

Staff Department
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

STUDENT MONOGRAPH
Advanced Infantry Officers Course
Class Nr. 2
1955-56

TITLE
Consider The Reverse Slope

Capt Leon H. Sugg, Jr.
Roster Nr 179

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
DISCUSSION.....	4
CONCLUSIONS.....	22
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	23
ANNEX A.....	24
ANNEX B.....	25
ANNEX C.....	26

PREFACE

30 January 1956
Date

The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author - not necessarily that of The Infantry School or the Department of the Army.


Signature

INTRODUCTION

"The occupation of a reverse slope position may be dictated if control of the forward slope is lost or not gained, or if the forward slope cannot be held because of its extreme vulnerability to enemy fire". The foregoing quotation was extracted from paragraph 291, FM 7-10, Rifle Company Infantry Regiment, Dated October 1949.

The concept of defense in the minds of most infantrymen is long fields of fire for all weapons from positions, if possible, on the military crest of the dominating terrain available in the area to be defended. It is the purpose of this monograph, through the use of observations made in combat theaters, and combat examples, all things being equal, to prove that the reverse slope defensive position is not to be used when conditions are not favorable for conventional type defense, but should be given a place of equal importance in the minds of soldiers. Further; that a reverse slope position properly organized, and determinedly defended, can be successfully held against major attacks with heavy losses to the attacker and minimum losses to the defender.

DISCUSSION

Cover and concealment are major factors in the conduct of successful defense. This fact is well known by most commanders and many hours are spent in training troops to take advantage of cover, in selection of positions, and in the means to camouflage the position once it has been selected and prepared. Most students, on being given a position to defend will immediately look to the exposed forward slopes seeking long fields of fire and observation for all weapons. (2:84)

Organization of the reverse slope goes a long way in solving the cover and concealment problem, as the effect of enemy ground observed fires are greatly reduced by the hill mass to the immediate front. (3:131)

There are many bonus advantages made possible by the increase in cover and concealment on the reverse slope. The movement of troops to the area which receives the major threat is possible. In moving they are subjected only to unobserved mortar and some artillery fire; while, if on the forward slope, their movement is readily picked up and subjected to all the fires the enemy has available. The problem of messing and getting ammunition to troops on the forward slope is often limited to the cover of darkness. This problem is greatly relieved by using the reverse slope. (7:4) Positions on the MLR are not disclosed prematurely by the firing of the troops because they cannot see the attacker until he crosses the crest, at which time he is within effective range; thus the element of surprise may be gained by the defender. Positions may be worked on and improved during daylight, fields of fire cleared, and obstacles constructed and improved when in direct contact with the enemy. In many cases this would be entirely denied to troops on the forward slopes. Lastly and possibly

the most important advantage offered by the reverse slope position is the greater freedom of movement allowed to commanders in the supervision of their troops. (3:131)

The United States Army, many times during the Second World War and the Korean Conflict, ran up against enemy positions organized on the reverse slope and occasionally one of our enterprising commanders tried one for himself. Let us look into several of these examples and see the results.

A PLATOON IN THE REVERSE SLOPE DEFENSE ²

On the 15th of March, 1943, in Tunisia, the battle for GAFSA and EL GUETTAR began with the 18th Infantry capturing GAFSA and EL GUETTAR in that order. On the 20th of March the regiment was attacking to the east from EL GUETTAR along the GABLES road. The country in which the regiment was operating was generally a rugged valley, slanting down from around 2000 feet at the shoulders of flanking ridges to desert level where the valley ended at GABLES. There was little or no vegetation in this area. The regiment was advancing from EL GUETTAR with the 1st Battalion on the right shoulder of the valley and the 3d Battalion on the left shoulder. Just as the regiment approached the hills to the east of EL GUETTAR it was ordered to go into defensive positions. The 1st Battalion taking positions on the right shoulder of the valley and the 3d Battalion on the left shoulder, with its right flank company, Company K extending down toward the floor of the valley, covering ^{the} midpoint by fire. The valley was about four miles wide. Dispositions within Company K placed the 1st Platoon on a forward hill with the 2d and 3d Platoons to its right and left rear respectively. The hill occupied by the 1st Platoon was about 200 yards in width along the front and angled across the long axis of the valley at about

fortyfive degrees. The forward slope was gradual and even. The reverse slope was steep, about a thirty degree slope, and was cut by a wadi or ditch about four feet wide and five feet deep, ^{which} and ran generally parallel with the crest about fifteen yards down the reverse slope. (3:129)(4:8)

It was here ^{in this wadi}, on the 22d of March, 1943 that the ^{lieutenant} ^{leader} 1st Platoon found himself. The forward slopes of his hill ^{was} ^{here} under scattered small arms fire and intelligence reports stated that the enemy, ^{elements} ~~composed~~ of an armored division, was expected to attack. (4:8)

The lieutenant crawled up to the crest to pick positions for the defense of his hill. On sticking his head over the crest slugs spattered rock fragments down his neck. He ducked down behind the protection of the crest and considered his position. He had in addition to his platoon an attached LMG section and one 60-mm mortar squad. He could put his LMG's and BAR's on the crest and wait for night to further organize his position. However, he knew he could expect an attack at anytime. (4:8)

The lieutenant knew that the Germans had been using reverse slope positions to good advantage since the African Campaign started. He remembered they had been tough positions to take. He looked his position over under the new light of setting up behind the protecting crest. The crest would give him complete concealment from ground observation, and cover from the enemy automatic weapons fire that was now being placed against the forward slopes. It would also give protection against any enemy flat trajectory weapons, particularly those of the German tanks which were expected. Mortar fire effects would be greatly lessened with the concealment offered by the crest against enemy observers. The lieutenant put the platoon in along the wadi,

spacing his men five yards apart, three squads on line. Each man dug himself a foxhole in against the forward bank. The grenadiers were placed on the flanks and the 60-mm mortar squad went into position in the wadi near the platoon CP, which was located in the center of the platoon position. The section of LMG's was split, one going in on each flank, firing along the crest. This position also enabled them to give flank protection. The BAR's were checked to insure they could cover the entire crest. Two OP's were organized on the crest for observation forward. (See Annex A) (4:9) e

The rest of the day was spent in improving the positions. When darkness began to fall and still the attack had not come the lieutenant got his squad leaders together and issued an order. He had every man move straight forward and dig-in just ahead of the crest in the same relative position they had occupied on the reverse slope. (He also established a two man LP, 500 yards straight to the front. He had them relieved every hour to keep them alert and to give every man a chance to dig in.) By midnight the digging was complete so the lieutenant split the rest of the night into two watches letting half the platoon sleep each watch. (4:10) e

The platoon was alerted at 0600 hours by the sound of motors and steel tracks ringing on the rocks. The word was passed to hold all fire. German tanks passed the flanks of the platoon position and disappeared to the rear. All was quiet for what seemed to be a long time. As the sun came up a line of half tracks could be seen about 700 yards to the platoon's front. As the enemy advanced, his fires began to fall on the platoon position. The man next to the platoon leader was hit almost immediately. The lieutenant passed the word, "back into the reverse slope positions". The platoon slid down over the crest, back into the cover of the wadi and the holes that were prepared the

day before. The lieutenant yelled, "hold your fire! don't open up until you hear me". The sound of motors could be heard approaching and ^{then} the deep roar as the half tracks mounted the slope. The noise paused and came no closer. The lieutenant guessed that they were still a couple of hundred yards away. (4:10)

There was a five minute wait, then a German Officer and his runner appeared on the crest. The lieutenant gave him time to wave his men forward and then shot him. The platoon sergeant got the runner. German Infantry poured over the crest and the ^{Americans} GI's opened up with the LMG's, BAR's, and M1 Rifles. No German got far enough forward for his body to roll into the wadi. (4:10)

In the next hour, three more attacks came over the crest with the same results. After the failure of the last ^{attack}, the survivors stayed behind the crest and threw grenades over. A warning system improvised on the spot was set up and worked perfectly. When a German grenade flew over the crest, the men who saw it yelled and everyone ducked into their holes. After each explosion grenades were thrown back. (These grenades were very effective on the Germans laying exposed on the forward slopes.) The 60-mm mortar also brought shells in on the forward slopes with good effect. (4:10)

The Germans again renewed their attack at 11:00 hours. They had studied the ground carefully and this time were determined to take the position. They sent a squad around the left and drove up the valley on the right with a company in halftracks. The LMG on the left flank and the BAR of the left squad along with the M1's in that area took ^{ELIMINATED} care of this German Squad with ease. (4:10)

Over on the right flank the rifle grenadiers had a field day. They stopped the half tracks, and the LMG and rifles ^{slaughtered the riders.} plastered them. The Germans made a determined effort. They scattered from the half

tracks and tried their best to work up the hill on foot. There was little cover and they found it a hopeless task. The few survivors gave up and got out as best they could. (4:10)^R

By 1700 hours all enemy attacks had been repulsed. The infantry accompanying the German Tanks had been unable to assault any other point on the left of the valley without reducing this forward strong point, which they had been unable to do. In their attempts they had lost 500 men either killed or wounded and five half-tracks destroyed. On ^{PARTY} a reconnaissance sent forward to check the crest and put back in the OP's for observation forward, ^{could see} the surviving Germans could be seen withdrawing down the valley from where they had come that morning. (4:11)

On checking the condition of his platoon the lieutenant found one rifleman dead and six wounded. All the wounded were able to walk back to the battalion aid station. (4:11)^R

(Company K was awarded The Presidential Unit Citation for this action in General Order #60, War Department, 29 July 1944.)

In analyzing this action we find a platoon defending in a reverse slope position against attacks made by a determined enemy who greatly outnumbered the defender. ^{AS} ~~That~~ ^{IT} the attacks were determined and fierce ^{AS} is indicated by the numerous attempts made by the Germans to dislodge the platoon, and by the 500 casualties they suffered in so doing.

~~That~~ ^{IT} the topographical crest immediately to the platoon's front served it well in giving cover and concealment and in gaining surprise ^{AS} is indicated by the fact that the initial enemy attack came boldly across the crest with no preparatory fires. Furthermore, after the enemy was pushed back to the forward crest he was only able to bring grenades to bear on the platoon position. The platoon suffered only seven casualties, although under heavy attack for most of the day, indicating

that the fires the enemy was able to deliver on the platoon position ^{were} ~~was~~ negligible.

In addition to gaining surprise, cover, and concealment the platoon's primary positions served well to meet the envelopment which the enemy brought against its flanks and rear. ✓ *Return to Add III*

A BATTALION IN REVERSE SLOPE DEFENSE

At 0300 hours, 17 December 1944, the 26th Infantry was ordered to CAMP ELSENBORN, on the northern flank of the breakthrough which was in progress at this time by the German Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies and was to become known as "The Belgium Bulge". (5:6,9)

The 26th Infantry reached CAMP ELSENBORN at 0700 hours, 17 December and was given the mission, by the 99th Division under whose control they were placed at this time, to occupy BUTGENBACH which appeared to be the next objective of the 12th SS Panzer Division, (5:10)

The regiment occupied BUTGENBACH at 1400 hours and the 2d and 3d Battalions continued the attack to the southeast with the mission of seizing the high ground west and southwest of BULLINGEN. This was accomplished at 1540 hours. The 1st Battalion was ordered to secure BUTGENBACH and maintain contact with the 2d Battalion by jeep patrols along the BUTGENBACH - BULLINGEN Road. The regimental command post was located in BUTGENBACH. (5:10)

The main enemy units opposing the 26th Infantry at this time consisted of elements of the 12th SS Panzer, 12th Infantry, and 3d Parachute Divisions. (5:10)

Due to the recent period of rehabilitation the regiment had undergone, after their drive through The HURTGEN FOREST had been completed, on 7 December, and due to the long combat record of the regiment, combat efficiency was relatively high. The enemy was in peak condition. His units had been brought up to full strength for this drive, large

amounts of material had been assembled, and his troops had been told that this was the decisive blow to eliminate the allied threat in the west. (5:10)

The 2d Battalion, which we will be concerned with for this operation, received orders at 1600 hours, 17 December to defend the high ground east, southeast, and south of DOM BUTCHENBACH. The battalion had 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. The battalion commander made his reconnaissance and in conjunction with his staff decided on a reverse slope defense. His reasons for selecting the reverse slope was for protection against the heavy fires that the enemy had available and which were expected to be brought against the battalion positions. Due to the 2100 yard front assigned the battalion it was decided to put three companies on line with three platoons on line in each company, except for Company G who utilized two platoons on line and furnished its Third Platoon for the battalion reserve. The Third Platoon of Company G and the attached tank platoon were combined into a tank infantry team and located back from the MLR on Hill 593. (See Annex B) (5:11)

Company F was assigned the ridge overlooking BULLINGEN. Company G (Minus one platoon) was placed to the right of the BULLINGEN Road. Company E extended from Company G's right limit to the right limit of the MLR. (See Annex B) In his defensive order the battalion commander specified that each company would have one 60-mm mortar laid for firing illuminating shells during the hours of darkness. In addition he requested that the supporting artillery battalion have one howitzer laid to fire illuminating shells every night. The 57-mm Antitank Guns and attached M-10 Tank Destroyers were disposed to cover the main avenues of armored approach, which were the roads from BULLINGEN and MORS-

CHECK to DOM BUTCHENBACH and the open ground between these roads. (See Annex B)

A gap of 1200 yards existed between the right flank of the 2d Battalion and the left of the 1st Battalion. This was unavoidable because of the shortage of units in the area. Due to the reverse slope positions occupied by the battalion supplementary positions to protect the rear were not necessary since the units could adequately perform this mission from their primary positions. (See Annex B) (5:11,12)

The battalion sector offered very little concealment from the air, except for the buildings in the area. Companies F and G located their command posts in a building together. Company E's Command Post was located in a building a few yards from the battalion command post. The battalion command post and aid station occupied the cellar and 1st floor of the town's main building, and the battalion OP was located in the third story of the command post. (See Annex B) (5:12)

Organization of the sector was started immediately, positions were dug and camouflaged, overhead cover was ordered for all crew-served weapons, and alternate positions were selected for machineguns and mortars. No artillery barrages were designated due to the extended front, but numerous artillery and mortar concentrations covering the front were plotted, registered, and passed down to include platoon leaders. Mines and barbed wire were requested and plans made to employ them when they were available. (5:14,15)

Three wire lines were laid over different routes to each company, and two to each platoon, to include the attached platoons. Normal radio and messengers were employed. Ammunition was stacked on positions for the 60 and 81-mm mortars. Patrols were sent out to BULLINGEN and MORSCHECK to prevent surprise. The patrols reported enemy vehicles moving southwest through BULLINGEN to MORSCHECK and continuing

on to the southwest, and some movement of tanks was seen in BULLINGEN and reported. (5:15)

The 18th of December was spent improving positions and one of the tank destroyers knocked out six light enemy vehicles which attempted to use the BULLINGEN-MORSHECK road during the day. In addition to the six light vehicles two truck loads of German Infantry and a armored car blundered into the 2d Battalion's position and were destroyed. Just prior to midnight approximately 100 antitank mines were received by the battalion. These mines were immediately put in forward of the MIR to block the two main roads into the battalion's sector. (5:15,16,17)

At 0215 hours, 19 December, the first enemy attack was made on the battalion position. Twenty truck loads of infantry dismounted about 700 yards to the front of Company F and were joined by an estimated ten tanks. They immediately launched an attack on Company F from the east and southeast. (See Annex B) Company F used the organic 60-mm mortars to illuminate the area and called for prearranged artillery concentrations. Altogether the fires of the 33d Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm howitzer), 5th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm Howitzer), and two V Corps Artillery Battalions (155-mm howitzer) were brought in on this attack and within an hour it was broken up. The enemy losses were 100 men killed, 3 tanks knockedout, and 4 trucks destroyed. (5:18)

One hour before daylight on the 19th of December, Company B, 26th Infantry moved in on the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry's left flank reducing the gap between the 1st and 2d Battalions to 600 yards. (See Annex B) The remaining 600 yards could be covered by fire during daylight and was outposted by Company B at night. (5:18)

Shortly after daylight enemy artillery and mortar fire began to come in on the battalion and increased in intensity until 1000 hours.

At this time the enemy launched an attack with a company of infantry and two tanks against Company G, and at the same time a company of infantry with four tanks hit Company F. Both of these attacks were repulsed with 57-mm antitank, artillery, and mortar fires. Some of these fires were called down to within fifty yards of the MLR. (5:19)

No more attacks were made by the enemy on the 19th of December. The three he made had been costly in losses of personnel and tanks. The 2d Battalion had only five casualties throughout the day, due to the well prepared reverse slope position occupied by the battalion and the zeal displayed by the troops in holding their positions. (5:20)

At 0330 hours, 20 December an estimated 20 tanks and a battalion of infantry attacked Company G and a similar force attacked Company F. (See Annex B) All available artillery fire was requested on the attackers. Three enemy tanks passed through the left platoon of Company G. These tanks passed all the way through the battalion position doing little damage, two of them were knocked out as they passed out of the battalion area in Company E's sector. (See Annex B) While these tanks were running through the battalion area, Companies F and G, continued to hold back strong attacks all along their front. By 0445 hours the attacks had been completely repulsed. No infantry penetrations had been made in the battalion lines. (5:22)

The Germans, at 0545 hours, after a intensive artillery and mortar preparation, launched another attack, this time with 20 tanks and a battalion of infantry astride the BULLINGEN Road against Company F. Company F called in artillery fire and ten of the enemy tanks were knocked out by the antitank weapons within the battalion position as they crossed the crest to the company's front. The remaining ten tanks withdrew behind the crest and attacked the left platoon of Company G. (See Annex B) This platoon was practically eliminated but the enemy

failed to get through due to the devastating fire of supporting artillery called in on his attacks. The Germans then withdrew temporarily to regroup for a second attack. (5:23)

As soon as this last attack had subsided the battalion commander decided to utilize the platoon from Company G that had been held in battalion reserve to plug the gap made in Company G's lines. This was accomplished and the battalion commander notified regiment that he had committed his infantry reserve. At the same time he requested that a rifle company and an additional 57-mm antitank platoon to be attached to the battalion. (5:23)

Fifteen minutes after the attack on Companies F and G had been repulsed an attack of approximately battalion size with tanks was launched by the enemy against Company E. (See Annex B) Two of the tanks were knocked out and the infantry attacking with them were all but annihilated by supporting artillery, mortars, machinegun, and rifle fire. The remaining enemy in this force withdrew toward MORSHECK. By 0830 hours all attacks had been repulsed and the front line companies began reorganizing their sectors. (5:24)

The battalion continued to hold its positions against heavy enemy attacks, which continued until 15 January 1945, taking a great toll of the Germans with relatively light casualties to itself. On the 15th of January the 1st Division launched a coordinated attack which resulted in restoring the line in its sector to that of 15th of December 1944.

In analyzing the defense of DOM BUTCHENBACH by the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, we find a reinforced battalion employing a deliberate reverse slope position, against a determined attacker who greatly outnumbered them in tanks and infantry.

The Germans launched numerous attacks against the battalion's position in overwhelming numbers supported by heavy artillery and

mortar preparations.

The attacks made against this position, in conjunction with the intense artillery fires, although causing some casualties, never succeeded in breaking the battalion's lines.

The defender through proper utilization of supporting fires on the crest and forward slopes of their position broke up every attack made by the enemy inflicting heavy casualties. In contrast the defender suffered few casualties because his well dug-in positions on the reverse slope gave maximum cover and concealment from the attacker's preparatory fires.

BATTALION ATTACK ON A REVERSE SLOPE POSITION

The 90th Infantry Division, operating under the U. S. Third Army, selected two crossing sites on The MOSELLE RIVER in October 1944 during the campaign in Western Europe, one at MALLING and the other at CATTENOM. In making plans for the crossing the 90th Division learned that the prominent LE STROMBERG HILL area immediately to their north, on the friendly side of the river, was occupied by the enemy and afforded excellent observation of the crossing sites. The mission of capturing and occupying LE STROMBERG HILL was assigned to the 83d U. S. Infantry Division, which was located immediately north of the 90th Division and was under the operational control of the Third Army's XX Corps. (6:5)

Upon receiving the XX Corps order to seize LE STROMBERG HILL, the 83d Division ordered Company B of the 308th Engineer (c) Battalion, 83d Division, to join with the 32d Recon. Squadron to capture the hill. The attack was launched at 0900 hours on the 4th of November 1944, and moved to the edge of the objective where the Germans, taking advantage of their excellent observation from the topographical crest, bogged it down with artillery, mortar and small arms fire. (6:6)

Shortly after noon it became apparent that the attack was not succeeding and Division issued a warning order to the 330th Infantry to be prepared to move through the 32 Recon. and Company B, 308th Engineers, to take the hill. By early evening it was definitely established that the attack had failed and Division ordered the 330th Infantry to jump off the following morning. (6:6)

The mission fell to the 1st Battalion of the 330th Infantry which was in regimental reserve at BURMERANGE. (See Annex C) The Battalion was to move under cover of darkness to positions in the rear of the line of departure and to attack at 0800 hours the following morning. The attack was to be made from the present front lines. The plan was to employ Companies A and B abreast, A on the right and B on the left, to seize and hold LE STROMBERG HILL. (6:8)

The 324th Field Artillery Battalion was in direct support. (6:8)

Company A was to attack southeast to the end of LE STROMBERG HILL, then sweep northeast in an enveloping movement. (6:8)

Company B with a machine gun platoon of Company D was to attack the left portion of the hill in a holding attack and continue on order. (6:8)

Company D's 81-mm mortars were to be in general support and the other machine gun platoon was also in general support initially and to be prepared to displace on order. (6:8)

Company C was in battalion reserve from positions in GANDREN (See Annex C) and was to follow Company A on order. (6:9)

The 324th Field Artillery Battalion and the battalion 81-mm mortars were to fire preparatory fires on the objective at H minus 5 minutes, these fires were to be lifted on call. (6:9)

Soon after darkness the battalion (minus Company C) moved up to BASSE KONTZ unobserved. Company C moved into GANDREN. (See Annex C) (6:10)

The men were in high spirits as they moved and morale was excellent. The battalion had suffered only a few casualties in the past few weeks, and the companies were slightly over strength. The night was spent making last minute preparations, with the men getting as much sleep as possible. At 0600 hours a hot meal was served. (6:11)

At H minus 5 minutes the prearranged artillery and mortar fires were laid on the objective and at 0800 hours Companies A and B crossed the line of departure. Shortly after jumping off Company B was pinned down by artillery fire from enemy positions across the MOSELLE RIVER. (6:13)

The enemy's attention appeared to be occupied with Company B and Company A moved up the slope without being fired upon. The 3d Platoon continued up the hill and reached the military crest where it ran into minefields and was pinned down. (6:14)

The 2d Platoon moved around the end of the hill advancing to the northeast. The platoon, hearing the firing and believing that the enemy was occupied with the 3d Platoon, confidently moved forward in platoon column, with the three rifle squads leading. The machinegun section followed in the rear. (6:14)

At this time the 2d Platoon Leader, with the thought of assisting the 3d Platoon, dispatched one squad from the platoon to strike out in the direction of the firing and to engage the enemy on his flanks. The purpose of sending out this squad was to provide a small diversionary force which would both draw the enemy's attention from the 3d Platoon and at the same time provide flank protection for the maneuver of the 2d Platoon. The remainder of the platoon, still unopposed, moved to the left and rear of the German positions on the hill. Fire erupted from the top of the hill and from three or four caves at its base, which had not been noticed because of their natural camouflage.

The platoon had walked into a trap. The men were pinned down from the fire. The machinegun section had been in the rear all through this maneuver and was unable to employ its weapons properly due to the terrain. Because of this ambush, casualties were heavy and the remainder of the troops surrendered, with the exception of the platoon sergeant, who feigned death until after the Germans had moved away. He then slipped back to the 1st Platoon position. (6:14,15)

The company commander arrived at the 1st Platoon at this point and hearing of the 2d Platoon's misfortune ordered the 1st Platoon to hold where they were until further orders. (6:15)

While this was taking place the men of Company B under cover of smoke moved up to the slope of the hill where they immediately ran into a heavily planted anti-personnel minefield (See Annex C) and were again pinned down. (6:16)

The Company Commander of Company A reported the situation to Battalion and then had the 3d Platoon withdraw to BASSE KONTZ from whence it was to proceed along the same route as that followed by the 2d Platoon and try again to outflank the German position. The squad of the 2d Platoon which had been sent to the aid of the 3d Platoon and thus spared, was now dispatched to the 1st Platoon. (6:16)

The 3d Platoon leader proceeded to a vantage point and issued his squad leaders the platoon order. Two squads abreast were to be deployed as skirmishers, the 1st on the left and the 3d on the right, with the mission of sweeping around the slope of the hill to the enemy's rear. The 1st squad was to follow in squad column formation and protect the platoon's flanks and rear. (6:16,17)

The signal was given and the men of the 3d Platoon moved out using assault fire and yelling as loudly as they could. The enemy was startled by this sudden maneuver and several prisoners were taken as the

advance steadily progressed, until it ran into a heavily mined area where it was pinned down by machine gun fire. Within seconds of the machine guns, mortar fire from across the river blanketed the area. Under this heavy hail of fire the men became excited and withdrew toward the nearest cover which was in a small draw. They reached the draw just in time to be greeted by a heavy concentration of mortar fire. Instead of running out of the draw the men became panicky and hugged the ground. This was disastrous and casualties were heavy. The platoon was finally herded out of the draw and sent to positions in rear of the 1st Platoon. (6:18,19)

By this time it was late afternoon and Company B was also having its share of trouble. It was being harassed by small arms and mortar fire and finding it difficult to move through the mine fields. Battalion ordered both companies to halt the attack and continue at daybreak. Darkness afforded Company B the opportunity to clear a path through the mine field. They halted and dug in for the night after getting through the mines. Under cover of darkness, the wounded were evacuated and the men of Company A's 3d Platoon, disorganized and demoralized by the day's events, were withdrawn to BASSE KONTZ for reorganization and a comfortable night's rest before resuming the attack. (6:19)

The German's cleverly planned reverse slope defense had taken a high toll of Company A. It had lost a machine gun section, two full squads from the 2d Platoon, and 28 men from the 3d Platoon, including the 2d Squad Leader and all of the assistant squad leaders. (6:19)

The next morning 6th of November 1944 the attack again jumped off. Company B was late, but Company A made it on time. The engineers of Company B, 308th Engineer Battalion had cleared a path through the mine fields during the night and the 1st Platoon swept through the

Germans in a frontal assault. The Germans attempted to withdraw down the rear slopes of the hill toward the town of RUDLING (See Annex C) but the 3d Platoon, flanking the position, forced them into Company B's area where they were taken prisoner. Judging from the number of casualties and prisoners taken, the Germans had withdrawn their main force during the night and left a holding force of approximately 30 men. Company A occupied the hill at 0930 hours and Company B continued on to clear the town of SCHENGEN. (See Annex C) (6:20,21)

In analyzing this attack we find a German position isolated and with exposed flanks, on the American side of The MOSELLE RIVER with the obvious mission of delaying the American advance until German positions for the defense of the MOSELLE RIVER LINE could be completed.

In this action an enemy unit in a reverse slope defensive position defended with both flanks exposed, against attacks made for two days, inflicting heavy casualties on the attacker.

The attacker in trying to take advantage of the exposed flanks of the German position, twice tried an envelopment and both times ran into the enemy primary defensive positions on the reverse slope, suffering heavy casualties for their trouble and making no impression on the enemy position. The frontal attacks made by the attacker on the first two days ran into heavy artillery and mortar fires and well placed mine fields. These attacks also made no impression on the position.

Judging by the number of casualties and prisoners captured when the position was finally taken, it appears that the Germans had accomplished their mission in delaying the attacker until they were ready to withdraw across the river.

CONCLUSION

1. The reverse slope defensive position is not a special type of operation to be used only if conditions are not favorable for positions on the forward slopes.

2. Units using the reverse slope, through proper utilization of observation posts on the topographical crest, suffer no disadvantages from loss of observation.

3. Through a well coordinated fire plan units on the reverse slope can successfully defend with maximum losses to the attacker and minimum losses to the defender.

4. In utilizing the topographical crest for additional cover and concealment a reverse slope defense presents maximum opportunity to gain surprise.

5. A reverse slope position, due to its location has maximum observation to the rear and is well situated to meet attacks from the flanks and rear.

6. Troops in the reverse slope position are protected from much of the observed enemy supporting fires.

7. Control of personnel on the reverse slope is considerably simplified, due to the additional cover offered by the crest to the front.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. FM 7-10. Rifle Company Infantry Regiment (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, October 1949).
2. Aitken, E. F., "An Attack on Defense", Military Review, pp81-84, June 1952.
3. Mueller, E. L., "Reverse Slope Defense", Infantry School Quarterly, pp129-130, October 1950.
4. Thornton, M. M., and Emery, R. G., "Try the Reverse Slope", Infantry Journal, pp8-11, February 1944.
5. Gendron, Thomas J., Maj, Inf, "Infantry Battalion, Reinforced, in a Reverse Slope Defense of Hilly Open Terrain Against Coordinated Infantry-Tank Attacks", Military Monograph, Advanced Infantry Officers Class Nr. 2, 1949-50, The Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, Ga.
6. Schnellker, Gerald C., 1st Lt, Inf, "Infantry Company Attacking a Prominent Terrain Feature", Military Monograph, Advanced Infantry Officers Class Nr. 1, 1948-49, The Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, Ga.
7. Miller R. P., Lt Col, Inf, "Interview with Lt Col R. P. Miller", pp4, The Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, Ga.