ockfen. By the time the troops came to within 200 yards of the town, the fire had lifted, and with shouting and wheeping, the men streamed into the village. Despite the fact that many of the men in each of the companies were not well-trained or seasoned soldiers, the clearing of the village was efficient and rapid. Non-commissioned officers played an extremely effective part in this attack; the leading few men of the leading platoon cleared the first house they came to, the remainder of the squad the second, and so on down the line, until finally the leading element of the company was the last squad in the third platoon. But by this time the NCO's had gathered up the men first committed and placed

(19) Personal knowledge.

them back into the column. The weapons platoon had meanwhile taken up initial positions on the perimeter of the western part of the company sector, and were displacing as rapidly as necessary while the riflemen moved on. Especially noteworthy in this action was the fact that the men, once having entered a house, did not linger --- a quick search following liberal use of grenades, and the building was determined clear. The limited amount of practice in this type of action received by the company in the attack upon Kreuzwiler on 19 February added in great measure to the expeditious manner in which the troops acted.

So rapidly was the village overrun, that the capture of Ockfen was completed by 1500, and initial disposition of men around the eastern and northeastern perimeter was begun. By 1630, the company outpost line had been established. The artillery casemate indicated on Map "E" was found to be unoccupied, and this mass of reinforced concrete was used as an outpost, upon which the defenses of Co. E were tied in. Positions were further consolidated and improved during the remainder of the daylight hours, and the expected counter-attack by the enemy was not received, although much conjecture was offered as to the whereabouts of the tanks which had forced the leading elements from Ockfen earlier in the day.

For the night of the 23d, the company maintained its outposts in limited strength, the remainder of the men being billeted in houses immediately in rear of their prepared defensive positions to be readily available lest the enemy launch a counteroffensive. This action was not undertaken, however, and the troops spent a quiet night. During the morning of the

24th, the regimental commander made plans for continuing the attack toward the regimental objective by the 1st and 3rd battalions; the 2d battalion was to remain in its present locality, reverting to regimental reserve when the other two assault elements of the 376th Infantry moved out.

Early in the afternoon of the 24th, Co. F was ordered to abandon its perimeter defense, and move to the high ridge to the north of Ockfen, (See Map F) there to protect the valley and also to furnish an overwatching position on the town of Schoden, which was to be attacked by Co. B, 61st Armored Infantry Battalion, 10th Armored Division on the 25th. (20). The attack upon Schoden was designed to include the numerous pillboxes south of the town, which had maintained observation on the crossing site (coincidentally, the bridge site), and had held up bridging operations completely. By 2400 on the 24th, Co. F was in position on the military crest of the hill, facing to the north; the long and tortuous trek up from Ockfen, along the scaly side of the bluff, had been difficult for the men, and everyone was fatigued. Not too much so, however, to prevent the digging of slit trenches and the tying in with Co. E on the right. From this vantage point, it would have been possible to observe the progress of the forthcoming battle in Schoden, and the men were looking forward to it with expectancy.

Further accounts of the actions of Co. F in the ensuing engagements, however, are beyond the scope of this monograph, and will not be included..

In two days action, then, the company as part of a battalion had assaulted and crossed a major barrier to further

(20) Personal knowledge.

eastward movement of the American forces, forced a bridgehead of some fifteen hundred yards depth, and were prepared to further support the action necessary toward the establishment of a bridge by which the spearheads of armor might lunge more deeply into the heart of the Third Reich. It must be borne in mind that even this small unit felt the pressure of the waiting tanks behind it, and fully realized that the rapid seizure of a suitable area would result in the prompt commitment of a mobile striking force of great weight. However, to the individual on the ground, each engagement with the enemy forces seems of major consequence. The man with the rifle feels entirely alone in the face of flying lead. The "big picture" is far removed from a rifleman in an attack, and what appears to be a Herculean task to him, seems of little consequence to the "planner" behind the front line.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In the final analysis of this operation, it becomes apparent that Co. F at no time acted as a single integral unit, but rather as a component of the infantry tactical unit, the battalion. The action described above is in no way peculiar compared to the operations of any other rifle company in any other division. Certain phases of the action, though, are worthy of analysis and criticism.

By the coordinated attack of the 94th Division on 19 February, enemy prepared defenses were breached sufficiently to allow the 10th Armored Division to rapidly exploit the original breakthrough. The use of armor at this time capitalized on its inherent shock action, fire power, and mobility. An earlier commitment of this type of unit would probably

have resulted in great losses of vehicles and would not have taken advantage of the traits of armor which are not well adapted to attacking fortified positions without infantry support in some strength. Once the armor had been committed, it rolled rapidly through the area, probably preventing to some degree the enemy's withdrawal across the Saar and their manning of the fortifications of the Siegfried Line.

After reaching the near bank of the Saar, a definite delay was occasioned by the lack of river crossing equipment. Although no mention in reference material was made of the reasons for this error in planning, it would appear that the fault lay in the higher echelon. There is no way to tell, of course, what would have been the result had the assault boats been present at the ordered time for the crossing, but it is without doubt a doctrine which must be continually kept in mind by coordinating staff officers and higher commanders, that a subordinate unit will be unable to execute a mission of this nature without being furnished adequate specialized equipment. The delay of the American forces in being in a position to cross the river after the rapid drive through the Triangle without doubt offered the defenders additional time to regroup their shattered forces.

From observation posts on the friendly side of the river prior to the crossing, little could be seen of Ockfen, the initial objective of the 2d Battalion. Maps had been distributed to all units which showed the enemy fortifications; but at the company level, and even the battalion, plans for mutual support were difficult to make. Aerial photographs of this sector would have been of great value, but none were

received. Even a low angle oblique taken from a liaison or artillery observation plane would have been of benefit. Sufficient time was furnished the 2d Battalion to perfect a coordinated plan, but in view of the fact that so little was known of the enemy side of the river, and since it was contemplated that the 1st and 3rd Battalions would have sealed off the Ockfen vicinity, proviso plans were not made. It is believed that this was a wise decision, in order to maintain simplicity, rather than having company commanders faced with a multitude of courses of actions depending upon the development of the situation.

The crossing of the Saar by the 376th Infantry on the night of 22-23 February was accomplished by all three battalions, rather than the customary "two up and one back". This plan, under the circumstances, was sound. The 10th Armored Division required a bridge site, it desired it without delay, and little reason could be seen for withholding a reserve. The enemy, moreover, was large immobilized in his pillboxes, and was, according to intelligence estimates, unable to launch an effective counterattack in a strength requiring the committing of a battalion-sized unit in retaliation. Furthermore, the terrain dictated the employment of all three battalions, since the natural boundaries and terrain features were of major importance and could not be seized by a lesser force.

In this regard, the crossing of the 2d Battalion and the capture of Ockfen nestled between two dominating terrain features not yet fully organized posed a difficult maneuver. An excellent avenue of approach for the enemy was afforded

into a sector not sealed off from attack. However, because of the pressure exerted from the rear by the armor, it behooved the rapid expansion of the bridgehead. The Ockfen Valley might well have fallen had the flanking bluffs been seized, but this operation would have required more time, and the fortresses within the sector would have had to be neutralized before bridging operations could be commenced. The decision reached to have the second battalion attack immediately after the 1st and 3d was, therefore, almost mandatory.

The advance of Companies E and F on Ockfen itself on the morning of the 23d was made under conditions of extremely limited observation, and it is believed that the use of patrols and small advance parties should have been made in order to ascertain the direction of attack, and to further develop the situation. Despite the fact that the enemy's employment of armored vehicles was thought to be remote, anti-vehicular weapons should have been provided the leading echelon of each company. It was clearly understood that armor is a vulnerable target in built-up areas, and that the rocket launcher itself is a valuable weapon in village fighting. The error in this case rested squarely with the company commander.

Immediately preceding the assault on the village, the eight-battalion artillery preparation undoubtedly did an effective job toward making the capture of the town easy and rapid. The morale of the attacking forces was almost visibly raised, and the artillery fire created havoc among the defenders. Those men of the German forces not killed were dazed and bereft of the will to fight. Upward of 200 prisoners were

taken, 71 of which were captured by a six-man squad from Co. E. (21)

The excellent work done by non-commissioned officers in directing the operations of their squads is indicative of good training, and good leadership. Centralized control in town fighting is extremely difficult at best; in this type of action the squad leader must take the initiative and retain it by quick decisions and prompt employment of his men.

The actions of Company F, 376th Infantry during this short three day period were not significant by themselves. However, they typified the teamwork that in any campaign must be present in order to effect a successful operation. Infantry fighting is based on this precept. As far as the general bridgehead action was concerned, Reichsmarschall Goering stated after his capture:

"When the first break in the Siegfried Line was made near Aachen, Der Fuhrer was very irritated. After that came the breakthrough near Trier, and that was wholly incomprehensible. We did not believe that these fortifications could be penetrated. The breakthrough near Trier was particularly depressing. That breakthrough and the capture of the Remagen bridge were two great catastrophies for the German cause." (22)

#### LESSONS

A small unit action is usually filled with points of troop leadership, administrative details, and background training that are valuable to note. In this particular operation, there are several which should be considered, for the action from 22-24 February will be typical in ground

(21) A-1, P. 347; (22) A-1, P. 363.

combat in the future, unless unforeseen progress is made in the waging of war. Some of the particular lessons are:

1. Armor, in penetrating prepared defenses, must have infantry support in some strength. In order to capitalize on the mobility, shock action, and fired power inherent in an armored unit, the unit must not be allowed to engage in close, immobilized warfare.

2. When a specialized operation is ordered for an infantry unit, sufficient specialized equipment must be made available to it to properly perform its mission. It is conversely an error to expect such a unit to accomplish a specialized mission without properly providing it with adequate equipment.

3. Where observation posts do not permit a comprehensive visual reconnaissance in a combination river crossing-assault of a town, aerial photos, town plans, or reports from friendly patrols are extremely valuable to commanders. Where none of these are available, progress will be slow, and opportunities for enemy counteraction increased.

4. Only under exceptional circumstances where rapidity of action is desired, and where the enemy situation has been well analysed, is it appropriate to attack a position subject to observation and fire from both flanks. In the attack on Ockfen, the 2d Battalion was actually creating a salient into an enemy avenue of approach, which might well have been a costly venture.

5. The use of reconnaissance patrols to probe an unobservable objective, while in itself consuming time, will probably save time in the long run, and allow for plans to be made for a concerted and well-aimed effort.

6. A retrograde movement must be planned in order to preserve control, even at as low a level of command as the rifle company. A disjointed withdrawal not only breaks contact, but also results in considerable reorganization being necessary to reconstitute the company.

7. By proper conversion of cultural features, barriers to attack may be quickly made and easily defended.

8. In attacking buildings under limited observation conditions, anti-vehicular weapons such as rocket launchers should accompany the leading echelon.

9. A "Time On Target" artillery preparation is especially effective on enemy defenses. This effect is further heightened by a prompt assault by infantry immediately as the fire is lifted. As well as dazing the defenders, the preparation increases the morale and feeling of confidence of the attackers.

10. In town fighting, leadership and control should be decentralized down to squad leaders and assistant squad leaders. Training or previous experience in this sort of action is especially desirable.

11. The operations of a rifle company should be keyed to comprise part of the whole, rather than separate and distinct small unit actions. The basic infantry tactical unit should remain the battalion, embodying maneuverable subordinate units and organic supporting weapons.