

*Palmer
12 pages*

Staff Department
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1949-1950

OPERATIONS OF THE 893d TD BATTALION (-Co A) IN
SUPPORT OF THE 28th INFANTRY DIVISION IN THE
VICINITY OF VOSSENACK, GERMANY, 2-9 NOVEMBER
1944

(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Battalion S-3)

Type of operation described: TANK DESTROYER BATTALION (-)
FURNISHING SUPPORTING FIRES AND ANTI-TANK PROTECTION IN
A CRITICAL BUT UNSUCCESSFUL OPERATION IN THE HURTGEN
FOREST

Major John J. Lavin, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. II

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	2
ORIENTATION.....	3
Introduction.....	3
The General Situation.....	3
Dispositions and Plans of the 28th Division.....	4
Dispositions and Plans of the 893d TD Bn(-).....	6
Final Preparations for the Offense.....	8
NARRATION.....	9
The Battalion Supports the Attack.....	9
The Battalion is Committed in its Anti-Tank Role.	12
The Situation Becomes Critical.....	17
Kommerscheidt is Lost, Vossenack Regained.....	24
Our Forces Withdraw from the Kommerscheidt Area..	30
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	33
LESSONS.....	39
MAP A Situation on the Western Front-Nov.'44.	
MAP B V Corps Sector	
MAP C Dispositions for the Attack	
MAP D Vossenack and Vicinity-Nov.'44.	
CHART 1 TD Organization and Data	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 Report of the General Board, U.S. Forces European Theatre (1944-1945) Study Number 1 (TIS Library)
- A-2 First United States Army, Report of Operations First U.S. Army (1 Aug 1944-22 Feb 1945) (TIS Library)
- A-3 History of the 893d TD Battalion (5 Jun 1940-19 Apr 1945) (Personal possession of author)
- A-4 World War II 1939-1945
By R.W. Shugg and Maj H.A. DeWeerd 1946
(Personal possession of author)
- A-5 France
Franco-Allied Goodwill Committee 1947
(Personal possession of author)
- A-6 Historical and Pictorial Review of the 28th Infantry Division in World War II 1946
(Personal possession of Capt Sherman McLeod Inf)
- A-7 V Corps Operations in the European Theatre of Operations 6 Jan 1942- 9 May 1945 (TIS Library)
- A-8 Unit Report No.5 (1-30 Nov 1944) 28th Infantry Division and Letter of CG 28th Div dtd 20 Nov 44. Microfilm (TIS Library)
- A-9 Narrative After Action Report, Hq. 893d TD Bn. 18 Nov 1944 (Including statements of Company Officers)
(Copy personal possession Lt. Col. H.C. Kerlin FA)
- A-10 Objective: Schmidt
C.B. MacDonald Historical Division SSUSA
(TIS Library)
- A-11 S-3 Journal 893d TD Bn Jul-Dec 1944
Microfilm (TIS Library)
- A-12 After Action Reports 893d TD Bn Jul-Dec 1944
Microfilm (TIS Library)
- A-13 The Medal of Honor
Department of the Army 1948 (TIS Library)
- A-14 US Army in World War II-The Organization of Ground Combat Troops. Historical Division, Department of the Army 1947. (Personal possession of author)

OPERATIONS OF THE 893d T.D. BN. (-CO A)
IN SUPPORT OF THE 28th INFANTRY DIVISION IN THE VICINITY OF
VOSSENACK, GERMANY 2-9 NOVEMBER 1944. (RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experiences of a Battalion S-3)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion (-Co A), in the vicinity of VOSSENACK, Germany, 2-9 November 1944, during the battles of the HURTGEN FOREST.

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

You will recall that the Western Front at the end of October was fairly stabilized, with the German Armies occupying terrain favoring the defense. To the north, water barriers faced the British and Canadian forces, in the center the SIEFGRIED LINE and METZ fortifications faced the Twelfth Army Group, and to the south the VOSGES Mountains faced the Allied forces. (1) (See Map A)

In this center area First Army was to launch an attack toward COLOGNE with its main effort on the left in the sector of VII Corps. (2) V Corps on the right of VII Corps was directed to conduct a preliminary operation to secure SCHMIDT and the ROER River dams to prevent the enemy from using the dams to flood the area to the north through which the major attack would pass. (3) The 28th Infantry Division as part of V Corps had moved into positions east of ROTT, GERMANY by the 27th of October, (See Map B) and prepared to jump off 31 October. (4)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Immediately to the north, VII Corps was building up to launch the main attack in the direction of DUREN and COLOGNE

(1) A-1, par.106
(2) A-2, p.57
(3) A-2, p.67
(4) A-10, p.5

as soon as the dams were seized. To the south, other elements of V Corps were prepared to join the 28th Division in rolling up the difficult SEIGRIED Line defenses from the flank and rear as far south as MONSCHAU. This would give us another good supply route to the COLOGNE Plain.

In planning the attack of the 28th Division it was assumed that it would be an infantry action for several reasons. Aerial photographs and intelligence information indicated that there was no road or trail from VOSSENACK to SCHMIDT and therefore no vehicles could support the attack initially. Another reason was that the SCHMIDT area was apparently free of enemy armor. Finally, it was believed that our artillery and air force could effectively isolate the battlefield once the operation started. (5)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 28th INFANTRY DIVISION

To assist the reader in understanding the narrative and the actions of the tank destroyer battalion it is necessary to describe the dispositions and plans of the division in some detail.

The 28th Infantry Division was disposed with three regiments generally abreast on a five mile front. (See Map C) Employment of its regiments was practically dictated by V Corps. The 109th Infantry on the north was to attack north through the forest until it reached the cleared ridge on which the town of HURTTEN was located. This would serve two purposes: first, secure the north flank of the division from serious counterattacks which the enemy had launched from this direction on the division which the 28th had just relieved. Secondly, it would secure a line of departure from which another division could later use to seize the town of HURTTEN. (6)

(5) A-2, p.170
(6) A-10, p.3

On the right of the 109th Infantry the 112th was to attack to secure VOSSENACK then turn southeast and take KOMMERSCHIEDT and SCHMIDT, the latter being the primary objective of the division. (7) The 110th Infantry, less one battalion which constituted the division reserve, was on the right of the 112th Infantry and was to attack south, secure objectives along the KALL River and the road between SCHMIDT and KESTERNICK. To their right (west) was the 28th Reconnaissance troop operating South of JEAGER HAUS.

Division Artillery was to support the attack with conventional fires on all known or suspected targets from (H-60) 0800 D-Day and thereafter largely on call of the infantry. The 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion (-CoA), the unit with which we are concerned, was operationally controlled by the Division Anti-Tank Officer who served as a member of the staff of the artillery commander. This battalion was initially assigned the mission of reinforcing the fires of the general support artillery, and preparing plans for the employment of the battalion in the anti-tank defense of the division's zone. (8)

The opposing forces were estimated at 5000 Infantry on the immediate front of the division of which 2000 were not yet committed. These troops were the major elements of the German 275th Infantry Division. Additional troops could be moved in from less active fronts. (9)

The 28th Division after almost a months rest on a quiet sector of the SEIGFRIED Line had received many replacements and was nearly full strength. Its combat efficiency was excellent, while that of the Germans was considered good. (10)

(7) A-7, p. 286

(8) A-9, p. 3 Personal Knowledge

(9) A-7, p. 288

(10) A-10, P. 5

Poor weather prevailed before and during the operation, with fog, rain, snow and cold cloudy days following each other. Roads in the division area were few and as a result of wet weather, soggy. The terrain was hilly and generally heavily wooded with cleared ground on the ridges where towns were located.

The status of supplies was good, the major shortage in all units being overshoes. Artillery ammunition was in limited supply, but considered adequate for the operation.

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 893d T. D. BN. (See Map C)

By the 30th of October the 893d T. D. Battalion, less Co. A and the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon which were on a mission with cavalry troops to the south, had moved into its assigned indirect fire positions to support the attack the following day. (See Chart 1 for Tank Destroyer Battalion Organization and Data) The battalion command post and service elements were in the vicinity of MULLARSCHUTE. Co. "B" some 3000 yards northeast, and Co. "C" was located about 2000 yards southeast of the town. The battalion at this time was at full strength in personnel, replacements having arrived while the unit was on a comparatively quiet sector to the south. (11) The battalion also had its full compliment of wheeled and track vehicles, less one tank recovery vehicle. The major supply shortages were in winter clothing, particularly overshoes and gloves. (12) The combat efficiency was considered excellent.

The terrain in this area played a critical part in the operation to follow, and deserves further emphasis to assist the reader in obtaining a mental picture of VOSSENACK and vicinity. (See Map D) The forest which covered the entire area, except on the ridges where the villages were located,

(11) personal knowledge

(12) Statement of Major William P. Hunter, then Battalion S-4
4 Oct. 49

consisted of pine trees averaging seventy-five feet tall. So dense was their growth that even in broad daylight only a trickle of sunlight filtered through. Cutting the forest up into huge squares were fire lanes and trails. These lanes and trails were soft and soggy from frequent rains. As you emerge from the woods in the vicinity of GERMETER and look generally north to the next clearing part of the town of HURTGEN is seen. Following this ridge around to the east you see the towns of BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN. Next is a sharp drop to the KALL River valley and finally to the southeast the hill on which KOMMERSCHIEDT and a portion of SCHMIDT can be seen. All these towns form a horseshoe of terrain dominating the VOSSENACK 'finger' at a range of about 3000 yards or less. The only paved road in the area runs north to HURTGEN.(13)

The gun companies organized their fire direction centers, had their positions surveyed in, prepared fire possibility charts, cleared trees masking their fire and placed the authorized 50 rounds per gun on position. The battalion established liason with each infantry regiment and division artillery. Wire and radio communications were established within the battalion and tied in with the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed). One radio channel was set on the Division Air O. P. frequency. The firing schedule for the attack the following morning was sent to the gun companies. Although they had not yet registered due to limited visibility they were prepared to fire. (14)

There was no enemy armor in the area, however planning for the employment of the battalion in its primary mission was concurrent with the plans and activities necessary to deliver supporting fires. Reconnaissance Company (less 1 platoon w/Co.A) made a reconnaissance of the road net in the division area to

(13) Personal knowledge

(14) A-9, p. 3, personal knowledge

determine the most likely routes of enemy tank approach and position areas to counter such moves.

The prevailing bad weather which had prevented the registration of the gun companies also resulted in orders postponing the divisions' attack which was to have taken place the following morning.(15) In spite of the fog, rain and mist which continued throughout most of the operation, the attack was finally ordered for 0900 hours 2 November 1944.(16)

This postponement gave all units additional time to perfect plans and study the terrain.

FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE OFFENSE

The next two days (31 October and 1 November) were spent rounding out unfinished details. The gun companies were registered, P.D.C.'s and gun crews organized to fire on a 24 hour schedule, three days emergency rations on each destroyer were verified and three rounds per gun of a new type high velocity armor piercing ammunition (HVAP) was placed in ready racks. All troops were fed "B" rations while in indirect fire positions.

Tentative plans "A" and "B" for the employment of the battalion in its primary mission were drawn up after a conference with the officers of Reconnaissance Company and a personal reconnaissance by the battalion commander and his operations officer. These plans fitted in with the over-all anti-tank and traffic circulation plans of the division and were approved. Plan "A" was designed to stop tank attacks from the direction of HURTTGEN, which was considered the main route for enemy armored attack into the division area. Plan "B" was designed to block the east and south routes of approach into the area, although no routes of approach from the east could be deducted from map and aerial photograph studies. Primary positions for both plans

(15) A-7, p. 286, A-10, p. 5
(16) A-6, p. 90

were generally in the CERMEYER - VOSSENACK area for 1 company with second company acting as reserve and adding depth at critical road junctions. Company commanders were furnished copies of the plans and an operations code covering the division area to include the objectives. Questions relative to both the plans and code were answered at the time of issue. (17)

Information as to importance of the operation was at this time lacking, although it was learned that plans were made to support this operation to the north and south. Up until the jump-off time no enemy armor was reported in the area. (18)

Meanwhile supply elements were concerned with hauling three inch ammunition to the gun positions, and in one instance a road of empty ammunition boxes was constructed over soggy ground in order for the trucks to reach a platoon firing position in B Companies area. (19)

Reconnaissance company established liason with the 294th Engineer Battalion manning road blocks along road and trails in the northern section of the division area, generally 3000 yards west of the town of HURTGEN. (20) (See Map D)

Prior to H-hour the division received an additional mission to attack southwest from SCHMIDT, take STECKENBORN and aid in the defense of the KESTERNICK area which troops to the south were to assault shortly. (21) This order had no effect on the immediate dispositions or plans of the battalion.

NARRATION

THE BATTALION SUPPORTS THE ATTACK.

At 0800 hours (H-60) 2 November 1944 Companies "B" and "C" began their schedule of supporting fires. These concentrations covered the entire division zone, particularly known and

(17) A-11 Nov. and personal knowledge

(18) A-9, p.3, personal knowledge

(19) Statment of Maj. William P. Hunter Battalion S-4 4 Oct. 1944

(20) A-9, p. 3

(21) A-7, p. 286

suspected enemy infantry positions, and were delivered in considerable volume.

One hour later the attack jumped off on schedule and the fires of the battalion for the rest of the day were mostly infantry support missions. In the north of the division zone the 109th Infantry made good progress averaging 500 yards or more through barbed wire, Schu-mines and booby traps all covered by machine gun and small arms fire. In the center, one battalion of the 112th Infantry, supported by elements of the 707th Tank Battalion jumped off from positions in the woods just west of the GERMEYER road, took VOSSENACK by early afternoon and remained there as planned. To the south the 110th Infantry received considerable artillery and mortar fire, which combined with the enemy stubbornly defending concrete pillboxes and extensive entrenchments limited their advance to 200 yards. (22)

About noon this first day, when it was apparent that the attack on VOSSENACK was meeting with success, the commander of the 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion initiated plans for the forward displacement of the two gun companies. At 1300 hours the first report of enemy armor was received from Division Artillery. This report indicated 10 enemy tanks had moved into the woods southeast of KLEINHAU, and shortly thereafter another report was received stating that 2 enemy tanks had moved into the woods northeast of the same town. (23) (See Map D)

During the day elements of Reconnaissance company performed missions assigned by battalion. They reported that the road-blocks along the north of the division zone were in some cases

(22) A-6, p.91

(23) A-11, 2 November, personal knowledge

involved in firefights but, since our engineers were about 50 strong at each position, supported by Anti-tank guns, 50 caliber machine guns and had mined and booby trapped the area no threat could be foreseen from that direction. They also reported that the engineers following the 112th Infantry had swept the trail southwest of RICHELSKAUL and road as far as the church in VOSSENACK. (See Map D) Reconnaissance company also selected tentative positions for the gun companies some 2500 yards west of RICHELSKAUL. The Pioneer Platoon removed mines and felled trees in the selected areas to prepare them for indirect firing.

Up until 1700 hours the gun companies fired some 2500 rounds, "B" Company firing over half of this amount, most of it being infantry supporting fire. (24)

During the night 2-3 November the companies fired interdictionary and harassing fires.

On 3 November plans for displacement were approved, the actual movement to the new positions to take place the following morning. During the day the battalion laid wire from the selected site to the nearest artillery unit for fire control, established liaison and arranged for survey. An artillery observer reported three enemy tanks 1000 yards north of HURTGEN at 1100 hours. This was only enemy armor reported in the area during the day. (25) During the night 3-4 November Companies fired interdictionary and harassing fires. One gun of "C" Company developed a leaking recoil system and was ordered out of action.

Two battalions of the 112th Infantry had moved out on this date, and after some minor skirmishes one battalion was in

(24) A-11,2 November 44

(25) personal knowledge

KOMMERSCHIEDT and the other moved on to SCHMIDT. The division had reached its objective and had completely surprised the enemy in the SCHMIDT area. However the overall picture in the division left much to be accomplished. SCHMIDT had not been entirely cleared of the enemy. By nightfall only three tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion had managed to cross the narrow, steep, unimproved trail the infantry had used to cross the KALL River valley. This was the route to be used in supplying the regiment in SCHMIDT. The battalion of the 112th Infantry remaining in VOSSENACK was receiving accurate enemy artillery fire. To the north the 109th Infantry was heavily engaged in see-saw battles, repulsing one major counterattack. To the south the 110th Infantry could make only limited gains in the heavily fortified forest. Casualties in the assaulting units were heavy. (26)

THE BATTALION IS COMMITTED IN ITS ANTI-TANK ROLE

At 0910 hours on the 4th, 14 enemy tanks were reported southeast and east of VOSSENACK, their exact location not yet known. At 1000 hours the division Anti-tank officer passed on to battalion the mission to repel a tank attack coming from the direction of HURTGEM, using Plan "B" modified. Company "C" less one platoon was given the mission and ordered to the vicinity of RICHELKAUL, preceded by elements of its attached Reconnaissance platoon. The remaining Platoon consisting of 3 guns was ordered to the new indirect fire position. A radio relay station was set up on high ground some 3000 yards west of RICHELKAUL in order that contact be maintained with the battalion command post and "B" Company in the rear and the battalion commanders party and "C" Company in the vicinity

(26) A-2, p.69
A-6, p. 91

of RICHELSKAUL.

Meanwhile elements of Reconnaissance Company continuing their mission of route reconnaissance reported that the main road entering RICHELSKAUL from the south was not entirely in our hands nor was it cleared of mines. They also reported that the trail entering GERMETER from the west was not yet cleared of mines and that the north south trail some 1000 yards west of GERMETER was mined 500 yards north of the trail junction. (See Map D)

In the GERMETER-VOSSENACK area enemy tanks had been neither seen nor heard. Towed guns of the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion which had supported the initial attack of the 112th Infantry were well disposed along the GERMETER road and additional towed guns were reported enroute. Since there was no tank attack, "C" Company was ordered to move its new indirect fire positions and install grousers. (Grousers were attachments for full-tracked vehicles which gave them increased traction for negotiating soft and steep ground.)

An additional mission to reconnoiter for other routes to KOMMERSCHIEDT was received since it was apparent the trail being used by the tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion was almost impassible. The platoon leader of the Reconnaissance attached to "C" Company completed this task and reported that no other route was passable, that the route the tanks were using needed improvement because it was too narrow for our vehicles and that it was blocked by three tanks which had thrown tracks or were otherwise damaged. The Reconnaissance officer also reported that the earliest time the trail could be cleared was by dawn the following morning and then only by additional help for, or increased effort by the engineers. This information was

passed on to Division by radio and to the Division Anti-tank officer who arrived at RICHELSKAUL about 1430 hours. (27)

Reports of enemy tanks continued to come in, including a radio intercept report that enemy tanks were moving against SCHMIDT. Since the towed Tank Destroyers were not to arrive for some time, the Division ATO ordered that two platoons of the 893d TD Bn. take up positions in VOSSENACK. The guns moved up to RICHELSKAUL while the company commander and platoon leaders went into VOSSENACK to select positions in the rubble of the town. It was almost dark before they returned and took the guns into positions. The company commander reported he had been unable to determine infantry dispositions in town since only a few men were seen and these suffering from fatigue and shock due to heavy enemy artillery fire. Since the situation was obscure the battalion commander, his party and the Division ATO decided to contact the commander of the 2d battalion 112th Infantry to effect necessary coordination. At the Infantry C P it was learned that the heavy artillery and mortar fire, which let up to some extent at nite, was causing exceptionally heavy casualties to the infantry dug in on the east slopes of VOSSENACK and that a tank attack was expected. Liason and coordination were effected about 1915 hours. The 3d Platoon of "C" Company was in positions south of the town near the church, and the 1st Platoon was in position of readiness near GERMETER.

While the battalion commanders' party was in VOSSENACK orders were received at 1700 hours from Division Artillery to move the number of destroyers necessary to VOSSENACK to repel any tank attack. Since the battalion commander was on foot and could not be contacted, the executive officer ordered "B"

(27) A-9, p.5, personal knowledge

Company to VOSSENACK immediately. So it was as the battalion commander was returning to the division CP that he met "B" Company on the trail southwest of RICHELKAUL. Upon learning that division had ordered them up, the battalion commander ordered them to take up positions in GERMETER and await further instructions. Several destroyers had bogged down in the old area but by dawn the company tank recovery vehicle had drawn them out and they had joined the company in GERMETER. (28)

Upon arrival at the Division CP at 2130 hours instructions were received to send one company to KOMMERSCHIEDT as soon as the road was opened. A combined infantry-tank attack by elements of the 89 Infantry Division and 116th Panzer Division had retaken SCHMIDT early in the day. The 28th Division planned to attack SCHMIDT again the following day, and "C" Company would have the mission of establishing road blocks on the three routes into SCHMIDT. (29)

The battalion commander and operations officer then returned to the battalion command post where remainder of the staff and the Reconnaissance Company commander were briefed. The latter officer was given a brief written order for "B" and "C" Company commanders and told to elaborate on this to insure understanding of the new mission assigned each company. These instructions called for "C" Company to cross to KOMMERSCHIEDT as soon as the trail was opened, "B" Company to move into VOSSENACK, inform the infantry battalion commander of the change and relieve "C" Company's liason at that command post.

A review of the events taking place on 4 November indicated that the situation was not too promising. Enemy artillery and mortar fire was heavy and accurate, enemy tanks were reported

(28) personal knowledge

(29) A-9, p. 5
A-7, p. 292
A-2, p. 69

on all three sides of the division salient, trouble with the MSR across the KALL River was increasing, units south of the river were under almost continuous pressure, in the south, a battalion of the 110th, the divisions only reserve, had reached SIMONSKALL in a flanking move, all units were suffering heavy casualties, and the enemy's pressure was increasing. Weather continued to be bad thereby eliminating needed air-support. Communication was almost entirely by radio, since wires were destroyed almost as soon as they were repaired. (30)

During the night 4-5 November Companies "B" and "C" made their change-over in VOSSENACK during which time their movements brought on an artillery concentration which blanketed the town. One platoon of "B" Company was guided by the infantry to positions on the open slope east of VOSSENACK enroute they lost one destroyer which fell thru rubble into a cellar. A second platoon was disposed north of the center of town, and the last platoon took up positions on the left of the second platoon. Meanwhile "C" Company moved to an assembly area south of VOSSENACK where the trail enters the woods and waited for the attached Reconnaissance platoon to report the route open. Here the destroyers took on mortar and miscellaneous ammunition which an officer of the 112th asked them to take across the valley. The three gun platoon of "C" Company lost another destroyer which hit a mine on the trail southwest of RICHELSKAUL, as it was coming up to join the remainder of the company. By the time they had removed the casualties, ammunition and useful equipment and arrived in VOSSENACK, it was daylight and the other platoons of "C" Company were in the KALL valley enroute to KOMMERSCHBIDT.

(30) A-6, p.91
A-7, p.292
A-10, p.96

THE SITUATION BECOMES CRITICAL

By 0530 5 November the engineers had opened the MSR to KOMMERSCHIEDT but it still required considerable skill to negotiate. By 1000 hours six of the eight destroyers had reached the town. One had been immobilized by artillery fire in the draw and its crew was killed or captured by Germans on patrol. One had developed an oil leak and made it only to the edge of the woods north of the town, where it stopped for repairs. It took over four hours to negotiate some 2000 yards.

These guns arrived as the infantry was receiving its second counterattack of the day. The T. D. platoon leaders conferred with the tank platoon leader who had been there since the night of 3 November. His recommendations were accepted and the 1st platoon moved in positions west of the town with his 3 tanks and the 3rd Platoon moved east of town. The combined fire of the TDs, Tanks and Infantry broke up the counterattack.

This same morning at 0715 the situation in VOSSENACK was entirely befogged. The battalion commander and his operations officer while enroute to that town received a report from "B" Company that the infantry reported an enemy tank attack on the town. Shortly thereafter another report stated that 12 Tiger Tanks supported by infantry were approaching the town. (31) Still no report came from "B" Company indicating they were engaged. Upon arrival at the "B" Company CP at RICHELKAUL at 0800 the battalion commander could find no evidence of a tank attack. Meanwhile the destroyers in town found the artillery and mortar fire the hottest they had ever encountered. It was necessary that they keep their radios on 24 hours a day. This caused the batteries to weaken rapidly in the cold weather, and it was therefore necessary to charge them frequently using the two diesel motors which furnished power to

(31) A-11, 5 November

move the destroyer. This attracted considerable fire to be directed at them, and much of it fell on the infantry. By noon each of the four T. D's. on the slope east of VOSSENACK had been hit four times, their infantry guide was killed and six crewmen wounded by fragments coming thru the open turrets. Equipment and stowage on the outside of the vehicle was being knocked off or torn to shreds. All platoons had similiar experiences. They could only sit there and hope to spot one of the frequently reported enemy tanks, but no target appeared. (32)

Over on the 'hill' (the nickname which was bestowed on KOMMERSCHIEDT) the enemy was growing stronger by the hour. He continued to blanket the area with artillery and direct fire, and made repeated counterattacks. During the day the third platoon leader and his crew were killed by an explosion inside the turret, the first platoon leader was wounded as were a number of the crew men in both platoons. Four enemy tanks were reported knocked out. (33) By 1630 this day (5 November) the remaining two-gun platoon had been guided across the KALL River and was ordered into reserve positions north of KOMMERSCHIEDT. This platoon was furthur instructed to move into town at dawn the following morning. (34)

Shortly after dark, about 1730 hours the battalion commander received a message to report to the CP of the 707th Tank Battalion, north of JEAGER HAUS. (See Map D) Here the battalion commanders of the 3d Battalion 110th Infantry, 707th Tank Battalion and 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion discussed the organization of Task Force Ripple, so named since Lt. Colonel Ripple, the tank battalion commander, was in command.

(32) personal knowledge

(33) A-11, 052115 November 44

(34) A-10, p. 108

personal knowledge

Statement Lt. W. Fuller Ron. Ptn. Ldr. atchd. Co. "C"

18 Nov 44

Included in the force were the elements of "C" Company in the KOMMERSCHIEDT area and one platoon of "B" Company, in the VOSSENACK area which was to move across the draw with a supply column of the 112th Infantry about midnite, 5-6 November. (35)

During each night all units engaged in a frantic effort to resupply, evacuate casualties, and bring up available replacements. It was during this night that the situation in the KALL valley along the MSR became even more critical. The "C" Company commander and his Reconnaissance platoon leader had returned to VOSSENACK early in the night 5-6 November to pick up ammunition and try to get immediate replacements for his two platoon leaders. The liaison officer with the 112th Infantry was assigned to "C" Company as a replacement and after they had secured the ammunition they moved to the head of the draw where a column of weasels (M-29 Cargo Carriers) and jeeps were held up. When they heard an explosion they assumed the trail had been mined and returned to VOSSENACK to try early the next morning when the trail was cleared.

Actually German Combat Patrols had ambushed the infantry supply column and the engineer company. An aid station in the KALL valley was visited by enemy patrol members whom the aid men observed mining the trail. (36)

In VOSSENACK "B" Company with recovery vehicle attempted to evacuate the destroyer which had fallen in a cellar. Unknown to them enemy heavy mortars had registered on the destroyer during the day and after they had dismounted and hooked up the destroyer and attempted to hoist it out, the sound of racing motors brought in a mortar concentration which seriously wounded the company motor sergeant and one mechanic. The

(35) personal knowledge

(36) A-10, p. 130-133

destroyer was left in the cellar.

So it went during the night while the battalion commander and his operations officer were at the division CP with Lt. Colonel Ripple coordinating and receiving final instructions relative to the task force that the supply route was not completely in our hands. This was the route to be used by the light tank company of the 707th Tank Battalion, the platoon of Tank Destroyers from "B" Company and the battalion of the 110th Infantry, which under Colonel Ripple was to consolidate with all forces at KOMMERSCHIEDT and attack to retake SCHMIDT.

About 0530 6 November "C" Company commander, a replacement officer, and the Reconnaissance Platoon Leader, with their jeeps loaded with ammunition followed the Reconnaissance platoon leader for another try at the KALL valley. They had not gone more than 300 yards south of VOSSENACK when the Reconnaissance Officer spotted an ambush of about 40 Germans. Both sides opened fire at the same time, a PANZERFAUST hit the Reconnaissance Officers' jeep and a burst from a German machine gun hit his machine gunner and a man in the back seat. "C" Company Commander's machine gun jammed and he was forced to bail out as a German lunged at him with a bayonet. This he slapped aside and with those who had not been hit returned to VOSSENACK. Here they found the 2d Platoon of "B" Company which was going to attempt to cross the valley alone since they had not seen the supply column earlier in the night. (37)

The Reconnaissance Platoon Leader asked for two destroyers to help him get his two men who had been wounded. It was still dark and foggy and as they neared the ambush he gave the order to fire. The destroyers opened up with machine guns they had

(37) Statement Lt. Jack W. Fuller,
Reconn. Ptn. Ldr. 18 Nov. 44

installed on the top of the turrets, killing and wounding some of the Germans, the rest fled. They found the two men, one dead, the other seriously wounded.

About this time, Colonel Ripple and the infantry battalion arrived. The "C" Company commander requested a platoon of infantry to clear the MSR and accompany the Tank Destroyer platoon across the valley. This was not possible in view of the mission assigned the Task Force, its reduced strength (the battalion was down to 200 men plus 100 heavy weapons men) and because it was an engineer mission to keep the trail opened. "C" Company commander therefore crossed on foot with the infantry column which skirted the trail and fought its way thru the valley. (38) The Reconnaissance Platoon Leader was left to guide the destroyers up, and as they started down the trail they met some engineers who told them damaged vehicles blocked the trail and that it was mined. They returned to the edge of the woods and waited for it to be cleared.

On 6 November operations continued with but little success. The initiative was passing to the enemy. The weather continued to be bad, roads were quagmires, there was no place for men to dry their wet clothing, enemy artillery, direct fire and small arms, poured into KOMMERSCHIEDT, from three sides, VOSSENACK received its share of enemy fire. The situation in VOSSENACK was, by noon considerably weakened. The Germans had moved in as far as the church. (39) (See Map D) A visit to the tank company CP in GERMETER was made to coordinate a counterattack to be made by the engineers, supported by tanks and TDs. This counterattack took place early in the afternoon and was only partly successful. Another was planned for the following

(38) A-10, p.138

(39) A-10, p.163

morning as more engineers were arriving to fight as infantry. A visit to the Infantry battalion CP in VOSSENACK which was now located in a cellar on the north side of town, some 200 yards west of the church brought forth a request for some fire on an unknown number of enemy 120 mm mortars in the draw about 500 yards north of the CP. The platoon leader of the first platoon in "B" Company had reported that heavy mortar fire was coming in on him from this same area.

Company "B" was assigned the mission, and the Reconnaissance Company Commander volunteered to observe and adjust the fire of the two guns from the 2d platoon which were readied to move out. Using a handy-talkie radio the Reconnaissance Officer moved to the open ground north of VOSSENACK, while the TDs moved to positions some 500 yards east of GERMETER. A concentration of high explosive and white phosphorus was directed at the Reconnaissance Officer as he adjusted time fire over their general location. He then called for super-quick fuses. The mortar fire ceased as the three-inch guns raked up and down the draw. No further mortar fire was received from that direction.(40)

The third platoon of "B" Company waited all day at the head of the draw. The engineer work in the valley was slow, most of them having been pulled out to fight as infantry in VOSSENACK. Shortly after dark a German patrol attacked the destroyers. The patrol was finally driven off by the number of hand grenades thrown at them. The platoon requested and received permission to return to GERMETER.

In KOMMERSCHIEDT the 6th of November was a bad day. Only two types of positions were available, cover positions in the

(40) personal knowledge

woods north of town or exposed positions on the flanks of town and in the rubble. These exposed positions were under enemy tank and self-propelled gun fire, principally from the dominating SCHMIDT area and the east. It was necessary for the armor to occupy the exposed positions if the infantry was to hold KOMMERSCHIEDT. All thought of attacking SCHMIDT was forgotten. It took all forces available to hold against the frequent enemy attacks throughout the day.

During the day "C" Company was reduced to three operational destroyers, five damaged destroyers, and crew members of guns incapable of firing now fighting as infantry. The emergency rations and small arms ammunition stowed on the vehicles were being put to use. It was their only source of supply. However they were little concerned with eating, only with survival and relief. Four fully operational tanks were left at the end of the day. Three others had damaged turrets.

On the division front there was little progress during the 6th of November. To the north the 109th Infantry continued pressure, and in the afternoon the 12th RCT of the 4th Infantry Division began to relieve them. To the south the 110th Infantry cleared several pockets of resistance within their area. Artillery, mortar, and small arms fire continued to be heavy and casualties mounted. (41)

During the night 6-7 November the principle concern of the battalion commander was to reinforce and resupply Company "C". The 112th Infantry Supply officer had assigned the battalion two weasels for resupply of the company. These were a part of a large convoy he had organized to cross the KALL valley that night. The S-4 of the 893d. T. D. Battalion loaded these with

(41) A-7, p. 194

ammunition and medical equipment as requested by "C" Company commander and the Administrative Officer of "C" Company was to accompany them. Also organized to accompany this column was a make-shift platoon of destroyers. This platoon consisted of four replacement destroyers for "C" Company, personnel from "C" Company headquarters (administrative, maintenance, and supply personnel) and the personnel from the destroyer which had developed a leaking recoil mechanism. The column got as far as GERMETER, most of the column halted when a long and heavy artillery concentration landed along the road. Some of the supply column continued on but "C" companies supplies were not delivered. The make-shift platoon never reached the MSR. The lead destroyer became bogged down on the trail south of "C" Company's rear CP, the second bogged down attempting to by-pass it and the untrained crews of the remaining two TDs could do little more than tow them back out of the soft area.(42)

A conference was also held with the Assistant Division Commander relative to the organization of Task Force Davis, which was to include two platoons of "B" Company and the make-shift platoon of "C" Company. More definite instructions were to be issued later. However this plan was not carried out since the situation deteriorated even more before it could be put in effect. (42)

KOMMERSCHIEDT IS LOST-VOSSENACK REGAINED.

At 0600 7 November the enemy commenced a coordinated attack on KOMMERSCHIEDT. It began with a 30 minute artillery preparation and was closely followed by infantry (estimated as one or two battalions) and 18-20 tanks (Mark V and VI) supported by direct fire of other tanks and SPs on the SCHMIDT

(42) personal knowledge

ridge. (43)

The Germans followed the barrage so closely that the enemy were firing at them from close range before they were noticed. In the ensuing battle which lasted until about 1030 hours, two more of the operational destroyers were knocked out along with four of the damaged guns. They had knocked out five of the enemy tanks and killed some 40 of the accompanying infantry. The second platoon leader knocked out a Mark VI at 30 yards before his destroyer was hit. This attack left "C" Company with one operational, one damaged destroyer, and no platoon leaders. The tankers of 707th Tank Battalion were reduced to one operating and 2 damaged tanks. The armor withdrew to the woods northeast of town and the infantry followed. The enemy did not press their success. Throughout the remainder of the day requests for artillery fire on enemy positions were relayed from "C" Company commander. Particularly on the woods east of their positions where the Germans seemed to be concentrating. Fire from enemy artillery and tanks poured into the area our troops held all afternoon.

At 1830 the enemy launched another Tank-infantry attack which was broken up 100 yards from our Infantry's position by artillery fire. (44)

In VOSSENACK this same day the engineers launched an attack to retake the remainder of the town, the attack of the day before having reached the church. The attack was supported by a platoon of tanks with the 1st platoon of "B" Company 893d TD Bn. as overwatchers. Artillery and mortars fired a preparatory barrage and at 0815 they jumped off. By 1500 they had

(43) A-9, p.197

(44) A-11, 6-7 November 44
personal knowledge

retaken the town.

Meanwhile the TD battalion commander had received additional instructions relative to Task Force Davis and an order to send the third platoon of "B" Company across the KALL valley. This was the platoon which had been unable to cross with Task Force Ripple because of the infiltration and mining of the trail to KOMMERSCHIEDT. The Reconnaissance Platoon leaders attached to "B" and "C" Company took a half track early in the morning and checked the MSR entrance with the engineers. They reported still mined and blocked. The few engineers left had all they could do to repel German patrols. The Reconnaissance platoon leader attached to "C" Company had remained with the third platoon of "B" Company and was to guide them over. They departed from RICHELSKAUL at 1500 after taking on a load of small arms ammunition, machine guns, emergency rations and medical supplies. Efforts to secure an infantry escort or have the trail cleared first were unsuccessful since every available man was in the line.

The platoon received only sporadic artillery fire going through VOSSENACK but when they turned south and started across the 1200 yards of open ground direct fire and machine gun fire came at them from the southeast. Artillery blanketed the area. The two leading destroyers were knocked out the third received a hit on the left driving sprocket and the fourth was going so fast that it failed to stop on the mushy ground until it crashed into the woodline near the entrance to the draw. (45) This was the last attempt to reach KOMMERSCHIEDT.

Reports of enemy tanks continued to come in from the air

(45) Statement Lt. J. W. Fuller Recon. Ptn. Ldr. November 44

OP, from the infantry and from "C" Company. Enemy tanks were reported in increasing numbers in the HURTGEM-BRANDENBERG-BERGSTEIN-SCHMIDT and KOMMERSCHIEDT areas as well as in the KALL valley itself. The 1st platoon of "B" Company in VOSSENACK could not however locate any targets within range.

In the remainder of the division sector the 12 RCF of the 4th Division had completely relieved the 109th Infantry in the north, the 2nd Battalion of the 109th relieved the remaining elements of the 2nd Battalion 112th Infantry and engineers in VOSSENACK and ordered to hold at all costs. The 110th Infantry (less one battalion with TF Ripple) made small advances in the south against stiff resistance. (46)

On the night 7-8 November the battalion commander returned to the command post proper in MULARSCHUTTE at 2300 hours. Here they met the Division Anti-Tank Officer who issued instructions concerning the withdrawal of forces south of the KALL River. This was planned to start at dusk on the evening of the 8th of November. The MSR trail would be secured and held open by the third battalion 109th Infantry. These instructions were encoded in detail and relayed to "C" Company at 080155 November as Division had ordered. The assembly area for "C" Company was the forward battalion CP southwest of RICHELSKAUL. The nightly staff conference was concerned primarily with plans for receiving, resting and reconstituting "C" Company. Efforts to have "A" Company returned to the battalion had continued from the beginning to the end of the operation, but without success. "B" Company personnel were also badly fatigued. Division Intelligence Reports during the operation indicated 2000-3000

(46) A-6, p. 91

rounds of enemy artillery and mortar fire falling daily in the VOSSENACK-GERMETER area.(47)

On the morning of 8 November final plans were drawn up for the reception of the remnants of "C" Company and the battalion commander departed for his forward CP at 0900. Reports of increasing numbers of enemy tanks continued to come in. A dismounted patrol led by the 2d Reconnaissance Platoon Leader was sent to determine the possibility of evacuating the destroyers of the third platoon of "B" Company which were lost the day before. About 1000 hours the tank platoon leader in VOSSENACK called for TDs to fire at some enemy tanks in the SCHMIDT area. The range was over 3000 yards and the 1st and 2d platoons which moved in fired several rounds per gun but could not identify the targets as tanks. Meanwhile the infantry battalion commander in VOSSENACK agreed to have the destroyers remain in cover positions in GERMETER during periods of good visibility when early warning of an enemy tank threat could be expected. At night and during periods of poor visibility the guns would remain in town.

The Reconnaissance platoon leader returned from his patrol at 1300 hours. He and two of his patrol members had been wounded. He reported that evacuation of the vehicles was not feasible, and further, the area around the guns was under small arms, mortar and artillery fire.

About this same time the tankers reported targets on the BERGSTEIN ridge. The first platoon of TDs moved back into town. The targets appeared to be pillboxes and the

(47) Personal Knowledge

results of firing were unknown. At 1600 hours an Air O.P. reported enemy tanks and infantry north of KOMMERSCHIEDT and due east of the battered remnants of our forces. The 1st platoon moved to positions on a knoll south of VOSSENACK and spotted them moving west across the open ridge some 3000 yards southeast of their position. The first round fired was a miss, the second, a hit. The enemy crew bailed out only to be caught in a platoon salvo of high explosive shells. This was a Mark IV tank. The number three gun hit a Mark V and spun it halfway around. It burst into flames. The remaining two Mark V's were engaged by the four TD's, One caught fire and the crew of the other bailed out. They, along with some enemy infantry were caught by high explosive rounds. There remained one Mark VI, several others along with the infantry had withdrawn to the woods. The destroyers had been firing normal ammunition and now they switched to the few rounds of HVAP (High Velocity Armor Piercing) they had ready. They decreased the range to allow for the increased muzzle velocity and scored hits. The count was verified by the operations officer and it was believed that this action by the platoon of "B" Company had halted another attack on our forces that remained south of the KALL River.

In the division sector the 12th RCT continued to attack to the north where the 109th Infantry had battered itself for six days. It made some minor gains. In VOSSENACK the infantry (2d Bn. 109th Inf.) took the usual pounding from artillery fire. In the south of the sector the 110th Infantry consolidated gains. The 3d Battalion of the 109th Infantry had moved up and opened the MSR across the KALL for the

withdrawl.(48) Fatigue, tension, trench foot, and the cold wet weather were also adding to the toll of casualties. The nervous tension can in some degree be shown through the number of enemy tanks reported in the area 8 November. During the day the tally kept by the operations officer of the 893d TD. Bn. indicated between 250 and 300 enemy tanks had been reported.

OUR FORCES WITHDRAW FROM THE KOMMERSCHIEDT AREA

During the night 8-9 November the withdrawl was carried out as planned. In the assembly area designated for "C" Company (200 Yards southwest of RICHELSKAUL) all was in readiness. On hand were medical personnel with sedatives, stimulants and first aid equipment and transportation. Guides were spotted. Personnel began arriving about 2315 hours and continued to straggle in until 1020 the following day. Some infantrymen and tankers also came to the same area. The men had many weird experiences to relate- enemy tanks parking over their foxholes, rounds bouncing off the front of Mark V and VI tanks like golf balls, one round of HVAP piercing the frontal plate on a Mark V at 800 yards and of artillery fire that completely shattered their nerves. As soon as a truck was filled the men were moved to a rest area in the rear. One officer and twenty seven men of "C" Company returned from the KOMMERSCHIEDT area.

On the 9th of November orders were received to keep one platoon of TDs in VOSSENACK at all times and to hold at all costs. Enemy tanks reports continued to come in. In the rear, supply personnel at all levels were extremely cooperative. Replacement destroyers, equipment, and ammunition were being

picked up by the battalion's service elements. Replacements however were not all trained TD men. Some were anti-aircraft, artillery and tank replacements but by the end of the five day rest period these men would be familiar with their jobs. All but three destroyers were on hand at the end of the day. Service elements of the battalion worked night and day. Ammunition, fuel and batteries for destroyers were the major requirements. Supply trucks lost their braking power because of the deep mud which ground the brake linings off.

In the afternoon one platoon of "B" Company was given a direct support mission of neutralizing some pillboxes in the southern sector. After the S-3 and TD platoon leader coordinated with the S-3 of the 2d battalion 110th Infantry the platoon moved down to the RAFFELSBRAND area to carry out its mission. Patrols reported 100 enemy dead in the area fired in. (49) The make-shift platoon of "C" Company which was organized on 6 November was attached to "B" Company and positioned in GERMETER. Another composite platoon was ordered to be formed by "C" Company and held in readiness for immediate use.

In VOSSENACK the infantry battalion commander requested that our liason with him be equipped with better communications. An SCR 610 with batterypack was installed in the CP. A Reconnaissance officer and several men were sent to an artillery OP in GERMETER as part of the observation and warning system.

The situation, though still critical should the enemy decide to attack in strength, began to settle down to a normal defense mission.

To sum up the results of this battle: The 893d Tank

(49) A-11 9 November 44

Destroyer Battalion (-Co A) did support the operations of the 28th Infantry Division to the best of its ability. While it failed to get sufficient anti-tank support across the KALL River, a contingency which had not been adequately planned for, the support it did render was adequate in proportion to other arms present in the restricted area. It forced the enemy to commit tank forces as well as infantry forces it had probably planned to use elsewhere and caused enemy infantry to be reluctant to accompany their tanks in some instances. The 275th, 89th Infantry Divisions and 116 Panzer Division (with 18 guns SP 75 mm and Tank Regiment of 60 Mark V and VI tanks) were engaged in this operation. Including tanks destroyed by "C" Company (not verified) the battalion destroyed 3 Mark IV, 10 Mark V and 6 Mark VI German tanks, and killed over 150 enemy personnel. The results of some 6000 rounds of indirect fire were unknown.

The battalion lost 9 killed, 20 missing and 38 wounded. (Most of the missing were found dead three months later) Of 24 destroyers entering the action 16 were lost (11 by "C" company, 5 by "B" company). (50) These losses were in proportion to those of the 707th Tank Battalion which entered the action with 50 medium tanks and lost 31 and the 28th Division itself with over 5500 casualties during the operation. (51) This action was one of the major disasters of World War II. As far as the battalion was concerned the enemy accomplished three things (over and above the physical destruction): (1) Showed that he was not through fighting yet, (2) That we should never underestimate his capabilities and (3) That our terrain evaluation was correct.

(50) A-12 Dtd. 6 November 44. personal knowledge

(51) A-10 p. 268

A-6 p. 93

As a result of the outstanding bravery on the part of Lt. Turney W. Leonard, 1st platoon Co. "C" 893d TD Bn while in KOMMERSCHIEDT area he was awarded the Medal of Honor. (52) His citation includes in part the guiding of his platoon to firing positions in the face of heavy enemy fire, and although wounded early in the action, continuing to fight. At one time he advanced alone and destroyed an enemy machine gun with a hand grenade. He also reorganized infantry elements which had lost their leaders and exhorted them to hold. Finally an artillery shell shattered his arm and he went to an aid station, later captured by the enemy.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. THE MAIN SUPPLY ROUTE

In this operation the main route of advance of the division did not include an adequate main supply road or provisions for an alternate supply road. In the planning stage this was probably not considered a serious drawback. As the action of the 112th Infantry was the main effort of the division and plans included the use of M-29 Cargo Carriers for resupply, it was evident some difficulty was to be expected in resupply in this area. Had the overall plan of isolating the battlefield by artillery and air action succeeded the regiment may well have consolidated its gains and the engineers had time to construct a suitable road across the valley. The fact that the planned isolation failed to occur made the trail (the only one available) an item of paramount importance. It was essential that it be held open, maintained and improved so that armor support, reinforcements and resupply could be gotten to threatened area. With enemy patrols active in the KALL valley

(52) A-13 p.317

security forces should have been provided for the MSR trail. Had such forces been available, it is believed the engineers could have repaired and widened the trail so that it could be used for one-way traffic. Such action would have allowed passage of anti-tank units, tanks and supply vehicles which were badly needed in the KOMMERSCHIEDT area. Evacuation of casualties would also have been facilitated. The strong enemy reaction to the advance of our forces south of the KALL River placed a heavy demand on all units for resupply and replacement. This reaction indicated a particular need for anti-tank elements. The loss of two destroyers by "C" Company in the valley, the failure to resupply them and get replacement guns to them, as well as the failure of the platoon of "B" Company to reinforce them was due in large part to the difficult situation on the supply route. Reconnaissance for an alternate route was made but none could be found. The failure to provide for, secure and maintain an adequate supply route resulted in the loss of critical terrain essential to the success of the operation.

2. WEATHER AND TERRAIN

Next to the enemy in importance, are the weather and terrain. These play the primary role in operation against our own force. In this particular operation plans appeared to have provided for all contingencies. Good weather which was evidently expected failed to materialize. Since isolation of the battleground was to be accomplished by artillery and air, both requiring good observation, the continued bad weather eliminated this possibility. Had the weather been good, the artillery and air would certainly have gone a long

way in reducing the effectiveness of any reserves the enemy attempted to employ in the area. As it happened, the isolation failed to reach the level necessary, due primarily to the bad weather. The rain, sleet and snow also affected the terrain, particularly the roads and trails needed by the battalion. The few roads (except those which were hard-topped) and trails which were available were turned into quagmires. It was necessary to install grousers on the destroyers and chains on vehicles to push through the ever deepening mud. Brakes became useless on most vehicles in the battalion. The combined effect of the weather and terrain delayed the movement of all types of transport and hampered the operation. Observation was restricted by mist and rain as well as the dense woods. Critical terrain was held by the enemy and when observation was good his fires were accurate and heavy. The weather had other effects not materially visible. The cloudy days and black nights had a depressing effect on troops operating in the dense forest. There was no place to dry out wet clothing or gain temporary relief from the cold. Adding to these the almost continuous enemy artillery and mortar fire one can well imagine the ultimate effect on the combat elements. Had the weather been good, it is believed the isolation of the battleground would have been enough to turn this defeat into a reasonably successful operation.

3. REPORTS OF ENEMY TANK ACTIVITIES

Throughout the critical phases of the operation enemy tanks were reported frequently. Reports must be factual complete and accurate. False reports, unverified may lead to premature deployment of reserves and movement to areas they are not needed. In critical situations such reports tend to increase the tenseness on the part of all personnel

and confidence is lost in the unit reporting. Reports of enemy tanks should include as a minimum the number and time observed, their location and direction of movement. Otherwise for example, the message '20 tanks' reported by one observer may be transmitted to the acting agency by several echelons of command at different times. Since tanks can move rapidly, time to verify each report does not often exist.

In this operation the critical situation (due to heavy enemy fire, high casualty rate, the weather and the terrain) resulted in many erroneous reports and the expenditure of much artillery ammunition as well as the movement of anti-tank units and an increased strain on the already fatigued infantry.

4. THE ENEMY CAPABILITIES

'Never underestimate the capabilities of the enemy'. This is a phrase we all learned when we first donned a uniform in the army. For several months prior to the operation, the TD unit like many others, had seen the enemies defenses crumble. Heavy battles were the exception rather than the rule. The over-all importance of the operation was not known initially. The fact that the control of the ROER Dams was the key to First Army's drive to the COLOGNE plain was evidenced by the strong enemy reaction which resulted in the loss of SCHMIDT. In spite of the fact the Germans were suffering many reversals, they demonstrated here that they were not through fighting. Although faced with a need for conservation, this threat to his defensive scheme resulted in almost unlimited expenditures of troops and munitions. The number of enemy units engaged as well as the amount of fire placed on our forces proved this. Coupled with bad weather he was able to restore his loss of SCHMIDT and KOMMERSCHIEDT and inflict heavy losses on our forces.

5. RECONSTITUTING A RESERVE

The battalion in this operation always maintained a reserve.

The threat of enemy tank attacks on VOSSENACK from the North which were possible or the East which were improbable led to a belief that a reserve of some sort should be held ready at all times. Had the operation of Task Force Davis been carried out the battalion would still have had a platoon in reserve. Information received prior to the attack indicated that the enemy had launched tank-infantry attacks from the direction of HURTGEN to GERMETER. Should such an attack have been launched the enemy could have cut off our forces both in VOSSENACK and across the KALL Valley. Without a reserve to halt the tank advance a deep penetration could have been effected since our troops were all in the line. The make-shift platoon of "C" Company was a reserve, as well as the platoon of "P" Company which was retained in GERMETER in cover position almost throughout the entire operation.

6. POSITIONS

In both VOSSENACK and KOMMERSCHIEDT the only positions available were exposed to direct enemy observation. Hull down positions existed in the rubble for only a few guns. Due to this factor our armor was subjected to heavy enemy fires both direct and indirect and as a result its effectiveness was considerably reduced. When armored units are required to occupy exposed positions the bulk of such units should be held in reserve in covered positions ready to move to preselected positions on call. Adequate observation, liason, communication and rehearsal in this type of employment are essential. At night or during periods of reduced visibility when early warning of a threat to our positions cannot be expected the armored units must occupy their preselected positions. In the case of VOSSENACK the occupation of exposed positions caused enemy fires to be directed at the destroyers with the resulting loss of personnel, and equipment and little gain. In KOMMERSCHIEDT it allowed

enemy overwatching tanks and artillery observers to damage or destroy almost the entire company.

7. ROTATION OR RELIEF

The effect of continuous enemy fire and extended time in the line is cumulative. This applies more to the infantry soldier than it does to the armored force man in his mobile pillbox. However it does apply in the opinion of the writer. Continued exposure to adverse weather, subsisting on emergency type rations, lack of space to move, nervous tension due to enemy fire and other factors result in a dangerous psychological attitude. Different men are naturally affected in different ways and express this attitude in different ways. The weakest will wind up probably with a self inflicted wound, the stronger hold out until he loses his instinct for self preservation. Fatigue both physical and mental dulls the individual until he fails to follow his combat training and experience. The result is higher casualties. In this operation this point was not covered in great detail. The reaction described was observed and personally experienced to a limited extent. Some personnel in "B" Company and more so in "C" Companies exhibited the attitude that they may as well be hit as to go on under such conditions any longer. The 3rd platoon of "B" Company in carrying out its order to cross the KALL valley after it had been determined the trail was still blocked crossed the open ground in column and failed to cover their advance by the overwatching principle they normally employed. It is believed in situations where enemy fire is extremely heavy and troops must hold their positions at all costs some effort to rotate or relieve them must be instituted. In VOSSENACK this was a easy matter, accomplished by the rotation of platoons in the town. However the GERMETER area was under almost the same amount of fire and the rotation did not provide rest for

fatigued personnel. Their combat efficiency was therefore considerably reduced.

8. ARMORED UNITS IN RESTRICTED AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT

In areas where the use of our armor is restricted and normal fire and maneuver impossible we must have some heavily armored tanks which ^{are} capable of meeting the enemy on a comparatively equal basis. The employment of the tank destroyer battalion in this operation was in line with the usual method of employment of tank destroyers in the European theatre. Tank destroyers were not designed nor did their doctrine(53) adequately provide for this type of employment. However their gun (3" or 76mm) did excell that of our tanks and it was necessary to employ the gun in its primary mission, from exposed positions. Even the 3" gun however, does not normally penetrate the glacis (frontal) plate of a German Mark V or larger tank. It is believed by the author that two requirements must be met if we are to successfully destroy enemy armor in a future war. First, special ammunition must be developed (as was H.V.A.P.) and distributed in adequate quantities to all units engaging enemy armor. Second, we must have available and ready for mass production tanks capable of matching or excelling the best the enemy can put in the field. In this operation the thinly armored tank destroyer and medium tank proved no match for the Mark V and VI except when the latter tanks were hit in the side or with special ammunition.

LESSONS

1. An alternate main supply route should be available, particularly when there is a possibility ~~that the main supply route may prove inadequate.~~

2. Evaluation of the weather and terrain must be as complete, as detailed and as accurate as possible, otherwise the operation may fail.

(53) T.D.Doctrine-A-14, p.426, FM 18-5

3. In critical situations, reports of enemy activities must be verified when possible, since false reports tend to lower morale and result in unnecessary movement of troops or deployment of reserves.

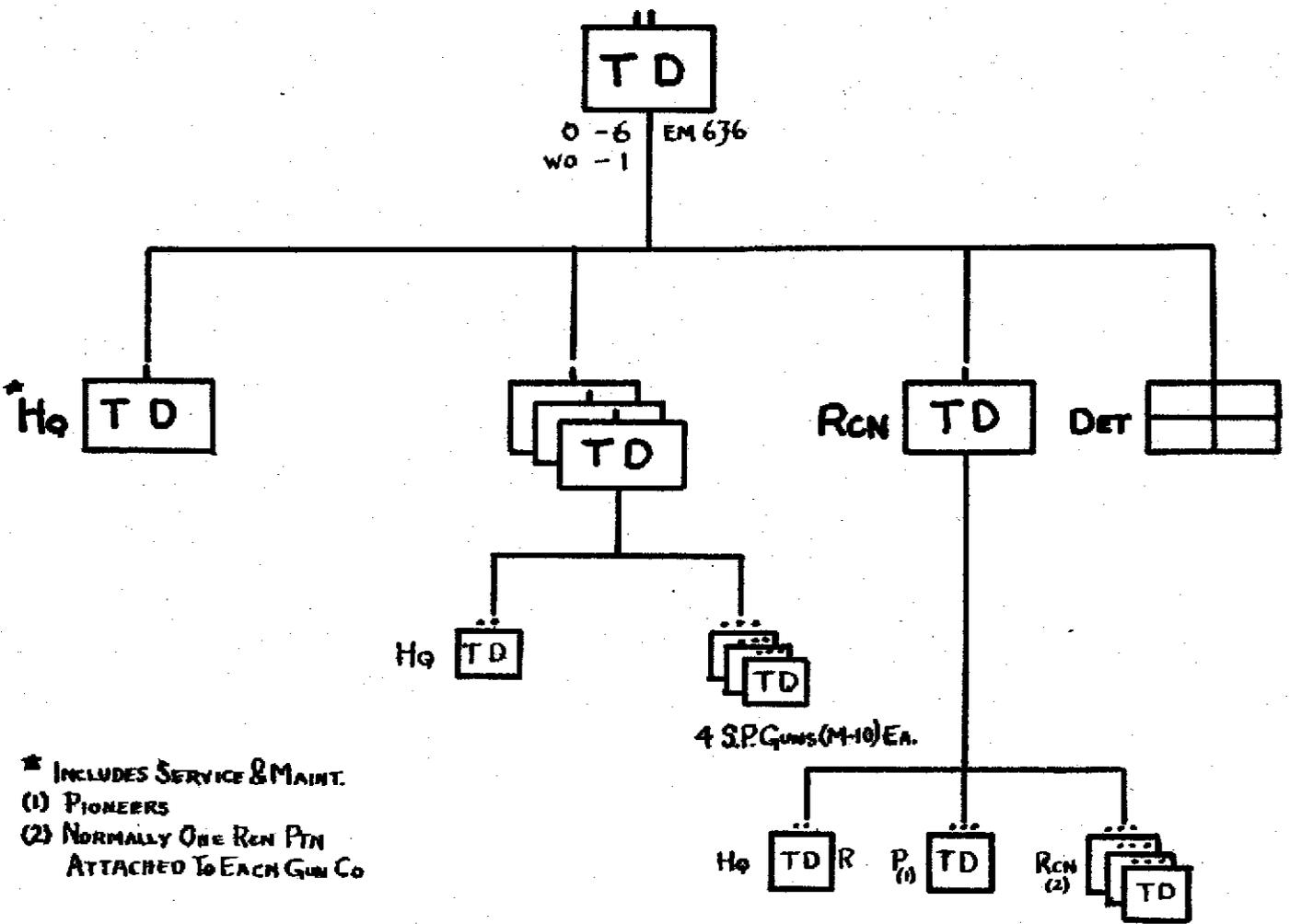
4. In order to reduce to a minimum the unknown factors in an operation, the capabilities of the enemy must not be underestimated if success is to be insured.

5. Always reconstitute a reserve for no matter how critical a particular situation may appear, the lack of a reserve may prove disastrous.

6. When an armored unit is forced to hold an exposed position, the bulk of its forces should be in an adjacent covered position ready to occupy preselected positions when needed.

7. In areas of continuous heavy shelling, combat troops including armor, must be relieved or rotated before their combat efficiency is adversely affected.

8. In areas where armored elements are canalized and normal maneuver impossible, our armor (and its armament) must be equal to that of the enemy if we are to succeed without undue losses.



* INCLUDES SERVICE & MAINT.
 (1) PIONEERS
 (2) NORMALLY ONE RCN PTN ATTACHED TO EACH GUN CO

M-10 DESTROYER

WT. - 3125 T. w/ CREW
 SPEED - 30 MPH MAX.
 RADIO - SCR 510 or 610
 3" GUN
 MAX. RANGE - 16000 yds
 PENETRATION - 4" ARMOR AT 1000 yds NORMAL AP
 POWER
 TWO 375 HP 6 cyl. DIESEL MOTORS
 WIDTH - 10 FEET

HULL ARMOR
 FRONTAL - 1/2" To 2"
 SIDE - 3/4" To 1"
 BOTTOM - 1/4"
 AA PROTECTION - CAL 50 MG.
 MOUNTED ON TOP REAR OF THE OPEN TURRET
 NO HULL OR COXIAL CAL 30 MGS