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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
(1ST U. S. INFANTRY DIVISION) AT DOM BUTGENBACH, BELGIUM
18 - 21 DECEMBER 1944
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION, REINFORCED, IN A
REVERSE SLOPE DEFENSE OF HILLY OPEN TERRAIN AGAINST COORDINATED
INFANTRY - TANK ATTACKS

Major Thomas J. Gendron
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st United States Infantry Division in the defense of the northern hinge of the Bulge at DOM BUTGENBACH, BELGIUM, 18 - 21 December 1944, during the initial phase of the German counteroffensive in the ARDENNES.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events which led up to this action.

On 6 June 1944 the UNITED STATES First and the BRITISH Second Army successfully invaded Western Europe and secured a bridgehead in NORMANDY, FRANCE. (1) (See Map A) After a period of consolidation and build up, a breakthrough was accomplished in the vicinity of ST LO in the latter part of July. Infantry and armored divisions of 12th Army Group poured through the shattered German Forces. (2)

Following the ST LO breakthrough, 21st Army Group made strong frontal attacks to the south. (3) These attacks in conjunction with a turning movement to the east by US First Army, compressed the German Seventh Army into a pocket in the vicinity of FAUSAISE and ARGENTAN in mid August, resulting in practical annihilation of the German Seventh Army. Thus a way was opened for a pursuit of the defeated enemy by 12th and 21st Army Groups across Northern France and Belgium to the German Border. (4)

- (1) A-1, p. 65
- (2) A-10, p. IX
- (3) A-15, p. 132
- (4) A-15, pp. 143-145

Of the forces involved, First US Army made the furthest gains, crossing the German Border south of AACHEN on 12 September. Here its advance was abruptly due primarily to lack of adequate logistical support owing to over extension of its supply lines. (5)

Following an improvement in the logistical situation, First Army resumed its attacks deeper into Germany resulting in the capture of AACHEN on 21 October. (6) First Army then massed its forces in the north to clear the HURTGEN FOREST and close on the ROER RIVER. (7) Severe fighting took place until 11 December, when elements of First Army broke out of the HURTGEN FOREST and halted their advance on the east bank of the ROER RIVER. (8)

First Army then made preparations for a continuation of its advance to capture the ROER RIVER Dams south of DUREN, in preparation for a crossing of the ROER RIVER and a rapid thrust to COLOGNE and the RHINE. (9)

(See Map B)

On 13 December, First Army launched its attack to seize the ROER RIVER Dams with three Corps abreast. VII Corps on the north attacked to seize limited objectives near LAMMERSDORF, GERMANY. V Corps, in the center, making the main effort of First Army, attacked to seize the important ROER RIVER. VIII Corps on the south, holding a considerably extended frontage with three infantry divisions was assigned a blocking role protecting the Army's right flank. (10)

By noon of the 13th, advances up to 3,000 yards had been made on the V Corps front against light resistance. On 14 and 15 December resistance stiffened, resulting in little progress and an enemy counterattack was repulsed in front of LAMMERSDORF. (11)

- (5) A-15, p. 176
- (6) A-2, p. 61
- (7) A-2, p. 67
- (8) A-2, p. 88
- (9) A-2, p. 95
- (10) A-2, pp. 95- ; A-14, p. 55
- (11) A-2, p. 98

On 16 December heavy enemy attacks on the southern half of the First Army front heralded the opening of the ARDENNES Campaign.

The 1st US Infantry Division, with elements of the 29th Infantry Division attached, assaulted OMAHA BEACH near ST LAURENT SUR MER as part of V Corps, First Army and on 13 June captured CAUMONT. (12) A month later the Division was relieved at CAUMONT and, as part of VII Corps, First Army, attacked through the ST LO Breakthrough. The division first attacked south toward AVRANCHES and then northeast toward FALAISE where it assisted in closing the ARGENTAN - FALAISE POCKET on 19 August, resulting in virtual destruction of the Seventh German Army. (13) From there the 1st Division swiftly moved east, crossed the SEINE RIVER south of PARIS. It then attacked northeast to the vicinity of MONS, BELGIUM, where in five days fighting, 3 - 8 September, it annihilated a German Corps of five divisions attempting to escape from the pocket caused by the rapid advance of First Army. (14)

On 21 October 1944 the 1st Division captured AACHEN, GERMANY and on 7 December completed a determined drive through the HURTGEN FOREST to reach the ROER RIVER as part of VII Corps, First Army. (15) The division, having suffered heavy casualties in this drive, was subsequently relieved and retired to a rehabilitation area in the vicinity of EUFEN, BELGIUM. On 16 December it was alerted for employment in the ARDENNES.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The rough wooded tableland of the ARDENNES in eastern BELGIUM and

- (12) A-1, p. 72; Personal knowledge
- (13) A-3, pp. 221, 222
- (14) A-2, p. 34
- (15) A-2, p. 61; Personal knowledge

northern LUXEMBOURG is broken by numerous small streams which become serious obstacles during periods of heavy rain or thaw. (16) (See Map B)

The principal ridge line runs from BASTOGNE northeast through ST. VITH, with the north end through the village of LOSHEIM. Parallel to this ridge, and extending from STAVELOT to beyond MONSCHAU is another section of high ground called the HOHE VENN. To the east of this hill mass, EISENBORN Ridge crosses the approach to MALMEDY from the east. (See Map C) About one third of the ARDENNES area is wooded. The terrain is favorable for armored employment near ST VITH and BASTOGNE but poor in the forest and marshes in western portion of the ARDENNES Area.

The ARDENNES contains a fair primary but poor secondary road system, making control of the limited roads a prerequisite to either successful attack or defense. Because of the rough terrain the key centers of the road net assumed great importance. ST VITH is the center of the road net south of the HOHE VENN. The highway along the ridge from WILTZ through ST VITH and MALMEDY to AACHEN was the principal lateral road for combat units in the line. (17)

Winter had arrived on the Western Front. In the ARDENNES particularly, the winter months are severe; and the expected heavy snow would make infantry maneuver difficult and would seriously limit tank movement. A partial thaw which set in at the beginning of the counteroffensive created cloud conditions which nullified the Allied air efforts, but made it very muddy for the movement of German armor. Later the weather cleared and the ground froze hard, making the going better for armor and also for the Allied Air Forces. (18)

"The broad plan of the enemy was to strike toward the MEUSE RIVER and on to BRUSSELS and ANTWERP with the Sixth SS Panzer Army on the north

- (16) A-5, p. 17
- (17) A-5, p. 17
- (18) A-5, p. 17

driving to LIEGE and the Fifth Panzer Army on the south thrusting toward NAMUR." (19) (See Map B) The area of attack was a 60 mile front between ECHTERNACH, LUXEMBOURG, and ROTGEN, GERMANY.

"The initial mission of Sixth SS Panzer Army was to attack rapidly west on a narrow front to seize MALMEDY. I SS Panzer Corps, with the 1st SS Panzer Division leading, followed by the 3d Parachute Division, the 12th Volksgrenadier Division, and the 12th SS Panzer Division, was to make the main effort for the Sixth SS Panzer Army. II SS Panzer Corps was held in rear of I Panzer Corps to exploit the breakthrough and swing north on the east flank of SS Panzer Corps along the Axis MALMEDY - EUPEN." (20)

"To the south Fifth Panzer Army was to attack on a broad front with plans to advance northwest by way of ST. VITH, then due west by way of HOUFFALIZE and BASTOGNE." (21)

In conjunction with the attacks of Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies, the SKORZENY Task Force, comprising about 2,000 men organized into a panzer brigade and a picked group of 150 English speaking commandos, was given the two-fold mission of seizing undamaged at least two MEUSE Bridges and creating confusion and loss of control in the American rear. The Task Force, partially equipped with American vehicles, was to accompany the mass of armor and, splitting into small groups was to attempt to infiltrate to the MEUSE at night. The commandos were provided with American uniforms and vehicles and were to slip through the line and give false directions, cut communication, and generally disrupt control. (22)

The enemy's attack was expertly planned and carefully disguised. He picked unlikely terrain and a thinly held front. He waited for weather favorable to his attack (i.e., limited visibility to reduce the effectiveness of Allied air superiority) and for the first week his operations

(19) A-2, p. 103; A-4, p. 9

(20) A-2, pp. 103-104

(21) A-3, p. 104

(22) A-5, p. 15

were concealed in fog. He built up enough supplies to catapult the initial momentum. Furthermore, beyond the normal means at his command, he used every deception and surprise element he could conceive, labelling these measures Operation Greif. (23)

Detailed intelligence reports and estimates kept track of the American situation in the avenue of the proposed attack and it was plain that the one imponderable in the German planning was the mobility of the American Forces which could be made available to block the drive. Operation Greif had the mission of balancing this factor. Some 700 paratroopers would drop behind Allied lines to seize the important road junctions between EUPEN and MALMEDY and block any American attempts to reinforce the breakthrough area. (24)

By the night of 15 - 16 December the enemy assault divisions had closed into final assembly areas, the bulk of his artillery was in position, and reserve divisions were enroute. (25)

The enemy attack was initiated on the northern portion of the broad front held by VIII Corps and was supported by a heavy schedule of well coordinated artillery fire, commencing at 0530 hours. Beginning at 0800 hours the enemy's long range artillery concentrated on key rear installations at ROTGEN, EUPEN, MALMEDY, VERVIERS and ST. VITH. (26)

Things went wrong from the start in the northern sector. On the night of 16 - 17 December, some 700 paratroopers were dropped in the general area of the MALMEDY - EUPEN Woods. As established from prisoners of war they were members of a special unit, led by Colonel Von Der Heydte, who were grouped together from various parachute divisions on a volunteer basis. In spite of distinguished leadership, their plan to

- (23) A-4, p. 9
- (24) A-4, p. 10
- (25) A-5, p. 16
- (26) A-2, p. 103; A-4, p. 9

seize the vital crossroads between EUPEN and MALMEDY failed. None of the paratroopers had been told of the mission, other than the statement that further instructions would be issued on landing. A cross-wind and bad briefing of the JU-52 pilots scattered the units and their weapons and equipment over a wide area. Much equipment and radios were broken or lost during the fall and reorganization was never accomplished. To add to the enemy's misfortunes, his attack in the north around BULLINGEN was slow in starting and on 17 December, his attack on MONSCHAU was turned back by American artillery.

Further to the south, the 1st SS Panzer Division successfully reached the outskirts of MALMEDY. (27)

On 16 December, First Army reacted promptly to protect the vital road network leading to the vast Army supply points in the vicinity of LIEGE and VERVIERS. The 1st, 9th, and 30th Infantry Division, the 82d Airborne Division, 5th Armored Division, and elements of the 3d Armored Division were quickly assigned to V Corps and moved in rapidly, extending the front of the Corps from BUTGENBACH through MALMEDY, STAVELOT and LEGLAISE to the vicinity of WERBOMONT. (28) (See Map C)

The Germans succeeded in capturing BULLINGEN late in the afternoon of 17 December and pushed patrols toward BUTGENBACH but failed to take advantage of the fact that American defenses in that area were still somewhat fluid. (29)

DISPOSITION OF THE 26TH INFANTRY

At 0300 hours, 17 December, the 26th Infantry was ordered to CAMP EISENBORN, on the northern flank of the breakthrough, to contain the enemy's drive and prevent it from spreading north. (30) The first elements of the 26th Infantry reached CAMP EISENBORN at 0700 hours, 17 December and were placed under 99th Division control until 18 December when the

(27) A-3, pp. 320-321; A-14, p. 55

(28) A-5, pp. 17-18; A-14, p. 55

(29) Personal knowledge

(30) A-4, p. 11

regiment reverted to 1st Division control. Something of a race then developed between the 26th Infantry and the 12th SS Panzer Division for the occupation of BUTGENBACH, which was the next town on the projected northern route of the enemy. (31)

The 26th Infantry occupied BUTGENBACH at 1400 hours at which time the 2d and 3d Battalions were ordered to continue the attack to the south-east and seize the high ground west and southwest of BULLINGEN. This was accomplished at 1540 hours. The 1st Battalion was then ordered to secure the town of BUTGENBACH and maintain contact jeep patrols with the 2d Battalion along the BUTGENBACH - BULLINGEN Road; (32) the regimental Command Post was located in BUTGENBACH.

Main enemy units opposing the 26th Infantry at this time consisted of elements of the 12th SS Panzer, 12th Infantry Division and 3d Parachute Divisions.

The combat efficiency of the regiment was relatively high, due primarily to the recent six day period of rehabilitation and its long combat record. Combat efficiency of the enemy was very high because he brought units participating in the counteroffensive up to full strength, and mustered all the equipment at his disposal to strike the decisive blow. In addition, German morale was higher than at any time since June 1944. The individual soldier had been led into believing that this was the opportunity to destroy enemy aspirations in the west and to save GERMANY from a two-front disaster. (33)

THE BATTALION SITUATION (See Map D)

At 1600 hours, 17 December, the 2d Battalion, received orders from the Commanding Officer, 26th Infantry to defend the high ground east, southeast and south of DOM BUTCHENBACH. At the time of receipt of this

(31) A-4, pp. 11-12; A-7, p. 3; Personal knowledge

(32) A-7, p. 3; Personal knowledge

(33) Personal knowledge; Statement of German Prisoners of War captured by the 2d Battalion

order the battalion consisted of its full complement of units and three attachments: 2d Platoon, Antitank Company, 26th Infantry, 2d Platoon, Company C, 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion (M-10), and 2d Platoon Company C, 745th Tank Battalion. Shortly thereafter the battalion for the first time was informed of the critical nature of the German breakthrough. The Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Derrill M. Daniel, made his reconnaissance and issued his defense order to assembled subordinates and battalion staff. While giving his defense order he put great emphasis on the necessity of holding at all costs. Following the defense order units of the battalion moved into and began organizing their assigned defense sectors. (See Map D) To comply with the mission of the battalion it was necessary to establish the main line of resistance along a front of 2,100 yards. Because of this extended frontage, support platoons could not be held out and all three companies were placed on line. In his defense order the battalion commander specified that each company would have one 60-mm mortar layed for firing illuminating shells during the hours of darkness. In addition he requested that the supporting artillery battalion have one howitzer layed to fire illuminating shells every night.

Company F was assigned a sector on the ridge overlooking BULLINGEN and a main supply route of the Sixth SS Panzer Army. Company G (-one Platoon) was disposed to the right of the main road into BULLINGEN extending to the North - South Road inclusive. Company E's sector began at Company G's right limit and extended along the tree line to ^{the} right limit of the main line of resistance. One platoon of Company G and the attached tank platoon were formed into an infantry - tank team and constituted the battalion reserve on the reverse slope of HILL 598. The tanks were placed in reserve to be ready for immediate employment in a counterattack role. Counterattack plans were made for this infantry - tank team to attack anywhere in the battalion sector to destroy any enemy threats to the main line of resistance. (34)

(34) Personal knowledge

The organic and attached 57-mm antitank guns and attached M-10 tank destroyers were disposed to cover the main avenues of armored approach i.e., the roads from BULLINGEN and MORSCHECK to DOM BUTGEN-BACH and the open ground between these roads. On the right a gap of some 1,200 yards existed between the 1st and 2d Battalions. This gap, though tactically unsound, was unavoidable because of the scarcity of available troops in the area. As will be noted by a study of Map D, the battalion took up a reverse slope defense. This was decided upon by the battalion commander upon recommendation of his staff to reduce the effectiveness of enemy observation and fire on the battalion's position. Supplementary positions to protect the rear were not required of the front line platoons as they could adequately protect the rear from their primary positions.

(35)

The battalion sector of defense, offered little concealment as the terrain was almost wholly devoid of cover. A small woods in Company F's sector provided concealment for its left platoon. Company E occupied positions along a tree line which provided little concealment. The tree lines in the area consisted of widely spaced trees and had little effect on fields of fire. The buildings in the sector offered cover for battalion and company command posts and the battalion aid station. Companies F and G located their command posts in a building together. Company E's Command Post was located in a building just a few yards from the battalion command post. The battalion command post and aid station were situated in the cellar and 1st floor of the main building in the area. The walls on this building were quite thick and offered adequate cover against enemy artillery and mortar fire. The third floor of this building offered good observation over the entire battalion sector. Consequently the battalion observation post was located there. (36)

(35) Personal knowledge
(36) Personal knowledge

The high ground in the sector was considered critical terrain, in that it formed part of the vital ELSENBORN Ridge which dominates part of the main road from BULLINGEN to BUTGENBACH, EUPEN, VERVIERS AND LIEGE. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was very much worried about the defense of ELSENBORN RIDGE when he called up General Omar Bradley to inquire about it. "The German's can't breakthrough," Bradley chuckled, "I've got the 1st Division there." (37)

The enemy had good observation over most of the battalion sector from observation posts on HILL 626. Therefore extensive camouflage of the battalion's positions was undertaken to reduce the effectiveness of his observation.

It is interesting to note that the 2d Battalion, which was at 80% of its full strength at this time, was composed of over 60% new personnel. It had recently suffered heavy casualties in its fight to clear the HURTTGEN FOREST. Companies E and F with machine gun attachments from Company H had been surrounded and annihilated in the town of MERODE, GERMANY 30 November to 3 December 1944. The remaining elements of the battalion had been reduced to small numbers prior to the regiment's relief in the HURTTGEN FOREST on 7 December. Companies E and F and the machine gun platoons of Company H had begun their reorganization on 8 December. Replacements had joined the battalion on 9 December in its rehabilitation area in the vicinity of EUPEN. In the seven days with the battalion, the replacements were thoroughly imbued with the spirit and traditions of the 1st Division and how the division had fought so valiantly and stood so steadfastly against great odds in the past. (38)

The majority of the battalion, had seen and heard of other units of the American Army surrendering to and running away in the face of the enemy during the period 16 - 17 December. Therefore, the battalion operations officer

- (37) A-3, pp. 341-342
(38) Personal knowledge

recommended to the battalion commander that a motto be adopted to instill in the minds of the men the necessity for holding at all costs regardless of what they had seen and heard. Consequently, late in the evening of 17 December the motto "WE FIGHT AND DIE HERE" was adopted by the battalion for the defense of its vital position on the northern hinge of the bulge. This motto was quickly disseminated to all troops and all members of the battalion were repeatedly reminded of this motto throughout the operation.

The 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 12th SS Panzer Division opposed the battalion initially. The 12th SS Panzer Division had been brought up to full strength and full equipment during the planning and training phases of the German counteroffensive. (39)

All units of the 2d Battalion had their full table of organization equipment. However, adequate winter clothing was not issued until 30 December. To overcome the bad effects of cold weather a system of rotating personnel to a warm house in BUTGENBACH on 24 hour basis was instituted for men occupying fox holes. This system later paid dividends in reducing the trench foot rate of the battalion to almost zero. (40)

FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEFENSE

On assuming their assigned defense sectors, units of the battalion immediately began preparing dug-in positions for crew-served weapons, followed by individual positions for all personnel. Because of expected intense enemy artillery and mortar fire, the battalion commander directed that all men and front line crew-served weapons be provided with overhead cover. Alternate positions were then selected for machine guns and mortars. All positions were camouflaged to the extent possible with existing materials and counterattack plans were completed. No artillery barrages were designated due primarily to the 2,100 yard front to be covered.

(39) A-4, p. 9; Personal knowledge-Statements of prisoners of war
(40) Personal knowledge

Instead, many artillery and 81-mm mortar concentrations covering likely enemy assault and attack positions of avenues of approach, assembly areas, and weapon positions were plotted, registered, and disseminated down to include platoon leaders. Mines and barbed wire were not available at this time but plans were made to employ them when available. (41)

Three wire lines were laid to each company and two to each platoon to include antitank, tank destroyer, and tank platoons. No two wire lines were laid over the same route. Normal radio and messenger communication supplemented wire. Regiment laid three wire lines to battalion. Both 60 and 81-mm mortar ammunition was stacked on positions, since heavy enemy attacks were expected momentarily.

Patrols were sent out to BULLINGEN and MORSHECK to investigate enemy activity in those areas. Patrols returned with reports of enemy vehicles moving southwest through BULLINGEN to MORSHECK and continuing on to the southwest. Patrols also reported tank movement in BULLINGEN. (42)

NARRATION

DEFENSE ON DOM BUTGENBACH - 1ST DAY

December 18th began with battalion reconnaissance patrols going out to BULLINGEN and the BUTGENBACHER HECK at 0100 hours. The patrol to BULLINGEN had the mission of getting as close to the town as possible without contacting the enemy, to establish listening posts and to return by 0600 hours. The patrol to the BUTGENBACHER HECK had the mission of establishing a listening post near the edge of the woods north of MORSHECK. The patrol from BULLINGEN returned on time and reported scattered vehicle movement through the town. On its return to the battalion it picked up four members of the 2d Infantry Division hiding out in a culvert

(41) Personal knowledge
(42) Personal knowledge

just west of BULLINGEN. The BUTGENBACHER HECK patrol reported scattered wheeled vehicle movement going southwest by the MORSHECK Crossroad. Upon getting this information, it was decided to send out patrols the night of 18 - 19 December to mine the crossroad. In addition, the tank destroyer nearest the road in Company F's sector was ordered to open fire on the enemy vehicles using the road running southwest out of BULLINGEN. This it did, destroying eight light enemy vehicles during the day.

At 1040 hours an estimated six tanks were reported to be in the BUTGENBACHER HECK. No action was taken as the tank sounds died out shortly thereafter. A misty fog hanging over the sector since the day before, started to lift at 1210 hours when an enemy M-3 (8 wheeled armored) reconnaissance car followed by a volkswagon approached Company E's position from MORSHECK. Because of the fog these vehicles could not be recognized by Company E but, on reaching a point 200 yards south of CR-Y, the tank destroyer located there destroyed both vehicles killing eight men and capturing one prisoner. The survivor said he was from the Adolph Hitler Division and further questioning revealed that the enemy believed our sector lightly held. (43)

Just five minutes after the enemy vehicles were knocked out, two truck loads of enemy infantry unloaded at MORSHECK and entered the woods northeast of the crossroad. Artillery and 81-mm mortar fire was immediately placed on the woods. Soon after the fire lifted a patrol was sent out to investigate. They reported seeing approximately 20 German dead in the vicinity and 10 other Germans moving toward MORSHECK carrying wounded comrades. The patrol did not fire at them because they believed doing so would be in violation of the Rules of Land Warfare. (44)

Later at 1300 hours, small arms fire was heard in BULLINGEN. A patrol

(43) A-7, p. 3; Personal knowledge
(44) Personal knowledge

was sent out to investigate and it succeeded in extricating 12 American soldiers of the 2d and 99th Infantry Divisions from the town. These soldiers were engaged in a fire-fight with a squad of Germans when the 2d Battalion patrol appeared. The patrol quickly eliminated the German squad by means of grenades and bazooka fire. (45)

Another patrol into BULLINGEN at 1630 hours reported seeing enemy infantry equipped with panzerfausts moving southwest out of BULLINGEN. On the battalion's left, the 3d Battalion contacted the 2d Infantry Division on its left and reported armored movement to its front. Towards the close of the day the 1st Battalion reported artillery fire falling on BUTGENBACH. A few minutes before midnight the battalion received its first antitank mines, approximately 100 in number. They were immediately laid forward of the main line of resistance to block the two main roads into the battalion's sector.

DEFENSE OF DON BUTGENBACH - 2D DAY

At 0215 hours, 19 December, the first major enemy thrust at the battalion's positions south east of BUTGENBACH was launched when 20 truckloads of enemy infantry detrucked. 700 yards in front of Company F's right sector. In a few moments the infantry joined an estimated 10 tanks and attacked Company F from the east and southeast. Commanding Officer, Company F immediately called for prearranged artillery concentrations on the enemy and ordered his 60-mm mortars to fire illuminating shells over the enemy. The 33d Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm howitzer) opened fire soon after with high explosive, white phosphorus and illuminating shells. The battalion duty officer, realizing that 105-mm artillery would not be very effective against tanks, immediately summoned the artillery liaison officer at the Command Post to get 155-mm howitzer fire on the target. The 5th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm howitzer)

(45) Personal knowledge

responded with heavy concentrations on the enemy. Two V Corps Artillery Battalions (155-mm howitzer) later reinforced the fires of the 5th and 33d Field Artillery Battalions. Within an hour the attack was repulsed with no penetrations of the battalion's positions. One enemy truck was set on fire by artillery fire; the resulting illumination added to that of friendly illuminating shells provided good observation for Company F's riflemen. At daylight two patrols from Company F investigated the area and counted over 100 dead, three knocked out tanks and four trucks destroyed, three of them overturned, in front of their positions. (46)

One hour before daylight, Company B, 26th Infantry moved into position just north of the DOM BUTGENBACH - BUTGENBACH Road on the battalion's right flank, reducing the gap between the 1st and 2d Battalions to 600 yards. The gap was covered by fire from Company B's positions during daylight and outposts from Company B at night. Occupation of the gap by Company B was deemed inadvisable because the ground north of the road offered better observation and fields of fire. (47)

Enemy artillery and mortar fire began falling on the battalion's positions shortly after daylight and increased in intensity until 1000 hours when a company of infantry supported by two tanks attacked Company G's position along the road from MORSHECK and at the same time approximately the same size force attacked Company F from the east. The two tanks leading the attack were allowed to approach within 100 yards of Company G's position when they were taken under fire by the 57-mm antitank gun in Company G's sector. Three rapid rounds in succession knocked out the two tanks. However, the lead tank managed to get off one round knocking out the antitank gun and killing two of its crew. Meanwhile Commanding Officer, Company E requested artillery and 81-mm mortar fire on the attacking infantry. Some of this fire was called down within 50

(46) A-7, pp. 3-4; Personal knowledge
(47) Personal knowledge

yards of company G's front line resulting in virtual slaughter of almost the entire enemy company. Those not killed withdrew to the BUTGENBACHER HECK where Company E's center security post, which had not withdrawn, killed or wounded the remaining few. (48)

The attack on Company F was quite similar in organization. The enemy in this case employed four tanks and a company of infantry. Again the tanks led and were allowed to come up close to Company F's position when the two 57-mm antitank guns north of the road on Company F's main line of resistance knocked out the two leading tanks. The accompanying enemy infantry were repulsed by machine gun and automatic rifle fire inflicting heavy casualties. Wire communications to Company F were cut and both the artillery observer's and Company F's radios were made inoperative by the enemy artillery preparations preceding the attack. With no prearranged signal for calling down artillery and mortar defensive concentrations, only 60-mm mortars were employed to assist in repulsing the attack. (49)

On repulsion of both attacks, enemy artillery and mortar fire increased in intensity throughout the battalion's position and continued until noon when another attack was expected but none developed. The battalion operations officer then visited all the platoons on the line assisting them in their reorganization, patting them on the back for a job well done and warned of expected heavier attacks. All platoon leaders and a majority of the squad leaders were contacted and again impressed with the necessity of holding their positions at all costs to prevent the enemy from capturing and making use of the vast army supply dumps in the LIEGE-VERVIERS Area. They were also reminded of the large forces backing up their defense. On visiting the company commanders, the battalion operations officer suggested they talk to their squad and platoon leaders

(48) A-7, p. 4; Personal knowledge
(49) Personal knowledge

about the necessity of holding at all costs and the adverse effect retreat would have on the Allied war effort. Further they were exhorted to again relate the great traditions of the regiment and division to the men. While on his tour, the battalion operations officer met a home town friend who had been sent out to man a security post the night before. This friend stated that he would have run away had the Jerries come near his post during the night. The battalion operations officer on hearing this, talked at length to his friend in the battalion command post. On completion of the talk the friend completely reversed his views on the matter of running away.

Additional mines were requested at this time. Regiment stated they would round up what they could. Shortly after 1500 hours enemy artillery and mortar fire resumed on the battalion's positions. This fire, though not intense, continued throughout the daylight hours. (50)

Toward evening, the 3d Battalion on the left laid in some mortar fire upon enemy patrols seeking to probe the battalion's positions on HILL 503. The fire scattered them before any small arms fire could be employed. The 1st Battalion, on the battalions' right, reported no enemy activity during the day. (51)

The day was a costly one for the enemy, for his three attempts to penetrate the battalion's positions resulted in heavy personnel losses and a diminishing of his tank strength with nothing to show for his efforts. The 2d Battalion suffered only five casualties throughout the day. This can be attributed primarily to the well prepared positions of the front line troops and the zeal they displayed in holding their positions.

(50) A-9, Film

(51) A-7, p. 4

DEFENSE OF DOM BUTGENBACH - 3D DAY

"With the 1st SS Panzer Division in serious straits to the west on account of the 12th SS Panzer's failure to penetrate the north flank and probably because it was clear to the most inflated SS ego that the campaign had stalled, the enemy continued resolute in his decision to force a passage to the north and west." (52)

At 0130 hours, 20 December, the enemy attempted a reconnaissance by fire employing tanks and rifle fire in front of Company E's positions. However, the Company Commander, Captain Pierre M. Stepanian, anticipated their motive and ordered his men to hold their fire; he then called for artillery fire on the enemy. By 0145 hours all enemy fire had ceased. This proved to be the lull before the main attempt. (53)

At 0330 hours an estimated 20 tanks and a battalion of infantry attacked Company F from the east and a similar force attacked Company G from the south. At the same time, intense artillery and mortar fire hit the battalion command post and its environs and continued as the enemy tanks drove forward. The enemy fire knocked out all telephone lines to regiment, subordinate and adjacent units and radio became the primary means of communication. All available artillery fire was requested on the attackers. Illuminating shells were again employed to light up the battlefield. Three tanks succeeded in overrunning the left platoon of Company G but the platoon stood firm trusting to the tank destroyers behind them to dispose of this threat to their rear. The enemy infantry seeking to follow through was unable to penetrate the battalion's front lines that held up against heavy enemy pressure. (54)

The enemy tanks that broke through headed toward the battalion command post and then turned south toward MORSHECK. None of the tanks

(52) A-6, p. 13

(53) A-7, p. 4; Personal knowledge

(54) A-7, p. 4; Personal knowledge

that broke through were knocked out until they passed out of Company E's position, when their exhaust flashes made good targets for the 57-mm antitank gunners on Company E's main line of resistance. Two of the three tanks were knocked out. It is believed that these tanks may not have broken through had the tank destroyer next to the F and G Company's command posts fired on them. The crew of the tank destroyer thinking they were surrounded removed the firing pin from the cannon, abandoned their vehicle and withdrew to the tank destroyer platoon command post near CR-Y. While the enemy tanks were running through the battalion's positions, Companies F and G, continued to hold back strong infantry-tank attacks all along their front. By 0445 hours the attacks had been completely repulsed with no infantry penetrations of our line. Further, not one front line infantryman left his position. Supporting artillery played a vital role in breaking up and destroying the enemy attacks. Furthermore the artillery was most effective in separating the infantry from the tanks. (55)

Reorganization was then attempted but intense enemy artillery and mortar fires made it extremely difficult for much to be accomplished. Enemy mortar and artillery fires gradually increased when at 0545 hours an estimated battalion of infantry and 20 tanks attacked Company F astride the main road from BULLINGEN. By this time the tank destroyer crew which had pulled out earlier, had been reoriented, returned to its tank destroyer, replaced the firing pin and was ready to fire. As the attack approached within 300 yards of Company F's position, and under the light of friendly illuminating shells, the three 57-mm antitank guns and the two tank destroyers in Company F's sector opened fire along with all other weapons on the company's main line of resistance. Supporting artillery was immediately called down. The tank destroyer and the three antitank guns had a field day destroying ten tanks as they advanced singly over a small ridge to their front. No explanation can be given for the enemy's poor

(55) Personal knowledge

tank tactics unless his plans were based on overrunning the position before the battlefield could be illuminated. However, under cover of the small ridge the remaining ten tanks with accompanying infantry slipped to the southwest where they launched a savage attack against the left platoon of Company G. This attack practically eliminated the Company G platoon, but the enemy failed to get through due primarily to the devastating fire of supporting artillery. He then withdrew temporarily to regroup for a second attack. (56)

Meanwhile at the battalion command post, the battalion commander who had busied himself calling for more and more artillery on the attackers by use of prearranged concentration numbers, decided to release the platoon of Company G, in battalion reserve, to the control of Company G to plug up the gap caused by the heavy casualties inflicted upon its left platoon. This platoon immediately moved to the barn west of Company G's position by way of the low ground north of the road where the company commander ordered the platoon to dig-in and protect the gap in the company's line. The battalion commander notified regiment that he had committed his infantry reserve and at the same time requested that a rifle company and an additional 57-mm antitank platoon be attached to the bat

Fifteen minutes after the enemy attacked Companies F and G, he launched an attack of approximately battalion size with tanks against Company E. Here a savage fight ensued between two antitank guns and seven enemy tanks in the light of illuminating shells fired by the artillery and Company E's 60-mm mortars. Two tanks were knocked out by a combination of 57-mm and bazooka fire only 75 yards from the main line of resistance, after which the left 57-mm antitank gun on Company E's line jammed. A third tank approached spattering machine gun fire at the

(56) A-7, p. 4; Personal knowledge

antitank gun position. Corporal Warner, the squad leader, stood by his gun and drew his pistol while the remainder of his squad ducked for cover. When about ten yards away, the tank commander stopped his tank and stuck his head and shoulders out of the turret to direct its movement. Corporal Warner with pistol in hand and still trying to free the breechblock fired at the head of the tank commander and quickly ducked down into his gun pit expecting to be run over by the tank. The tank gunned its motor and started toward him. Just as it reached the gun it reversed and quickly withdrew with its tank commander slumped over the hatch apparently killed by a round from Warner's caliber .45 pistol. The tank crew had evidently lost interest in the attack on the death of its commander. The enemy infantry attacking with the tanks was all but completely annihilated by supporting artillery, mortars, and front line elements. Remnants of this force withdrew under heavy fire along the two tree lines leading to MORSCHECK. (57)

Meanwhile the enemy resumed his attack in another attempt to break through the gap in Company G's line. However, the attacking force was quickly dissipated by supporting artillery and the fires of the platoon of Company G which had recently moved to positions in front of the barn to cover the gap. By 0830 hours, all attacks had been successfully repulsed with heavy casualties to the enemy. The front line companies then began reorganizing their companies as quiet reigned over the battalion sector. (58)

Commanding Officer, Company C, 26th Infantry reported to the battalion commander at 0900 hours stating that regiment had attached his company to the 2d Battalion. The battalion commander told him to stand by until the reorganization of the battalion was completed. On completion of the battalion reorganization, the battalion commander decided to redispense

(57) A-8, p. 20; Personal knowledge

the battalion to increase the strength of its position. He particularly wanted to give Company G a narrower front because of the heavy casualties it had suffered. He further decided that the tanks would do more good in primary firing positions than in reserve positions as long as the enemy attacked with large numbers of tanks.

At 0930 hours the 1st Platoon Antitank Company, 26th Infantry was attached to the battalion. At 1100 hours, under cover of supporting artillery and smoke, the battalion reinforced was disposed as shown on Map F with the exception of the newly attached tank platoon which for reasons of secrecy was not placed into position until darkness. In this defense order, the battalion commander attached one rifle platoon of Company C to Commanding Officer Company E to employ on his line. The attached tank platoon was assigned primary firing positions for its tanks.

(59)

Shortly after 1100 hours, the battalion commander talked to the regimental S-3 and requested that 1,000 antitank mines be made available to the battalion for the purpose of placing a continuous hasty mine field in front of the battalion's main line of resistance. The battalion commander then visited all front line platoons checked their positions and exhorted them to hold fast. At 1330 hours, Commanding Officer, Company C, 1st Engineer Combat Battalion reported to the battalion command post relative to the battalion's desires on employment of antitank mines. The battalion operations officer first oriented the engineer officer on the battalion's situation, then led him on a reconnaissance of the battalion's positions with a view toward formulating a plan of antitank mine defense of the entire main line of resistance.

On completion of the reconnaissance resulting in recommendations to the battalion commander, the battalion commander decided that the first

(59) Personal knowledge

task would be to strengthen the two existing roadblocks with additional mines. Following this, a continuous hasty mine field would be layed across the front of the entire main line of resistance, starting on the left and working to the right. About 1500 hours enemy artillery, mortar and tank fires again opened up on the battalion's positions, with the heaviest concentrations falling on the left and right flanks of Companies F and G respectively. In conjunction with these supporting fires the enemy launched two more attacks at 1600 and 1700 hours in an attempt to split E and F Companies. Both attacks were beaten off by supporting artillery and the enemy ceased his attacks for the night. (60)

Soon after dark, the recently attached 1st Platoon, Antitank Company, 26th Infantry, went into position on the right of the 2d Platoon, Antitank Company. (See Map E) The engineers then set out to reinforce the roadblocks and lay mines in front of Company's G's main line of resistance. Thus began a mine laying operation that continued until the entire front of the battalion's main line of resistance was mined. The operation was completed on 25 December. (61) During the remainder of the night of 20 December the enemy ceased his artillery and mortar fires and a strange lull rested over the battalion's positions. But this quiet was merely a shadow of calm before the severest attack of all.

Summing up the operations for the day we find that the battalion repulsed three major and two minor attempts by the enemy to breakthrough its positions. Heavy casualties in tanks and personnel were inflicted on the enemy at relatively light cost to the battalion. Although these attacks throughout 19 and 20 December were unpromising from the enemy's point of view the build-up in front of the battalion's positions continued, and it was evident that attacks on a largescale were in the offing.

(60) Personal knowledge

(61) A-6, pp. 64-65; Personal knowledge

DEFENSE OF DOM BUTGENBACH - 4TH DAY

"On 21 December another assault was launched. Into it the enemy put everything he had at his command, for by this time his need to break through to the north and come to the rescue of the beleaguered 1st SS Panzer Division to the west was imperative." (62) At 0100 hours he opened up with machine gun and tank fire on Company G. The platoon leaders immediately called for the artillery concentration numbers in that area and the enemy fire ceased.

At 0300 hours the enemy laid down an intense concentration of artillery, mortar, tank and nebelwerfer fires which struck heavily on the battalion's front line positions and the battalion command post area. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the battalion's front line troops as several direct hits were scored on fox holes and weapon emplacements. All wire lines to regiment, subordinate and adjacent units were knocked out. The two tanks north and northwest of the battalion command post and the tank destroyer near the barn west of Company F and G Command Posts were disabled by the fire. The enemy preparation also succeeded in setting fire to the East and West Barns in the command post area and they soon burned to the ground. Since the Company H command post was located in the east barn, the personnel therein moved in with Company E's command post. The enemy's preparation fires lasted three hours literally tearing the battalion's main line of resistance to shreds. Heavy casualties reduced the main line of resistance to small groups of infantry and resulting wide gaps. To counter the enemy's fire and to protect the main line of resistance the battalion commander and staff kept busy calling for friendly artillery and mortar fires, by means of prearranged concentration numbers, on likely enemy assembly areas and mortar and artillery positions. Supporting artillery replied with heavy concentrations on all targets requested. (63) At 0600 hours when word came from

(62) A-4, p. 14

(63) Personal knowledge

the three rifle companies that the enemy was attacking in great strength all along the front, supporting artillery was requested to place a ring of steel around the battalion. This they did in short order. In all a total of ten artillery battalions responded to the call of the Commanding General, 1st Division Artillery. Included among the 12 battalions, were battalions from the 1st, 2d and 99th Infantry Divisions, and three battalions of V Corps Artillery. The direct support artillery battalion allocated sectors of fire to each participating battalion.

(64) The artillery fire proved to be of great assistance to the shattered remnants on the main line of resistance by breaking up the infantry-tank team formations and slowing down their advance while inflicting heavy casualties on the infantry. The main enemy's attacks were directed at the junction of Companies E and F and the right flank of the battalion. However, the enemy was surprised to find our antitank strength still intact. Personnel of the 1st Platoon, Antitank Company, who had just settled down for the remainder of the night after digging in their guns, delivered accurate carbine and automatic rifle fire against the onslaughts of enemy infantry leading the tanks. When the enemy tanks appeared, the platoon fought infantry and tanks with the assistance of a few remaining riflemen and the artillery. With this assistance, they knocked out two tanks and a 150-mm self-propelled gun no more than 100 yards in front of their positions. However, succeeding enemy tanks destroyed the platoon's three antitank guns and most of their crews. (65)

To the left of the 1st Platoon, the 2d Platoon, Antitank Company was also hard hit by infantry and tanks but again determined resistance and supporting artillery stopped the infantry. The tanks then attacked ahead of the infantry and succeeded in knocking out the three antitank

- (64) Statement made by the late Major Green, S-3, 33d FA Bn, on 22 Dec 44.
(65) A-8, pp. 20-22; Personal knowledge

guns of the 2d Platoon but only after one of them knocked out a Mark VI tank. With all the antitank guns of both the 1st and 2d Platoons knocked out and the tank due west of the battalion command post previously disabled by the enemy's preparation fires, the right flank of the battalion was thus left open for enemy tanks to get through. However, the remaining infantry and antitank company personnel continued to resist the enemy attacks.

At 0925 hours, eight enemy tanks got around the line of trees on the right flank of the battalion. They drove up and down that portion of the main line of resistance west of the double line of trees running south from ^{the} Company E ^{and H} command posts, crushing all opposition in their paths after which three of them withdrew, apparently for the purpose of rounding up infantry to launch an attack on the buildings at DOM BUTZENBACH. The remaining five tanks did not wait for the infantry, instead, they moved down the slope of the hill toward the battalion command post. However, they were soon halted by the fires of the two tanks positioned along the south barn whose fires had initially been impeded by the double line of trees and early morning mist. A tank fight followed with the battalion's tanks knocking out two enemy tanks before they themselves were knocked out. The remaining three enemy tanks moved down to the cover of the south barn, where the battalion's tanks had been hit, and proceeded to blast the buildings. Company E and H command posts received three direct hits and the battalion command post was heavily blasted with fires from tank cannons. (66)

Meanwhile in the command post the battalion commander and staff continued calling for all available fires to block infantry penetration of the main line of resistance. Division artillery responded to all requests, as they must have realized the dire situation of the battalion. At 1030 hours the battalion commander decided that reinforcement of the

battalion with an additional rifle company would be necessary to hold the battalion position. He then radioed an urgent request to regiment for a rifle company equipped with extra bazookas. At the time the above action took place, Companies G and F were beating off heavy attacks in their sectors. Company G's portion of the main line of resistance remained relatively strong as most of the enemy preparation fires in their sector resulted in tree bursts which had little effect on the troops as they had provided themselves with adequate overhead cover. The tank destroyers and antitank guns on Company F and G's main line of resistance succeeded in destroying three enemy tanks. The infantry again held their positions and endured wave after wave of attacks by enemy infantry who persisted in moving through heavy artillery and mortar barrages. The front line elements fought the hostile tanks and infantry with hand grenades, rocket launchers, automatic rifles, and rifle grenades. Machine guns were almost in continuous operation and the crews of antitank weapons stood by their guns. At 1230 hours, Companies F and G reported by radio that the enemy attacks in their sectors had been successfully repulsed and that the enemy artillery and mortar fires in these areas had ceased.

With the main line of resistance completely open from the road to MORSCHECK to its west extremity, and with all antitank weapons covering that area knocked out, the situation on the right portion of the battalion sector was serious. Added to this, the three enemy tanks previously mentioned were still firing into the battalion command post. The battalion commander requested that all available artillery and mortar fire be shifted to this sector to prevent the enemy from making any further penetrations. As long as the three enemy tanks were along the South Barn in the command post area, it was deemed impracticable to commit the battalion reserve which consisted of Company C, minus one platoon, to

restore the main line of resistance in that area. At 1250 hours the battalion commander requested a platoon of tank destroyers from regiment, to assist in knocking out the enemy tanks. The request was granted. Within fifteen minutes the platoon leader reported into the battalion command post. He stated that he had moved his platoon down the BUTGENBACH--
Road
DOM BUTGENBACH/under the concealment provided by smoke fired from smoke grenades. His platoon consisted of four self-propelled 90-mm antitank guns. The platoon leader was immediately ordered to position his guns to fire through the barn and destroy the three enemy tanks. Placing his tank destroyers in the vicinity of the battalion command post and the building along the road to the west, the platoon leader ordered his tank destroyers crews to fire round after round of 90-mm through the South Barn.

At 1400 hours, this fire caused two of the enemy tanks to attempt a return to their lines. They gunned their motors and raced up the hill along the double tree line leading out from their positions. The 90-mm tank destroyers knocked out both of them halfway up the hill. A third tank remained by the barn. The tank destroyers continued to fire through the barn in an attempt to knock out the lone enemy tank. However, this fire did not compel the tank to move. Finally at 1630 hours the battalion commander called for 81-mm mortar (heavy) fire on the tank with a result that the tank quickly moved out and escaped through the smoke from a burning enemy tank. (67)

As soon as this last tank was out of the way, the battalion commander ordered Commanding Officer, Company C, 26th Infantry to employ the remainder of his company to reestablish the main line of resistance from the/^{north-south road}inclusive to the right edge of the battalion sector. Supporting artillery was requested to continue its fires in that area until Company C was in position.

(67) Personal knowledge

In answer to an earlier request by the battalion commander for an additional rifle company, Company E, 18th Infantry was attached to the battalion. The Commanding Officer of this company was instructed that his company would form the battalion reserve and would be located on the reverse slope of HILL 598. (68)

Soon after Company C got into position, enemy artillery and mortar fire again opened up on the battalion positions and the enemy made a series of small attacks throughout the battalion front that lasted until dark. All attacks were beaten off by artillery and frontline elements.

The last attack taking place at dusk, ending the enemy's attempts to break through the battalion's positions for the day. As soon as darkness arrived, extensive reorganization of the companies took place.

In the early part of the evening reports came into the command post on the status of the battalions. Company E was down to 75 men, Company F 75, Company G 55, Company H 80 and Company C 75. Recently attached Company E of the 18th Infantry had 125 men. Based on these figures the battalion commander decided to shorten the company defense sectors and commit one platoon plus a squad of Company E, 18th Infantry, and attach them to Commanding Officer, Company C, to be employed on his main line of resistance which would consist of that portion of the battalion main line of resistance lying west of the road to MORSHECK. The reorganization of the battalion was planned to take place at 2200 hours under the cover of heavy harassing fires on the enemy. At 2300 hours supporting engineers were ordered to resume laying mines in front of the battalion's positions. (69)

Supporting artillery played a dominant role in repulsing the major attack of the day, as witnessed by the fact that not one German infantryman penetrated the main line of resistance even though no troops were there to stop them. The division artillery later reported that they supervised the firing of 8,000 rounds in support of the defense of DOM BUTGENBACH on

(68) A-9, Film; Personal knowledge
(69) A-9, Film; Personal knowledge

21 December.

To sum up the results of this operation: The 2d Battalion 26th Infantry reinforced by two antitank platoons, a tank platoon and two tank destroyer platoons successfully held its positions and blocked the main avenue of approach to BUTGENBACH, VERVIERS, LIEGE, and EUPEN.

In addition to blocking the vital road, the 2d Battalion destroyed 47 enemy tanks and one 150-mm gun, self-propelled, in rear^{of} and in front of its main line of resistance and inflicted an estimated 1,000 casualties. Patrols sent out on 23 December reported enemy dead as common as grass in front of the main line of resistance. One patrol actually counted three hundred dead in the BUTGENBACHER HECK alone. (70)

The battalion in this engagement suffered few casualties in proportion to the enemy's losses. The artillery, mortar, and nebelwerfer preparation prior to the main attack on 22 December caused the most casualties. The battalion lost four 57-mm antitank guns and two tanks as compared to the enemy's loss of 47 tanks and one 150-mm self-propelled gun.

The battalion continued to hold its positions against heavy enemy attacks which resumed on 28 December and continued until 15 January when the 1st Division launched a coordinated attack which culminated in restoring the line in its sector to that of 15 December.

To what extent the stand of the battalion at DOM BUTGENBACH put a spike in the wheel of the enemy's plans is an open question. Certainly the enemy, from the high priority he placed on getting through to the northwest and his successive all-out attacks, considered it of primary importance. The stand moreover, was disastrous to the enemy in other ways. On the positive side he had one of his top SS Panzer Divisions ground down to a framework and on the negative side, he was unable to come to the rescue of the 1st SS Panzer Division. But most important of all, he was forced to rearrange his high-level plan completely, abandoning the idea of getting at the First Army's Dumps at VERVIERS, EUPEN and LIEGE, BELGIUM.

(70) Personal knowledge

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. ARTILLERY SUPPORT

The greatest single factor contributing to the success of the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, in the action just described, was the adequate and timely delivery of artillery fires. Though no defensive artillery barrages had been planned, defensive concentrations were plotted, registered, and disseminated to subordinates to cover all likely enemy avenue of approach, assembly areas, attack positions, command posts, and artillery and mortar positions. As soon as the enemy preparation fires opened up, the battalion commander and staff called for harassing fires on possible assembly areas and attack positions by use of prearranged concentration numbers. When the enemy launched his attack, forward observers, platoon leaders and company commanders called for supporting artillery and mortars by means of these prearranged concentration numbers. While these fires were carried out, the battalion commander and staff called for additional artillery fires on likely positions of follow up forces. When the enemy used tanks, medium and heavy artillery were automatically requested to break up tank formations.

Coordinated and well planned use of artillery fire paid off, since it is felt that the battalion front line troops could not have held back the numerous heavy enemy attacks launched against them without the timely aid of the artillery breaking up their formations and reducing their will to fight. This was well proved on 21 December when fires of the artillery and some mortars shattered enemy formations attempting to push through an 800 yard gap in the battalion's main line of resistance.

2. INDOCTRINATION OF TROOPS ON THE DEFENSIVE

The second greatest contributory factor to the success of the battalion

in defending DOM BURGENRACH was the proper indoctrination of the troops. This was accomplished by much emphasis on the necessity for holding at all costs, the adoption of a battalion motto for the operation, and personal visits of front line troops by commanders and staff officers, to include the battalion commander.

In this particular operation the battalion officers felt that the men could easily be swayed into surrender and rout after hearing and seeing what had happened to other units in the area. Therefore, it was decided from the start to impress the men with the need for holding at all costs and that by so doing their personal safety would be increased. The battalion motto, "WE FIGHT AND DIE HERE", was adopted and disseminated. Platoon leaders were ordered to talk to their squad leaders at least twice daily, expounding the traditions of the regiment and division, telling of the large forces backing them up and the need for defending their battle position at all costs and that retreat or surrender would seriously endanger the security of other forces and the winning of the war. Company commanders were exhorted to visit their front line troops frequently, at least once a day. Battalion staff officers and the battalion commander made visits as frequently as possible.

To further illustrate the effectiveness of proper indoctrination for defense I would like to go into detail on the experience I had with my home town friend on 19 December. On the night of 18 December this friend was ordered out to man a security post 300 yards in front of the main line of resistance. When he noticed me checking the battalions' position the next afternoon he exclaimed: "It is a good thing those Jerries did not come near my post last night, because if they had, I would have run to the rear as fast as my legs could take me." I then explained to him that if he knew what was backing up his security post, he would feel differently. Getting permission from his company commander

later that afternoon, I led him to the battalion command post and talked to him in detail about the necessity for holding the battalion's positions and described the forces and supporting troops backing up his security post. He was amazed when he heard how important our position was and learned about the strong forces backing up the battalion. On leaving the command post he very determindly remarked, "I don't care what the Jerries throw at me or how many come after me now, I won't leave my hole until told to do so."

3. FAILURE TO CAPITALIZE ON ADVANTAGEOUS SITUATIONS

In his attack in the early morning of 21 December, the enemy successfully breached and destroyed 800 yards of the battalion main line of resistance by use of artillery and mortar preparations and tanks. This gap existed for six hours, yet the enemy failed completely to take advantage of it. If the enemy had employed his reserves to drive home the attack in this sector, it would be easy to believe that his attempt would have been successful in cutting off the battalion. True, intense artillery concentrations in this area may have deterred his efforts but if he had the determination to succeed he could have successfully seized the battalion command post and cut off the remainder of the battalion. His failure to capitalize on this opportunity for success resulted in his eventual defeat.

4. ANTITANK MEASURES

Though the battalion was successful in destroying 47 enemy tanks and one 150-mm gun self-propelled in this action, it is felt that the use of mines and other obstacles protected by friendly fires would have prevented the enemy tanks from breaking through the main line of resistance on 20 and 21 December. Where open ground and high speed tank approaches exist in front of the main line of resistance, mines and other antitank obstacles should be employed to stop or at least slow down

enemy armor. In the action described, initially only the two main roads were mined, thus leaving high speed approaches throughout the position to be covered only by antitank weapons. Since a determined enemy will employ all the means at his disposal to succeed in his mission, he can be expected to employ means such as smoke, high explosive and poison gas to reduce or destroy the effectiveness of antitank weapons. The result would be relative freedom of movement for his tanks. However, if mines are placed in front of these weapons, his advance will be stopped long enough for the defense commander to maneuver other antitank weapons into position and to repel or destroy the enemy tanks before a penetration has been made.

5. COMMUNICATIONS

Our defensive doctrine states that wire is the principal means of communication in the defense. The doctrine is believed to be sound. However, with the increased fire power of modern armies and the high explosive effect of new munitions, it is felt that a great reliance will have to be placed on radio in the future. In the action described, three wire lines were established between battalion and higher and subordinate units and two to adjacent units. In other words as an additional precaution, the battalion laid more lines than our communication manuals prescribe. Yet, in the attacks of 20 and 21 December, the enemy's artillery and mortar preparation fires knocked out every one of the lines. The attacks were very severe, and the battalion commander, expecting heavy enemy artillery preparations, had ordered that all radios open up as soon as wire went out. Throughout most of 20 - 21 December, the battalion conducted its defense entirely through the means of radio, as all wire lines were out and the use of messengers was impractical due to heavy enemy fire.

6. EMPLOYMENT OF TANKS

During the early morning attack of Company F on 20 December, the

enemy played into the hands of the battalion when attacking with 20 tanks in column over a ridge that was covered by antitank weapons. On this occasion, the enemy attacking along the axis of the road from BULLINGEN, employed 20 tanks and approximately a battalion of infantry against the positions of Company F. For some reason he employed his tanks in column near the road. As the tanks came over the ridge in front of Company F, the two tank destroyers and three antitank guns in that vicinity destroyed ten of the 20 tanks, one by one, as they came over the ridge. It was not until the tenth tank was knocked out that the enemy realized the error in his method of employing tanks. Had he attacked over the ridge with five or more tanks abreast, the results might have been reversed. Tanks should go over ridges abreast in order that they may exert their maximum fire at the most dangerous localities and, at the same time, provide each other with mutual support for protection. As it happened, single tanks coming over the ridge had no mutual support and made single targets for the concentrated fires of the antitank weapons.

7. BATTLEFIELD ILLUMINATION.

To gain the maximum effectiveness of the strength of a battle position, plans for its defense must include provisions for illumination of targets during the hours of darkness. In this action adequate provisions were made for illuminating the battlefield in almost a moment's notice. This was accomplished by having one 60-mm mortar in each company and one 105-mm howitzer of the supporting artillery layed continuously for immediate firing of illuminating shells during the hours of darkness. These illuminating shells were fired within moments after the requests were made. The illumination resulting from these shells provided adequate observation for the battalion's front line elements to make the most effective use of their fires. It is believed that the

effective employment of battlefield illumination played an important role in the battalion's successful defense of its position.

8. PREARRANGED SIGNALS FOR CALLING DOWN DEFENSIVE CONCENTRATIONS

The enemy's attack against Company F at 1000 hours 19 December, could have proved disastrous to that company and the battalion due to the lack of a prearranged signal for calling down artillery and mortar defensive fires on the enemy. The underlying fault for such an omission can be attributed to the battalion headquarters. Having decided not to employ defensive artillery and mortar barrages, but to rely on planned concentrations instead, the battalion commander and staff inadvertently omitted any plans or directives concerning prearranged signals for calling down defensive fires. Fortunately the omission did not prove costly but could very well have, had Company F's front line elements failed to stop the enemy's attack without vital artillery and mortar support. Prearranged signals for calling down defensive fires should always be provided for, as the uncertainties of combat may destroy the best means of communication.

9. EMPLOYMENT OF ARTILLERY AND MORTAR FIRE AGAINST COORDINATED INFANTRY - TANK ATTACKS

Artillery and mortar fire is most effective against coordinated infantry-tank attacks in that the fire, if delivered in sufficient volume, will separate the infantry from the tanks, break up tank formations and by use of medium and heavy artillery, tank casualties will result. When a unit in the attack or defense is hit by a coordinated infantry-tank attack, all available fires should be delivered on the attack with the intention of separating the infantry from the tanks and breaking up tank formations thus denying attacking tanks the mutual support of other tanks. When tanks lose their mutual support and accompanying infantry, they fall

easy prey to antitank guns and bazooka teams. To be successful, tanks need supporting infantry and the covering fire of other tanks. Without these supporting forces, it becomes a relatively simple task to destroy them one by one. This action clearly described repeated occurrences of the above. With the exception of the one attack in which the artillery and the mortars did not participate, supporting artillery and mortars separated the infantry from the tanks and in all but one case broke up the tank formations. These results allowed the antitank and rocket launcher crews on the main line of resistance to knock out tanks without fear of immediate reprisal from a mutual supporting tank.

LESSONS

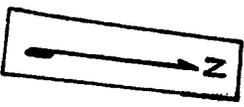
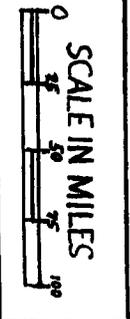
1. Artillery support, when properly planned, coordinated, and delivered, will normally have the most influencing effect on the successful defense of a position.
2. Proper indoctrination of troops engaged in defensive operations will greatly influence the degree to which they will hold their positions at all costs.
3. A commander should at all times be prepared to capitalize on enemy weakness and unforeseen advantages to better assist in the accomplishment of his mission.
4. Where high speed tank approaches lead into a battle position, antitank mines and other antitank obstacles should be employed to slow down the attacking tanks sufficiently to permit their total destruction by antitank weapons.
5. With the increased fire power and explosive potential of modern armies, more reliance must be placed on radio than any other means of communication in the defense.
6. Tanks attacking over a ridge line should attack abreast in order

that their fires may be concentrated to the front and deny the enemy the advantage of concentrating his fire on single tanks.

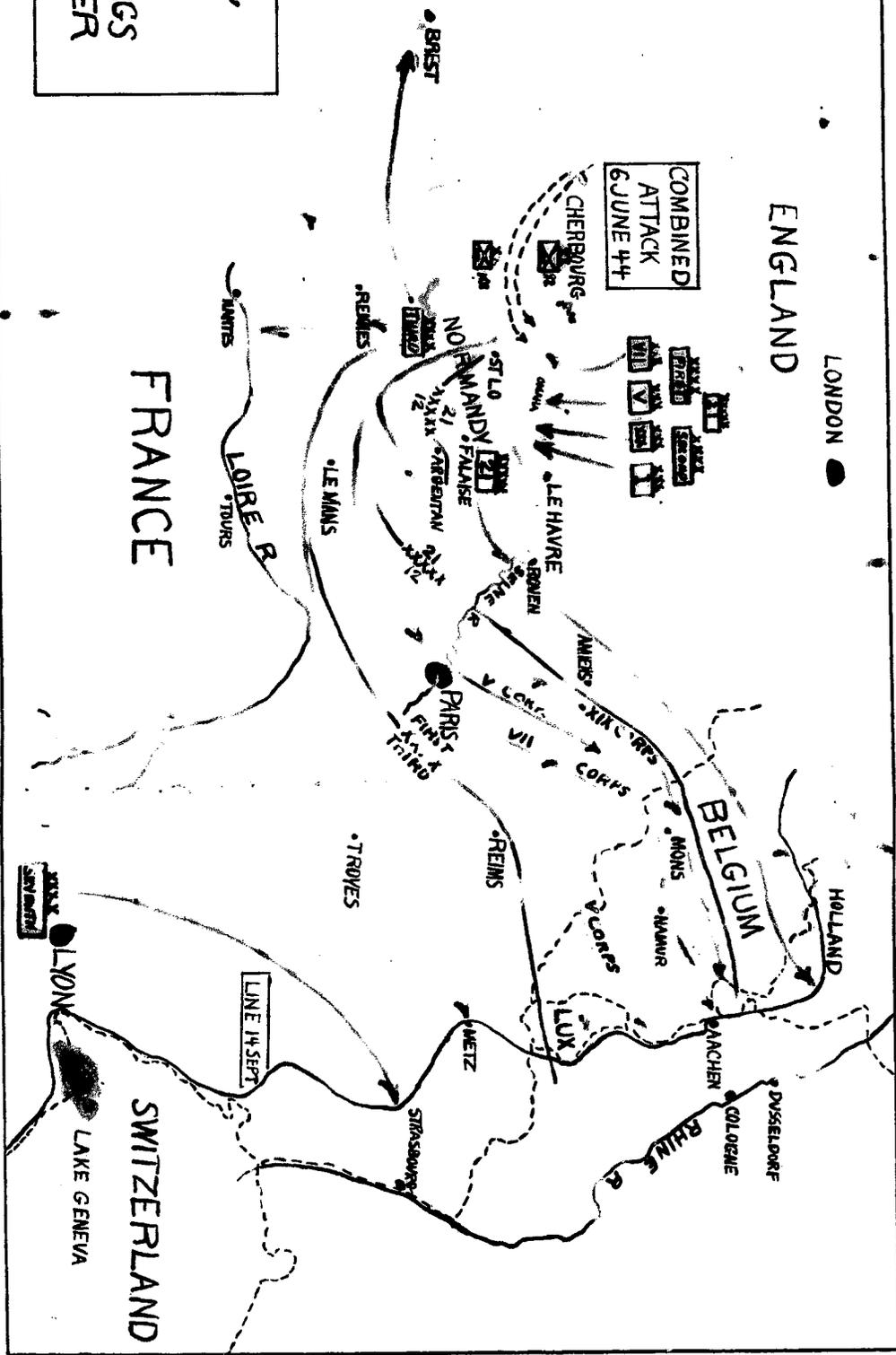
7. In the defense, provision for the immediate illumination of the battlefield during the hours of darkness will determine to a great extent the effectiveness of front line elements in repelling enemy night attacks against their positions.

8. In the defense, prearranged signals for calling down defensive fires should be planned regardless of the extensiveness of other means of communications.

9. All available artillery and mortar fires should be directed at coordinated infantry-tank attacks to separate the infantry from the tanks and to break up tank formations with a resultant reduced effectiveness of mutual support and an end result of permitting their destruction piecemeal by front line elements.



MAP "A"
NORMANDY LANDINGS
TO GERMAN BORDER



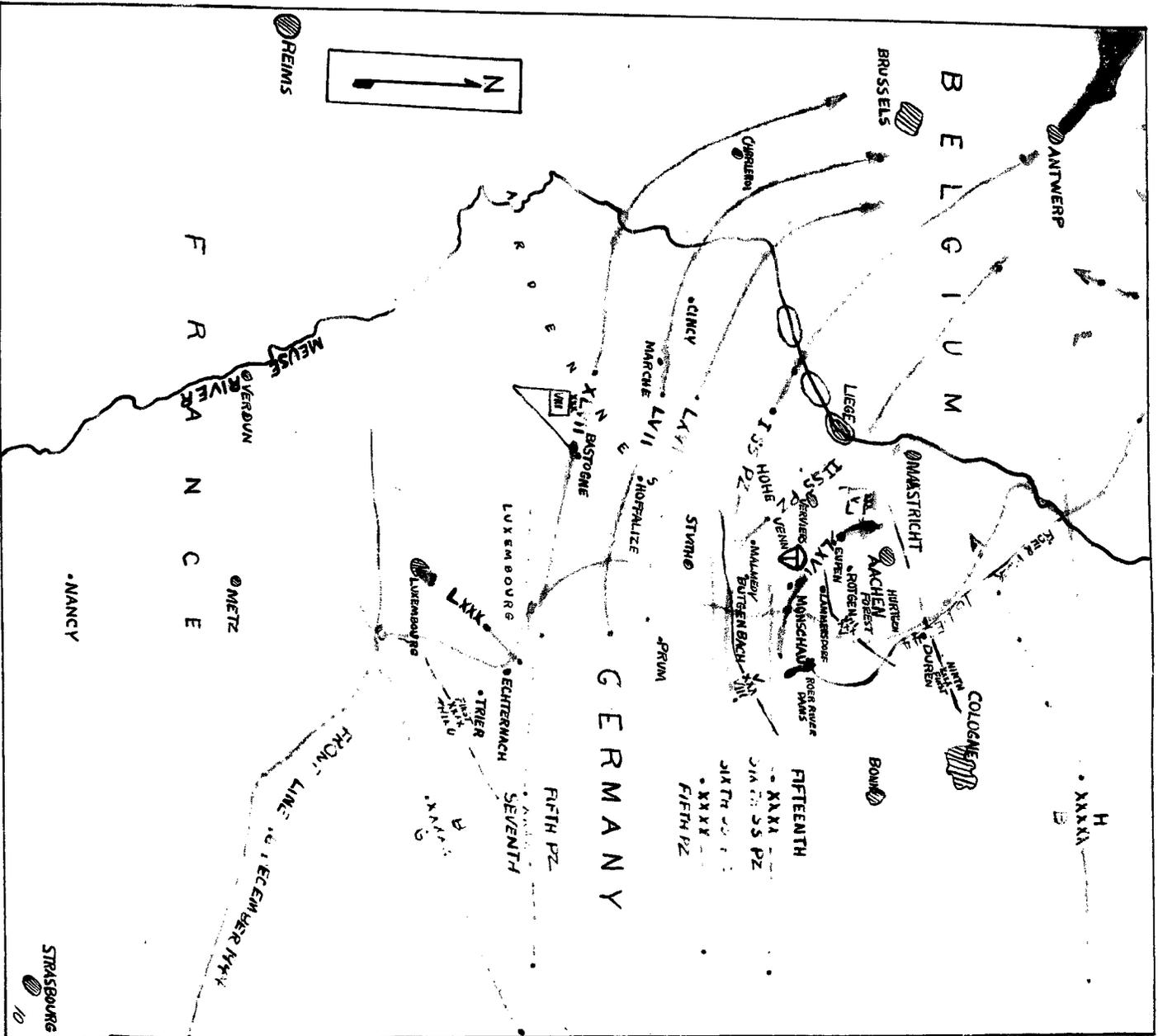
MAP "B"
GERMAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE
DECEMBER 1944
ORIGINAL PLAN

SCALE IN MILES

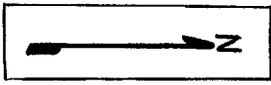


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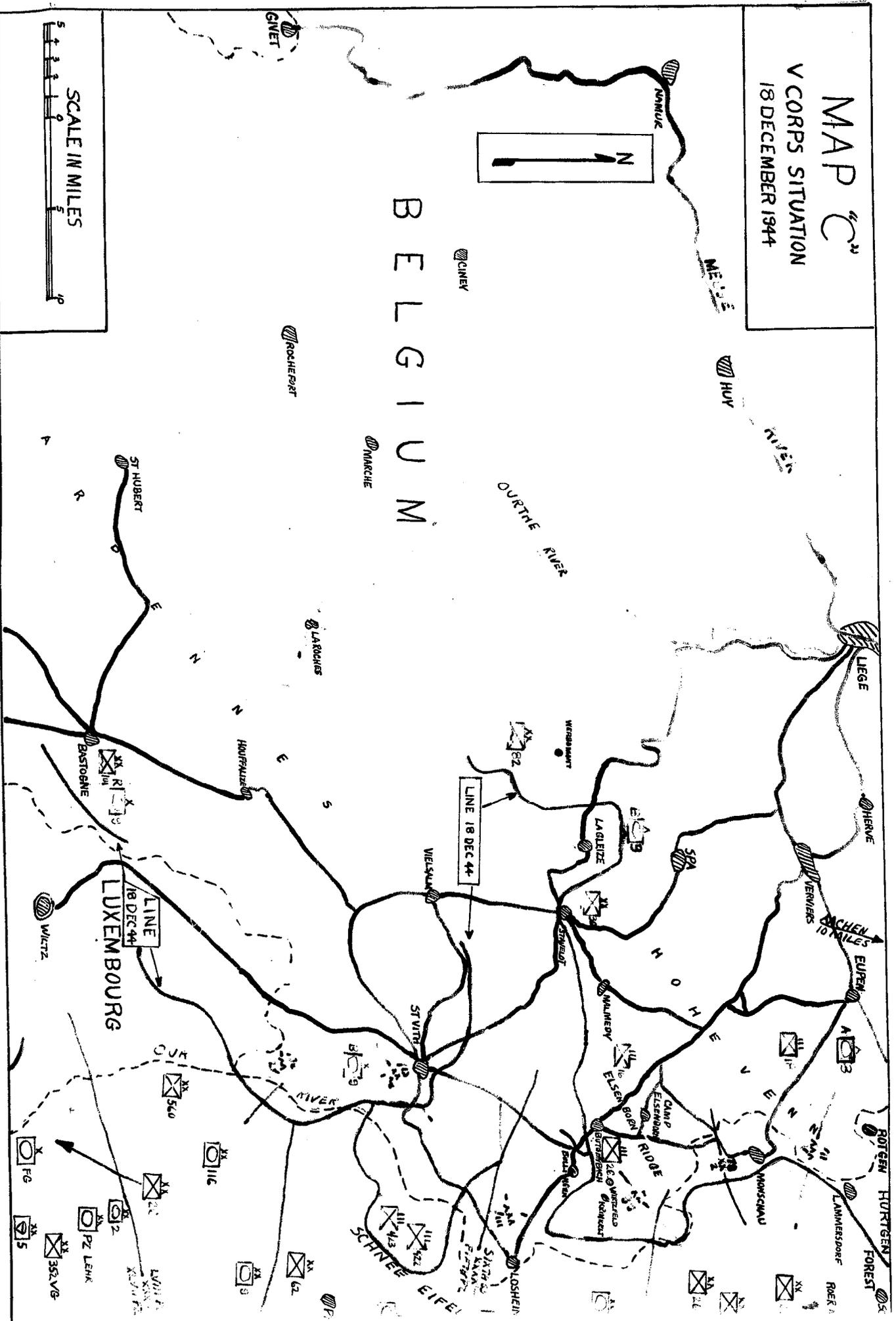
- INHALTATION PARTIES
- AND ISO PZ BRIGADE
- DIVERSIONARY ATTACKS
- PANZA RET. W/TAKE



MAP "C"
 V CORPS SITUATION
 18 DECEMBER 1944



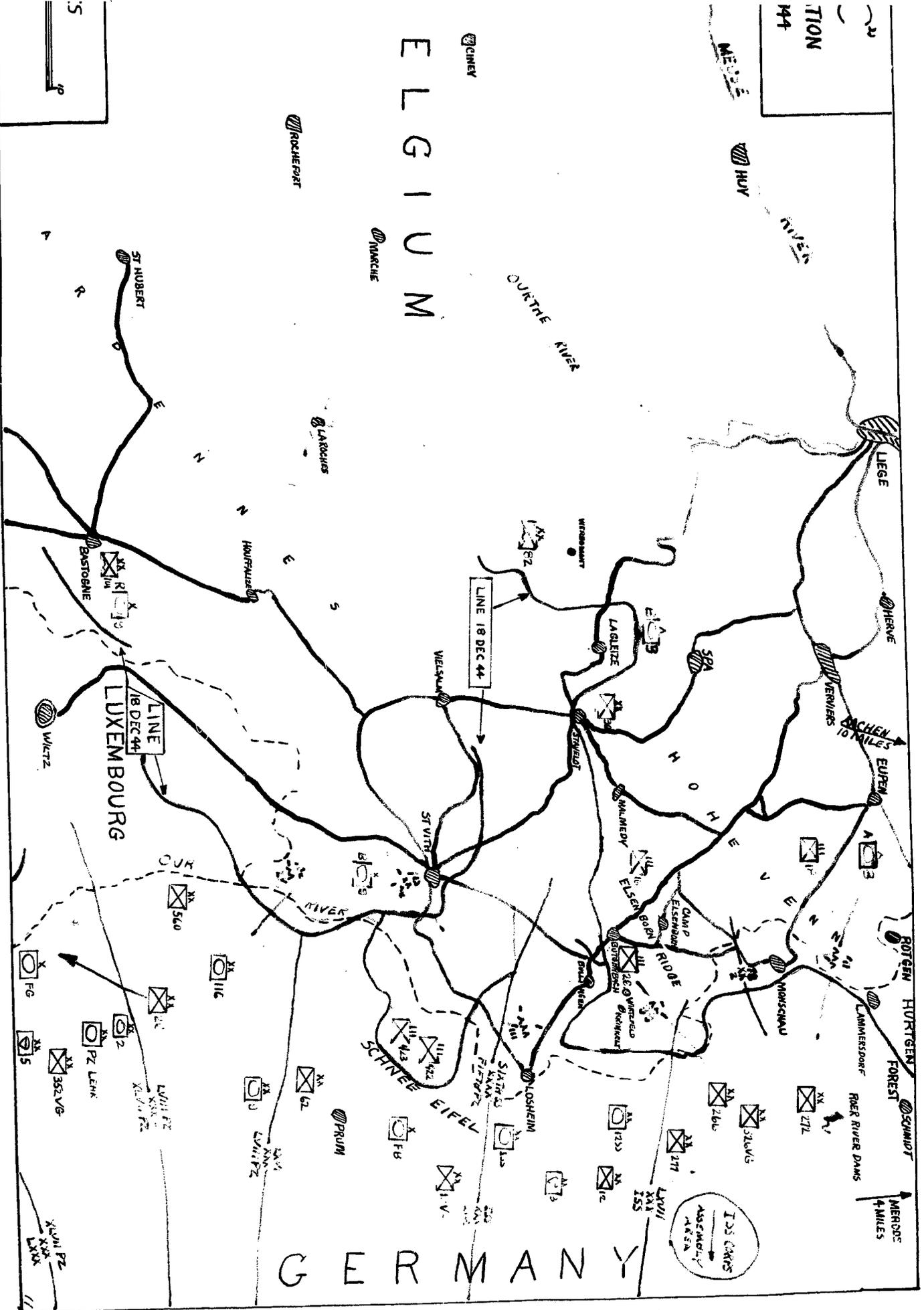
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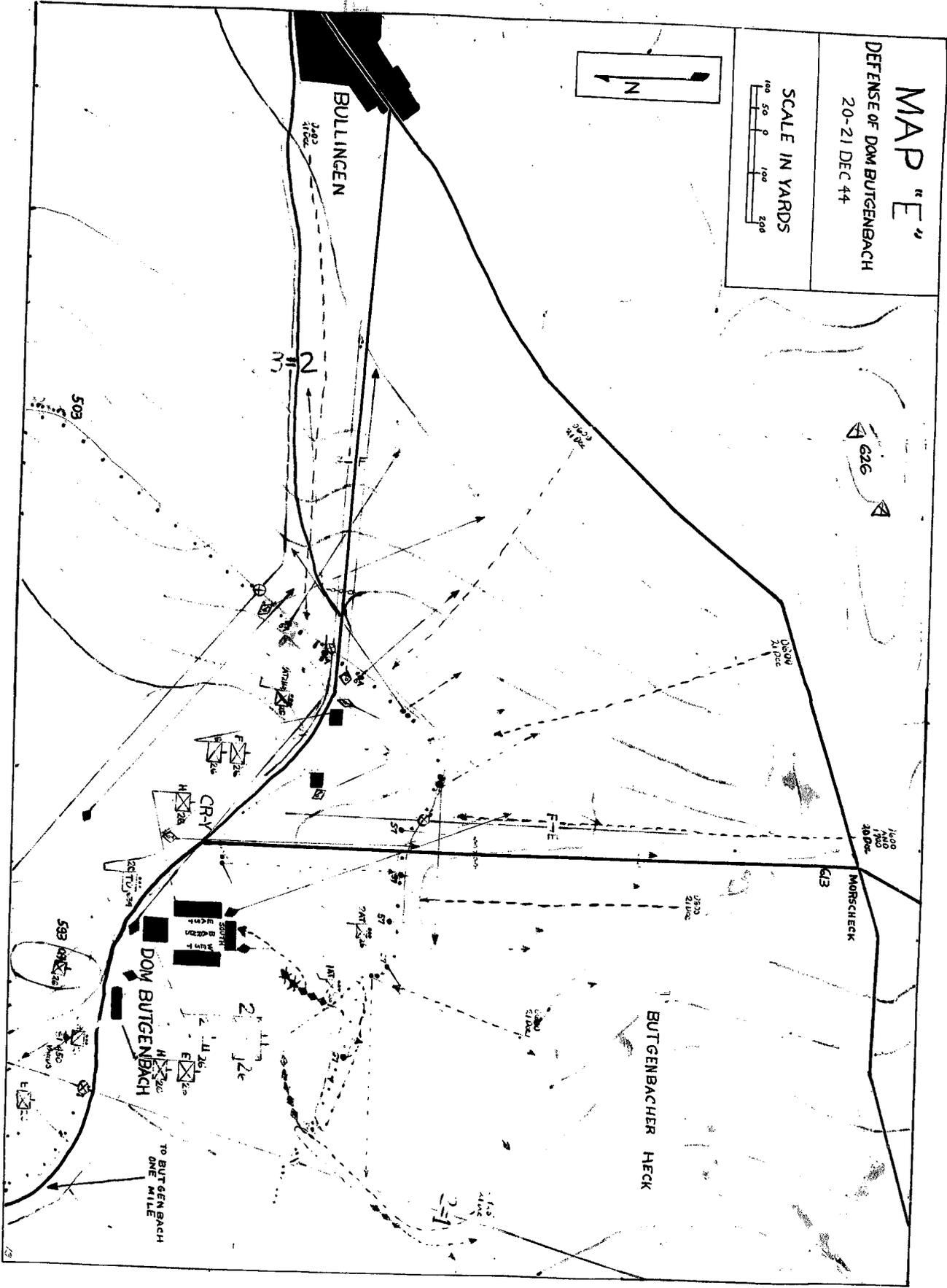
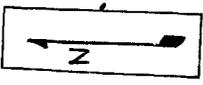


MAP "E"

DEFENSE OF DOM BUTGENBACH

20-21 DEC 44

SCALE IN YARDS



MAP "E"

DEFENSE OF DOM BUTGENBACH
20-21 DEC 44

