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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 2D INFANTRY
(5TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CROSSING OF THE SEILLE
RIVER AND SUBSEQUENT ATTACK ON THE TOWN OF LOUVIGNY,
SOUTH OF METZ, FRANCE, 9 NOVEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of C Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION CROSSING
A RIVER AND ATTACK ON A TOWN BEYOND

Captain Emile J. Bussolati, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. 2

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION (See Map A)

This monograph covers the operations of the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, 5th U.S. Division in the crossing of the Seille River and subsequent attack on the town of Louvigny, south of Metz, France 9 November 1944. This action was a part of the overall operation toward the encirclement and reduction of the fortress city of Metz, France.

Following is a resume of the major events which preceded this action: On 6 June 1944 the United States First and British Second Armies successfully invaded the shores of Northern France at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula.

(1)

The development of the bridgehead progressed smoothly, despite adverse weather conditions on the beaches. With the build-up phase and regrouping of forces completed, the famous breakout operations from the St Lo Area began on 25 July. Infantry divisions broke the crust, while armored divisions awaited the opportunity to exploit through gaps made by the infantry. Once the crust was broken, the operations of the Allied Forces became that of pursuit, which, during the month of August, saw the swiftest advance ever to be made in military history. By the end of that month, many allied units were less than one hundred miles from the German border. (2)

The army that we will be principally concerned with is the United States Third, which became operational on 1 August, under the command of Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr. Third Army's presence on the Continent had been enshrouded in a veil of secrecy up to this time. The VIII, XII, XV and XX Corps

(1) A-1, p. 22-24

(2) A-1, p. 31-44

were placed under its operational control and the XIX Tactical Air Command was to furnish the close air support. (3)

A brief summation of the operations of Third Army during the month of August is best described in five operational phases. It must be remembered that several of these phases were conducted simultaneously. Multiple spearheads thrust out in several directions at the same time with such speed and boldness that the Germans were thrown off balance. These spearheads thrusting deep behind the enemy's lines resulted in huge pockets being formed; thereby sealing the doom of many thousands of German soldiers. Phase One: The conquest of Brittany was a mass withdrawal of German forces into the fortified ports on the Brittany Peninsula. One of Third Army's spearheads was on the heels of the fleeing enemy, and by the end of August the stronghold of St Malo had been captured. The remaining ports, Brest, Lorient and St Nazaire were being contained. Phase Two: The Argentan, Falaise, Mortain encirclement began concurrently with the drive into Brittany. This was another mass withdrawal by the Germans in an attempt to prevent encirclement. Numerous German Counterattacks were launched against Third Army's speeding column in a desperate effort to keep an escape corridor open. Heavy losses were suffered by the enemy without having succeeded in the stopping of the encirclement. The major portion of an entire German army was trapped in this huge pocket. Phase Three: The advance to the Seine was already in progress. The Germans were again threatened with encirclement by a three-pronged drive to the north and east. The enemy was suffering from disorganization and ruptured communications. The natural and prepared defenses along the Seine were unmanned, due to the rapidity of advance which did not allow the withdrawing Germans to occupy these positions. Phase Four: The advance along the Loire was executed as a security measure to protect the exposed south flank of Third Army. German units south of the river were not certain as to which

(3) A-4, p. 88-89

direction it would be best to move; consequently, the presence of large bodies of enemy in that sector presented a threat to Third Army's flank and rear. This condition improved once pressure was exerted against the Germans by the Seventh Army from the south and west. By the end of the month the German exodus resembled that of a rout, it was a race against time, in an effort to escape through the last remaining corridor which was rapidly being closed by the advancing Seventh and Third Armies. Phase Five: The rout of the German forces across the Marne, Aisne and Meuse Rivers was a follow-up of phase three. The relentless pressure against the Germans did not permit a determined stand to be made along any of these natural defense lines. Although communications were shattered, units badly disorganized, and losses in men and materiel tremendous, the enemy still retained an overall control of the tactical situation. The German mass withdrawal was not yet a total collapse. At the end of August Third Army extended along the line of Verdun, St. Mihiel and Commercy, approximately forty miles west of the Moselle and Metz. At this point critical shortages of supplies forced the army to halt its eastward advance. The most critical of the shortages was gasoline and maps. Many tactical units were using road maps in the conduct of operations. Before enough gasoline could be obtained to continue the rapid advance the army would have to remain idle for almost a week. There was one more major obstacle to cross before reaching Germany and the Siegfried Line, the Moselle River. Intelligence estimated that a delay in the advance at this time would result in a build-up of German forces in the path of Third Army. The army remained in place for a week. During this time the Germans were regrouping their forces along the Moselle River. The hinge of the regroupment was centered around Metz. Third Army's XX Corps was given the mission to seize Metz, then to the Rhine and from there to Frankfurt, Germany. (4)

(4) A-2, p. 16, 48-52

THE GENERAL SITUATION (See Map B)

On 2 September XX Corps' dispositions had the 5th Infantry and 7th Armored Divisions, in the Verdun area, of the recently established Meuse River bridgehead. The 90th Division was still in Reims, having run out of gas. This division moved into the bridgehead on 6 September. The Corps was given the go ahead signal on 7 September. The plan called for the 90th Division to operate in the Thionville area, and the 5th Infantry and 7th Armored were to force crossing over the Moselle, south of Metz, then to seize Metz. (5)

To the east of the Moselle the banks are dominated by hills that have been cut out of the land by tributary streams, chiefly, the Seille and Nied Rivers. Throughout the entire area, the hills and ridges formed by these rivers are steep and heavily wooded. It was upon the dominating terrain formed by the convergence of these rivers that the famous fortifications of Metz were built. This historic fortress, built by the Romans in the fifth century, had been the scene of battle, between warring nations many times and changed hands often. Each of the warring forces, which had swept back and forth over this historic battleground, had left the imprint of their military ingenuity and tactical inventiveness on the terrain, by the construction of new fortifications and improvements of natural barriers. In all, the fortress contained forty-three forts and fortified groups plus an additional one-hundred twenty-eight artillery pieces of large caliber, emplaced in Metz proper. These forts were exclusive of those in the Maginot Line, Thionville, and in the Siegfried Line. (6)

The delay in advance permitted the Germans to regroup their forces in and around the city of Metz and its fortifications. The 462d Mobilization Division, the permanent garrison of Metz, which included the officers

(5) A-3, p. 1

(6) A-3, p. 7

candidate school, a number of machine gun battalions and other miscellaneous units, had been rapidly reformed into regimental tactical organizations. These units organized the static defenses, the ring of fortifications surrounding Metz. The 17ss Panzer Grenadier Division, which had fallen back before XX Corps' drive, now occupied the zone to the south and southwest of Metz. In the Thionville area the 559th Infantry Division had been mobilized very recently. Remnants of other units were hastily drawn together to fill in the general organization of the defenses. In numbers there were now approximately 40,000 German troops in the general area. This area was well known to the Germans; however, XX Corps' troops, due to the rapidity of advance to Verdun, had not been allowed sufficient time to gather and disseminate information relative to the fortifications or the military strength with which the Germans would defend them. The maps on which the Corps' units were operating showed neither the fortifications nor the details of the terrain. (7)

On 7 September the divisions of XX Corps moved out as planned and at first met only light resistance. As the approaches to the Moselle were reached, resistance increased. East of the river the dominating terrain was utilized by the Germans to employ direct fire weapons. Numerous 88's were emplaced so that direct fire could be delivered against the approaching Corps. The 90th Division was making slow progress in the Thionville area, while the 5th Infantry and 7th Armored Divisions were battling desperately to force a crossing over the Moselle south of Metz. It was not until 10 September that a successful crossing was established at Arnaville by the 10th Infantry Regiment, 5th Division. Bitter fighting continued as the bridgehead was being developed. After it was considered to be large enough for further operations, instructions received from Third Army altered the Corps mission; it would now contain Metz and the forts for an indefinite period. This time included all of October and the first part of November. Another offensive

(7) A-3, p. 2

would begin, XX Corps to attack on 9 November, objectives again would be Metz and Frankfurt; however, this time the forts would be by passed. Several changes had taken place in the Corps sector during the containing period. The 95th Infantry and 10th Armored Divisions were added to the Corps during October. Both of these divisions were placed into the line in order to gain battle experience. The 7th Armored Division was transferred to Ninth Army. The 95th Division had relieved the 5th Division for a ten day period. The 5th moved back into the line on 1 November. On 9 November the divisions were in line from north to south in the order of 90th, 95th, 10th Armored and 5th Division. (8)

The 5th Division utilized the ten day relief period in rehabilitating its units. The depleted division was brought up to strength. Much valuable training had been accomplished; however, one important phase was overlooked, the training in cooperation of tank-infantry teams. (9)

XX Corps planned to attack on 9 November, the 90th and 5th Divisions were to envelop Metz from the north and south. The 90th Division would establish a bridgehead across the Moselle east of Thionville then attack south towards Boulay to make contact with 5th Division. The 5th Division would attack east, bridge the Nied River, then attack north to make contact with the 90th Division in the vicinity of Boulay. The 95th Division was to make a demonstration in conjunction with the attack of 90th Division to create an indication of a major attack, then to relieve the 10th Armored Division and attack south to seize the city of Metz. 10th Armored Division, after relief by 95th Division, was to be in Corps reserve in an assembly area in the vicinity of Mars La Tour, from there to be prepared, on Corps order, to attack through the 90th Division bridgehead, reconnoiter to the Saar River, seize intact crossings over the river from Merzig to the south. (10)

(8) A-3, p. 3-6, 13, 16

(9) Personal knowledge

(10) A-3, p. 62-63

5th Infantry Division, in accordance with Corps order, planned to attack east across the Seille River with 2d and 10th Infantry Regiments abreast. 10th Infantry on the left was to cross at the bend of the Seille River, north of Cheminot, cover Louvigny and secure the north flank of the bridgehead. 2d Infantry on the right, making the main effort, was to cross simultaneously at the bend of the river near Cheminot, converge on Cheminot, and attack Louvigny from the south, from there to attack east and seize the initial divisional objective, Silly en Saulnois. As the attack developed, the 11th Infantry was to extend its right flank to the Seille River and prepare to advance, on division order, to destroy the enemy in the triangle between the Moselle and Seille Rivers. (11)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLAN OF 2D INFANTRY (See Map C)

The 2d Infantry planned to attack across the Seille River in the order of 2d, 1st and 3d Battalions.

The regimental defensive sector, extending along the west bank of the river from Longueville Les Cheminot, southward approximately 3000 yards, was held by the 3d Battalion. In regimental reserve was the 1st Battalion at Vittonville and the 2d Battalion at Bouxieres. The regimental plan called for the 2d Battalion to attack through the positions of the 3d Battalion, commencing at 0530 hours, 9 November, to make an assault crossing of the Seille River, then to seize the town of Cheminot, and the high ground to the east, from there to be prepared to assist, by fire, the attack of the 1st Battalion on Louvigny. 1st Battalion was to follow the 2d Battalion at 0800 hours, cross the river on a ~~foot~~ bridge, then to proceed along the Seille River Valley to an assembly area in the valley, south of Louvigny; from there to attack north and seize Louvigny and then to prepare to continue the attack to the east on regimental order. 3d Battalion was to be in regimental reserve, to be prepared to move to an assembly area in the vicinity of

(11) A-3, p. 16

St. Jure upon the capture of Louvigny. After the capture of Louvigny, the 2d and 3d Battalions were to be prepared to continue the attack to east. 50th Field Artillery Battalion would be in direct support. Cannon Company would be general support, priority of fires initially to 2d Battalion during the crossing of the river. 735th Separate Tank Battalion less one medium company would be attached to 1st Battalion. (12)

THE PLAN OF THE BATTALION TO CROSS THE RIVER AND ATTACK LOUVIGNY
(See Maps C & D)

Battalion planning had been conducted concurrently with regimental planning so that ample opportunity for reconnaissance down to include squad leaders was made available. The time also permitted a thorough briefing to be given to the men in the battalion who were to participate in the operation. Most of the time between 1 October and 7 October was spent by the battalion in firming up its plans and gathering valuable intelligence of the terrain over which the battalion would operate and of the enemy in the area. (13)

Intelligence gained from all sources including higher headquarters produced enough facts upon which the battalion commander could base his plan to achieve that part the regimental mission assigned to his battalion.

The terrain in the area, coupled with the recent heavy rainfall, would present a problem in the operation of all types of vehicles. If vehicles operated off roads, the going would be extremely difficult, particularly along stream beds and plowed fields. Considerable engineer maintenance would be necessary to keep the relatively few roads in the area in proper condition to be used as supply routes. The Seille River, normally a stream of approximately twenty yards width, had, due to the heavy rainfall, swollen to a width of approximately two hundred yards at the point where the crossing was to be made. Even with this unfavorable condition, the engineer estimate indicated that a footbridge could be installed successfully and in time for use by the

(12) A-6, p. 47-49

(13) Personal knowledge

battalion to execute its crossing. Foot troops would only be hindered by the mud and clay clinging to their boots, which would slow down cross country movement considerably. The normal one and one-half miles per hour would be reduced to approximately one mile per hour. The terrain had considerable variety, including the wooded and sharp rising ground found in the river valley, where the best cover and concealment would be available. The area to the north from the battalion forward assembly area offered adequate cover and some concealment, however, upon reaching a point approximately five hundred yards south of Louvigny the terrain leveled off into the flat open type, actually plowed fields, barren of crops. Louvigny was not an unusual town, it had been a farming community containing twenty to twenty-five stone structures which were dwellings. Previous bombings and artillery fire had caused much damage to the buildings. The debris from this destruction provided the Germans with ready made fortification materials. (15)

Prisoner of war reports and a study of aerial photographs indicated that the towns of Cheminot and Louvigny were each occupied with a rifle company reinforced with automatic weapons. Pagny and Goin were presumed to contain a battalion command post and aid station. Artillery support was normal, however, actual gun locations were unknown. Armor was known to be included with the overall defense system, however, locations were unknown at this time. Morale of the German soldier was good and his supplies were adequate. The latest enemy report indicated that a system of trenches existed southeast of Louvigny and were occupied with the strength of a rifle platoon. Since this area had been a battleground for some seven weeks, all civilians had been evacuated from Louvigny, Pagny and Silly en Saulnois. This factor known would permit maximum use of supporting fires against the town as the battalion attacked it.

The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel William H. Blakefield, Jr., issued a complete field order at 1200 hours on 7 September. The enemy (15) A-5, p. 1-7 and personal knowledge

situation and information of the weather and terrain was as indicated in the preceding paragraph. Preliminary to crossing the Seille, the battalion would move to an initial assembly area in the woods south of Lesmenils. The command post, aid station and ammunition supply point would move into Lesmenils beginning at 1800 hours, 8 November, in order to establish those installations in support of the battalion's operations the following day. The weapons carriers would precede the foot elements of the battalion which was to begin its movement from Vittonville at 0230 hours, 9 November, to the assembly area approximately seven and one-half miles away. Each man would be issued 2/3 of a K-ration prior to leaving Vittonville. Routes to the bridgesite would be reconnoitered, concurrent with the issue of extra ammunition and final preparations before the crossing was to begin. Since the weapons carriers could not accompany the troops crossing the river, the weapons would have to be hand carried and the weapons carriers would be retained under battalion control until a suitable vehicle bridge could be erected over the Seille. As an additional measure to insure adequate support from the battalions mortars, each man would carry one round of 81mm mortar ammunition across the river to the positions from which the mortar platoon would support the battalions attack on Louvigny.

The plan for crossing the river would be in a column of companies in the order of A and C Companies, the command group, then D and B Companies. The attached tanks would join the battalion column across the river in the vicinity of the forward assembly area. Immediately upon crossing, the battalion would begin its movement to the forward assembly area utilizing the cover and concealment of the river valley. The order of march would remain the same, with A Company designated as the advance guard with the mission of securing the forward assembly area. As soon as the assembly area had been secured, A Company with Company D of the 735th Tank Battalion attached, would attack north, seize the trenches on the high ground southeast of Louvigny, there to take up defensive positions in order to protect the right flank of the battalion. The remainder

of the battalion would close into the assembly area and make final preparations for the attack on Louvigny. The two medium tank companies and battalion headquarters of the 735th Tank Battalion would join the battalion in the assembly area. A Company of the tank battalion would be attached to C Company, the remainder of the tank battalion would operate under battalion control. An engineer treadway bridge was to be constructed in the vicinity of the assembly area during the night of 8-9 November in order that this coordination could be carried out as planned. C Company was to attack on the right on a frontage of four-hundred yards; B Company was to attack on the left on a frontage of three hundred yards. The boundary between companies would be the main road running south out of the town. After capture of the town the attack would turn east with Companies B and C to advance five hundred yards from the eastern edge of town, there to assume defensive positions for the night, to be prepared to continue the attack to the east the following day on order. B Company was to establish contact with 10th Infantry on the high ground northeast of Louvigny. One machine gun platoon of D Company would be attached to each assault company. The mortar platoon of D Company would be in general support, from positions in the draw southwest of the town. One rifle platoon from B Company would constitute the rifle element of the battalion reserve. As stated previously, the command post, aid station, and ammunition supply point would remain in Lesmenils during the attack. Evacuation was to be by litter to the footbridge, then by jeep ambulance to the aid station. All of these installations would displace to Louvigny after it had been cleared of enemy. A battalion observation post was to be established on the high ground southwest of Louvigny. The battalion command group would follow the attack behind B Company. (16)

MOVEMENT TO INITIAL ASSEMBLY AREA AND FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR CROSSING THE RIVER (See Maps C and D)

The battalion moved from Vittonville as planned. The foot elements of the battalion arrived in the initial assembly area at 0530 hours. The evening before (16) A-4, p. 1-2 and personal knowledge

a hot supper had been served and 2/3 of a K-ration was issued. The weather was unpleasant, rainy and cold, typical for this time of the year in this area. The men had gotten very little sleep so far. The command post, aid station and ammunition supply point had been established in Lesmenils. The weapons carriers had been dispersed in the assembly area in order to facilitate the removal of weapons and ammunition. As final preparations were completed as planned, the time was approaching H-hour. The men were kept so busy in the assembly that little rest was obtained, consequently an already very tired battalion would soon begin its movement across the river to the forward assembly area. There were still several thousand yards of cross-country marching to be traveled prior to the attack. Although this condition dampened the spirits of the men, morale was still high. Perhaps an explanation of the excellent morale and esprit is the fact that finally, after over a month of defensive combat, they were eager to go on the offensive again. No artillery fire had fallen in the assembly area during the battalions stay there of approximately two hours. Artillery and mortar fire could be heard falling around the crossing site, undoubtedly directed at the 2d Battalion's attack. Regiment reported that Cheminot had fallen to the 2d Battalion against little opposition. As A Company approached the crossing site, men of the 2d Battalion could be seen advancing to the high ground east of Cheminot. (17)

NARRATION

CROSSING OF THE RIVER AND MOVEMENT TO FORWARD ASSEMBLY AREA

(See Map D)

The battalion command group was on the near side of the footbridge awaiting the arrival of the battalion. The battalion commander realized that this would be a critical point during the crossing. He and his staff were to be of great assistance in the maintenance of control, particularly since the area was under intermittent artillery fire. Men were encouraged to continue moving to the relative safety of the far side. A Company had begun its crossing as planned (17) A-7, period 8-9 November and personal knowledge

followed by the remainder of the battalion. The entire battalion had crossed by 1000 hours. No casualties had been suffered by the battalion. As the tail of the battalion cleared the bridge the head had already marched approximately one half of the distance to the forward assembly area. The battalion was strung out throughout this distance. Contact between companies was maintained by the use of connecting files. A drizzling cold rain was falling, adding to the discomfort of the tired men as they trudged along. The round of 81mm mortar ammunition was an additional burden which would soon be dropped onto the mortar platoon positions. Some of A Company's men had already dropped the round they were carrying. No enemy had been reported by A Company up to this time. The column continued to move, the men becoming more exhausted with each step. The remaining 1/3 K-ration in the men's possession would be eaten in the assembly area in order to save time. 1/3 of the ration had already been eaten as breakfast in the old assembly area. At 1030 hours a few snow flurries began to mix with the rain and the temperature dropped several degrees. An occasional round of artillery fell on the south side of the river as the column moved along the north side which was protected by the deep defilade formed by the sharp rise of the north bank. This was a positive verification of the terrain report. At approximately 1300 hours A Company commander reported the arrival of his company in the assembly area and that he did not see any tanks at the proposed crossing site where D Company of the 735th Tank Battalion was supposed to have joined his company. The battalion commander instructed the A Company commander to continue his mission and that he would check with regiment as to where the tanks were. Having received this information the A Company commander promptly began preparations to attack the trench system as planned. Although his company occupied the battalion assembly area, no security force had been sent forward nor to the flanks in order to secure the area. In a very short time this failure proved to be a costly mistake. At 1330 hours A Company came under a devastating hail of small arms and automatic weapons fire on both flanks, front and rear. The

company was in the progress of deploying for its attack, which, due to this situation would not take place for some time, if at all. The situation was reported immediately to the battalion commander, who ordered the A Company commander to assault the enemy positions immediately then to continue on his mission. The German positions were well concealed and expertly emplaced to accomplish an ambush against such a target as offered by A Company. The fire so completely covered the company that any attempt to move meant another casualty, which were mounting rapidly. A Company was definitely stopped, the commander had no unit uncommitted with which to influence the action. The A Company commander informed the battalion commander of the situation that his company was completely pinned down, his casualties were high and that his company could not advance. In the meantime, the battalion commander, after making a hasty estimate of the situation and a personal reconnaissance, decided that he would leave A Company in their present positions to protect the rear of the battalion and continue with the planned attack on Louvigny with B and C Companies. A, B, and C Companies were informed of his plan. A Company's predicament and the plan to continue on with the attack on Louvigny was immediately reported to the regimental commander via radio. The regimental commander indicated approval and stated that the 3d Battalion would relieve A Company during the night. It was definite, at this time, that the tanks would not participate in the attack since they were unable to get across the river as the constructed treadway bridge had fallen into the river. The battalion commander sent his S-3 to contact 2d Battalion which was on the high ground east of Cheminot. He was to coordinate the fire support which 2d Battalion was to furnish and also to inform the 2d Battalion Commander of his plan of maneuver. The final instructions the battalion commander issued to the Company commanders included the information of the tanks not participating in the attack. Although the battalion was not in the selected assembly area, no change was made in the boundary between companies. The necessary adjustment for deployment would

be made as the companies moved out of assembly area to the north. The A Company Commander was informed that his company would contain the enemy with which it was engaged until relieved during the night by 3d Battalion, after which the Company would reorganize and move to Louvigny to join the battalion. The time of attack was set at 1515 hours. A ten minute preparation of artillery fire would be delivered on the objective preceding the attack. The mortar platoon was in position to support the attack. The B and C Company Commanders exchanged plans of maneuver and both commanders agreed that once the companies were exposed to observation from the town that marching fire would be employed. It was felt by these company commanders that with both companies employing marching fire simultaneously the effect on the enemy would cause him to seek cover, thereby permitting the companies to advance into the town. To further the chances of success, additional artillery fires would be requested on the town and the south edge, while the assault companies moved in as close as possible behind this fire. The artillery preparation began at 1505. B and C Companies were prepared to move out as planned. (18)

ATTACK ON LOUVIGNY (See Map D)

B and C Companies moved out promptly at 1515 hours in the attack. Machine gun and mortar fires of 2d Battalion being delivered on Louvigny could be heard as the companies moved forward out of the assembly area. The C Company Commander having an open right flank positioned his support platoon behind his right assault platoon with the mission of protecting the exposed right flank. Particular attention would be given to the high ground where the trench system was located. The attack progressed rapidly and in a very short time the men would come under observation from the southern edge of Louvigny. As the assault companies came abreast of the trench system small arms and automatic fires were directed at C Company's right flank. Neither B nor C Company was within observation distance of the town as yet. The decisive action of the support platoon (18) A-5, p. 3-4 and personal knowledge

leader of C Company immediately remedied this flanking fire situation by a rapid maneuver to the left flank of the enemy position. They quickly over-ran the position, captured twenty Germans, and wounded or killed six others. With this flank threat eliminated the attack continued uninterrupted, but only for a short time. As the companies left their last cover and came under observation of the town they were met by small arms automatic weapons and mortar fire from Louvigny.

The attack might have bogged down at this point had it not been for the earlier decision of the B and C Company Commanders to employ marching fire in crossing over this open ground. In unison the two companies, in a skirmish line approximately five hundred yards wide, opened fire, moving while doing so. A tremendous fire superiority was built up in this manner. The 81's and artillery were dropping concentrations throughout the town area. The marching fire did not let up at any time, the firing and forward movement was continued. As the assault companies entered the south edge of the defenses the supporting fires lifted to the north and east.

The support platoon of C Company had resumed its mission of protecting the right flank of the battalion; however, it was minus its platoon leader who was wounded in both legs during the short but fierce fight when capturing the trenches. Several men of the platoon had also been wounded. No other casualties had been sustained by the battalion thus far with the exception of A Company whose commander, at this time, was unable to estimate his losses.

Platoon and squad leaders had planned the house to house cleaning up operations of Louvigny in great detail. Each man knew exactly what was expected of him; consequently, upon reaching the town no time was lost in the business of digging the Germans out of cellars, buildings and other similar hiding places. Ricocheting small arms fire echoed throughout the streets as one small group of men covered the movement of another group. Hand grenades and even bazookas were employed inside of buildings quite effectively. The

streets soon became alive with German soldiers marching to the rear with both hands over their head. It was obvious that most of them were still dazed from the artillery, mortar, machine gun and small arms fire that had been poured into their positions. Some of them appeared to be happy over the fact that they had been captured. Certainly all of the supporting fires that were delivered against this enemy proved to be most effective. It was 1630 hours when B and C Companies entered Louvigny. Every possible location of enemy was investigated as the mopping up operations progressed. There had been no letting up, but rather a determination to do a complete job was the aim of the men.

When the 1st Platoon of C Company reached a point about half-way through the town it was taken under fire by a direct fire weapon at extremely close range. Any attempted movement was immediately brought under this fire. Only a portion of the platoon was able to return the fire. (19)

Private First Class Harold A. Estep, a browning automatic rifleman of 1st Platoon, under cover of the fire of his squad, advanced boldly to a flank position then worked his way to the rear of the enemy position holding up the advance of his platoon. He took the gun crew of the 88 dual purpose gun completely by surprise and killed the entire crew with a well aimed burst of fire from his automatic rifle. This permitted the platoon to continue its advance. (20)

As the companies cleared the north and east edge of the town a few scattered Germans were seen running toward the town to the east. A combination of artillery fire and well aimed rifle fire changed the minds of the would be escapees.

Both companies, having cleared their portion of Louvigny by 1730 hours, immediately set about the task of securing the objective for the night. Positions were taken up about five hundred yards to the east, between Louvigny and the railroad, each company covering approximately a five-hundred yard sector. Darkness was setting in fast.

(19) Personal knowledge and A-5, p. 5

(20) Personal knowledge

It had become increasingly colder through the day and another uncomfortable night could be foreseen by the men. The men hoped that they might take advantage of the warmth of some of the buildings in the town on a relief basis. Their hopes were answered since about one-third of the defenses included the edge of town.

The count of prisoners of war taken by the battalion was about one-hundred fifty with an undetermined number of dead and wounded. The battalion had suffered only fifteen casualties. It was not until the early morning of the next day that an accurate estimate of casualties in A Company could be made. Some of the wounded of A Company, who were able to crawl, managed to get back to the aid station, as well as a considerable number suffering from battle exhaustion.

Engineers had cleared enough of the supply route of mines to permit vehicle use within an hour after the town had been cleared. A vehicle bridge had been constructed, replacing the footbridge. The displacement of the command post, aid station and ammunition supply point to Louvigny was completed by 2000 hours.

All that remained for the battalion to be intact once again was to have A Company in the area. 3d Battalion relieved A Company during the night. A Company joined the battalion at 0530 hours the following morning. Its casualties had been very heavy, almost one half of the fighting strength of the company.

(21)

To sum up this action - the battalion had made a successful attack, having taken its objective with very light casualties. Even though it was without the support of one of its rifle companies and with no tanks to assist, it still succeeded in accomplishing its mission. The success of the attack can be attributed to leadership of all commanders participating and the aggressiveness of the command as a whole. This success contributed immeasurably to the ultimate encirclement and reduction of Metz.

(21) A-5, p. 5-11 and personal knowledge

The fall of Louvigny was the beginning of a series of similar attacks by the battalions of 2d Infantry which by the 19th of November had covered 46,000 yards, liberated 42 towns and villages, captured 622 prisoners, killed an estimated 950 and wounded an estimated 1800 of the enemy. The regiment made contact with reconnaissance elements of the 90th Division, thereby completing the encirclement of Metz.

During the overall period, 9 November - 19 November, the regiment's loss was 5 officers and 48 men killed, and 13 officers and 273 men wounded. (22)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. PRIOR PLANNING

We can generally say that prior planning for this operation was excellent in most respects. The tactical, supply, and evacuation plans were outstandingly well thoughtout. Although, as was pointed out, as a whole there was excellent planning, one weakness existed. Failure to insure maximum rest for the men of a unit prior to an attack can cause serious adverse results. The movement of the battalion from Vittonville to its initial assembly area commenced at 0230 hours, arriving in the assembly area at 0530, certainly no sleep and little rest was obtained by the men during this time or until the crossing began at 0800. A very minimum amount of sleep had been obtained prior to leaving Vittonville due to the amount of preparation necessary prior to vacating this area. Furthermore, the men still had several hours of very tiring marching after crossing the river when moving to the forward assembly area. A principle, and a sound one, is that troops should be fresh and well rested in order to make a vigorous attack. It is believed that if the battalion had moved early on the evening of 8 November to the initial assembly area that more sleep and rest could have been obtained by the men. They would have at least been well rested to begin the movement to the forward assembly area. Although no adverse results can be attributed to this failure, it could have resulted in an unsuccessful attack.

(22) A-6, p. 55

2. SECURITY

Every commander is faced with security and should take full responsibility to insure that his unit is never surprised due to failure to take proper security measures. In the case of A Company's failure to accomplish either of its several missions, this was due directly to a lack of security. The mission of securing the battalion forward assembly area should have been enough of a directive to the A Company Commander to at least investigate the high ground surrounding. An even better solution would have been to physically place some element of his command to occupy the high ground. If either of the two methods offered above would have been employed, it is believed that the company would not have been so completely surprised. It was not the numerical strength of the enemy position but rather the expertly emplaced and concealed weapons which caused the trouble to the company. An investigation of such likely positions could have prevented the entire company from walking into the trap. This failure resulted in unnecessary loss of life and depleted the company to one half of its fighting strength. If A Company had been available for the attack on Louvigny, the battalion could have achieved its objective with possibly even fewer casualties and certainly with a more secure right flank.

3. TANK-INFANTRY COOPERATION

Normally, when an infantry commander has tanks attached to his unit he immediately thinks of the tremendous support that the tanks will provide for his unit. His tactical plan, normally, will include the maximum use of the tanks he has at his disposal to the utmost of their capabilities. This battalion commander, having a battalion of tanks less one medium company attached, made plans to employ the tanks in the attack on Louvigny. This plan had to be altered since the tanks did not cross the river as scheduled. Several reasons were given for the failure of the tanks to join the infantry as planned; that the treadway bridge had not been successfully installed; also an unsuitable site had been selected for the crossing; and finally, that the

river had swollen to a width beyond expectations. Even though these reasons were correct, it was inexcusable for the tanks to fail to join the battalion. It would be difficult to place the blame for this failure on any one person, but rather due to a lack of understanding of the problems involved in the coordination of a tank-infantry combination. Certainly a more positive action should have been taken when the treadway bridge broke through, such as an alternate plan to cross at another point. The attachment of armored engineers to the tank battalion might have been the answer as they are better equipped with armored bridging material than is an infantry division. It is believed that the major fault lay in the fact that neither the tankers nor the infantry had been imbued with the full appreciation of the limitations and capabilities of the other. This is further attributed to the lack of a tank element being organically assigned to the infantry division or regiment. Consequently, training between tankers and infantrymen had been neglected. It is believed that the present T/O and E, with tanks organic to the infantry division and regiment, should alleviate the problem of tank-infantry cooperation. In this case, the failure of the tanks to join the infantry reduced the capabilities of the battalion tremendously and could have been the weight necessary to turn the tide of the battle. The tanks would have been particularly useful in assisting the riflemen in crossing the open ground south of Louvigny. Fortunately, the battalion was able to take its objective with relative few casualties without the assistance of armor.

4. MARCHING FIRE

The success achieved by B and C Companies in the attack on Louvigny through marching fire is worthy of note.

This was the first time marching fire had been employed in a coordinated battalion attack in this unit. The complete success enjoyed in its initial application provided the battalion another maneuver for future operations. In the words of the B and C Company Commanders, the men were sold on it.

In this instance, a distance of about 500 yards of open terrain had to be traversed in the face of enemy fire. An attack of this type can be very costly and many times will fail completely. The enemy usually has the advantage of covered positions from which he can cause great damage to groups of men attacking over open ground. This disadvantage to the attacker can be greatly overcome if a large volume of instantaneous fire is delivered on the enemy position, thereby forcing him to abandon his firing parapet for the safety of the lower part of his hole. When such instantaneous fire is delivered by rifle units and is sustained while those units move toward the objective, it becomes marching fire. To be successful, the volume of fire must include every available weapon and must be dense enough to cover the entire enemy position. In this case, B and C Company covered 500 yards of open ground in the face of strong enemy positions with a minimum of casualties and made relatively short work of mopping up the objective of enemy, still dazed from the volume of fire he had been subjected to.

LESSONS

1. Prior planning for an attack should include provisions for maximum rest for participating troops.
2. Continuous security is the responsibility of every commander. No unit should ever be surprised because of the commander's failure to provide proper security measures.
3. Tank-infantry cooperation is achieved only through training and mutual understanding.
4. Marching fire, frequently, will enable a unit to cross extremely open terrain when no other maneuver can be successfully used.