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THE OPERATIONS OF F COMPANY, 101ST INFANTRY
(26TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON
MON SCHUMANN CROSSROADS, LUXEMBOURG,
27 DECEMBER 1944 - 3 JANUARY 1945
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INEXPERIENCED TROOPS ATTACKING
OVER RUGGED SNOW COVERED TERRAIN.

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AGO MICROFILM

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company F, 101st Infantry, 26th Infantry Division in the vicinity of MON SCHUMANN, LUXEMBOURG, 27 December 1944 - 3 January 1945, during the ARDENNES CAMPAIGN.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to review briefly the exploits of the Third U.S. Army prior to this time.

After becoming operational on 1 August 1944, the Third U.S. Army, commanded by Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr., was given the mission of exploiting the breakthrough at AVRANCHES.

(1) The drive struck with lightning like rapidity and knifed through successive hastily organized defensive positions until it reached the line of the MOZELLE RIVER. (2) Here the attack ground to a halt, the overextended supply and communication lines causing a shortage of gasoline, ammunition and other vital items necessary to continue the operation. (3) (See Map A)

On orders from SHAEF, the Third Army was to maintain a defensive position along the general line they now occupied until supply facilities could be built up to the point where continued offensive action could again be undertaken. (4)

General Patton, believing success could be gained only by offensive action, and afraid of what the implications of being

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- (1) A-3, p. 90
(2) A-2, p. 138
(3) A-4, p. 87
(4) A-3, p. 143

on the defensive would do to the morale of his victorious troops, then undertook what has been termed the "offensive-defensive".

(5)

On the 8th of November, the XII Corps, spearheaded by the newly committed 26th Division, struck a sledge hammer blow at the opposing German forces. (6) Handicapped by record high floods and sticky French mud, the Third Army, nevertheless, relentlessly pushed the surprised Germans back toward their vaunted West Wall system of fortifications. (7)

One of the primary objectives of the Third Army drive was FORTRESS METZ, which was encircled and taken by the 5th and 90th U.S. Infantry Divisions. Although METZ was surrounded and occupied, four of the forts continued to offer resistance. (8)

In the early part of December 1944, it became apparent to Allied intelligence that the Germans were concentrating forces somewhere on the Western Front. In a special Estimate of the Situation, prepared on 4 December 1944, Third Army G-2 reported these significant facts:

"That eight Panzer, three Paratroop, and three Infantry Divisions were out of contact in the north;

That the enemy's continued failure to commit 5 and 6 SS Panzer Armies, despite the threatening advances into Germany, strongly indicated determination to employ this powerful mobile reserve in a co-ordinated effort;

That a G-2 Air analysis of enemy rail movements revealed extremely heavy traffic toward the Eifel, opposite the Ardennes. On November 26, TAC/R planes reported 300 trains

(5) A-2, p. 139

(6) A-3, p. 168

(7) A-5, p. 8

(8) A-3, p. 173 & 178

"in movement and in marshalling yards. On other days the number ran from 33 to 84 trains;

That on the basis of this analysis a large build-up of troops and supplies clearly was in progress opposite the southern (Ardennes) flank of First Army." (9)

There was also some indication of an armored build-up between COLOGNE and TRIER. (10) SHAEF G-2 probably felt that the enemy would use these armored elements to counterattack our flanks after we had crossed the ROER and entered the COLOGNE plain. That would have been the logical course of action had the situation been reversed. As events were to prove, this estimation was in error.

On the cold, wet snow-powdered slopes of the SCHNEE EIFEL hills on Friday night, 15 December 1944, all hell suddenly broke loose. Along a seventy-five mile strip, shells of all calibers up to and including fourteen inch guns pounded the American lines. The Germans struck across by BULLINGEN in front of MALMEDY; they stabbed through the LOSHEIM GAP. Down both sides of the SCHNEE EIFEL nose that points into the BELGIAN-LUXEMBOURG border, Nazi spearheads slashed toward ST. VITH. They smashed across the OUR RIVER on the south; they crossed the SAUER to assault ECHTERNACH, just north of LUXEMBOURG CITY. Hitler's counteroffensive, ably led by Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, was on, staking all on terror, fiendishly and cleverly applied.

(11) (See Map B)

* On the 18th of December, General Patton was summoned to Twelfth Army Group Headquarters at LUXEMBOURG. There

(9) A-3, p. 192
(10) A-3, p. 219
(11) A-3, p. 223

General Omar Bradley briefed him on the situation and asked how soon Third Army forces could be shifted to the ARDENNES. (12)

This meant a complete abandonment of the proposed Third Army offensive and the resulting stupendous job of swinging an entire army of 300,000 men ninety degrees with their accompanying supply installations. General Patton replied that he would have the 4th Armored, the 26th and 80th Infantry Divisions moving to the area within 24 hours.

NS
The new grouping of the Third Army would place the VIII Corps on the west; III Corps in the center; XII Corps on the east; XX Corps holding the SAAR salients and protecting the Army's exposed rear. (13)

NS
& (12) III Corps, comprising the 4th Armored Division on the left (west); the 26th Division in the center; and the 80th Division on the right (east), attacked, 0600, 22 December with the mission of relieving the defenders of BASTOGNE. (14)

This feat of moving three divisions, two of them engaged, and attacking in a new direction for 125 miles through a raging blizzard, will go down as one of the great moments in military history.

[The ARDENNES area was difficult country for military operations. It is bounded on the west by the MEUSE RIVER with its deep valley and high bordering cliffs. Eastward into Germany the country consists of a series of parallel ridges and valleys running from northeast to southwest. The heights are not great, rising to not more than fifteen hundred feet above sea level.]

(12) A-2, p. 189
(13) A-3, p. 237
(14) A-3, p. 237

The river system has slashed deep gorges between the heights. a third of the area is forest covered, mostly firs and spruce.

X It is poor tank country for the hills and forest confine vehicles to the roads winding along the valleys. A network of good roads connects most of the small towns and villages. (15)

DIVISION SITUATION

15
The 26th Division had landed at the port of CHERBOURG on 7 September 1944. For almost a month the division was held in reserve in NORMANDY while its men were organized into truck companies for the Red Bell Express. (16)

18
On 5th October, the division joined XII Corps in the vicinity of NANCY. There it remained in defensive positions until 8 November, when it spearheaded the XII Corps attack capturing MOYENVIC, CHATEAU SALINS, and SARRE UNION. (See Map A) (17)

→ 175
H On 11 December, elements of the 87th Division began relieving the 26th Division in the vicinity of SARREGUEMINES. The division retraced its steps over its old battle grounds to METZ where it was anticipated that the division would spend from four to five weeks in rehabilitation. (18)

The 101st Infantry, 26th Division, was given the mission of containing the one remaining fort (JEANNE D' ARC) still offering resistance. (19) At this time the 26th Division was under control of III Corps, which had established headquarters at METZ on 6 December with the mission of the final reduction of the METZ system of fortifications.

On the evening of 19 December, word was received at division headquarters that the division would move out at 1030 the

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- (15) Personal knowledge
(16) A-5, p. 3
(17) A-5, p. 9 ; A-3, p. 168 & 171
(18) A-4, p. 135
(19) A-5, p. 19

following morning. (20) The destination was LUXEMBOURG where the division would take part in the III Corps co-ordinated attack ordered for the 22nd of December. (21)

The division plan of attack for the initial phase of the operation was two regiments abreast: the 104th on the right, (See Map C) the 328th on the left, and the 101st in reserve. (22)

COMPANY SITUATION

During the recent offensive in the LORRAINE, on 13 November, F company had been surrounded and captured by the Germans. (23) This left only the cooks and mess personnel of the original members of the company.

The company was reconstituted as follows: a lieutenant, liaison officer from division, took over command; a platoon leader from E company was assigned as executive officer, and two replacement officers were assigned as platoon leaders. The battalion battle patrol of eleven men was disbanded and the personnel sent to F company as N.C.O.s. The balance of the company was filled with approximately eighty new replacements, fresh from the States. Of this new organization, only the platoon leader from E company and the members of the battalion battle patrol had any previous combat experience. (24) Good, bad, or indifferent, this was the unit that was to oppose the cream of the Nazi Elite divisions in the Bulge.

About two days after the company was reconstituted, four of the new non-coms became casualties while on a mission of clearing woods. From this point until the regiment was relieved near the German border, F company formed the battalion reserve.

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- (20) A-5, p. 21
(21) A-2, p. 197
(22) A-5, p. 22
(23) Personal knowledge
(24) Personal knowledge

On 10 December, the regiment was relieved by elements of the 87th Division and a tactical motor move to METZ was made. (25) It was planned to send all of the 26th Division, with the exception of the 101st Infantry, into immediate rest.

The 2nd battalion, 101st, was to contain the Germans still holding out in FORT JEANNE D' ARC while the 1st and 3rd battalions would guard the equipment and supplies in the forts already surrendered. Under concealment of darkness on 11 December, the 2nd battalion took over the siege from elements of the 345th Infantry, 87th Division. The regimental commander ordered that no attempt would be made to attack the fort other than by fire. The fort was to be starved into submission. (26)

On 13 December, the fort capitulated and 514 prisoners were taken. (27) The mission of the 2nd battalion was completed and the unit moved back to METZ. F company was billeted in the SCHLIER CASERNE, which had been a former German Officers' Candidate School.

The company settled down to life in garrison. Training commenced on 17 December and life was made more bearable by the hot meals and the promise of movies and night passes to METZ. Showers were set up in METZ and the men received a change of fresh clothing when their long missing duffel bags put in a surprise appearance. (28)

On the 16th and 17th of December, the division received 4,000 replacements. (29) These men were part of the 5% overhead of Army troops which General Patton had drafted to replenish the ranks of his dwindling combat divisions. (30,31)

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| (25) | A-6 | (29) | A-3, p. 202 |
| (26) | A-6 | (30) | A-2, p. 187 |
| (27) | A-5, p. 19 | (31) | A-3, p. 190 |
| (28) | Personal knowledge | | |

These fillers came from ordnance, tank destroyer, engineers, field artillery, anti-aircraft, and air corps units; furthermore, they lacked formal infantry training other than that received during basic training. This was usually several years old. (32)

The next day was spent in exchanging pistols for rifles, musette bags for packs, and in reorganizing and re-equipping the company. Some of the replacements received in the LORRAINE were promoted to N.C.O.s due to dearth of material in the company. Technical sergeants of Ordnance and Air Corps were placed in squads as riflemen until they were able to prove themselves capable of being subordinate leaders.

(32) The anticipated training period was never begun for on the evening of 19 December, the company was alerted for a motor move. (33) Rations were issued and the $\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks were loaded with ammunition and weapons. The company was at full TO/E strength, with the exception of officers, and sufficient additional personnel were available to form a headquarters platoon. (34)

At 0800, 20 December, after a hot breakfast, the company was entrucked in every conceivable type of transportation for the move northward. Divisional $2\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks, engineer dump trucks, and huge pontoon trucks were utilized for the move. A peculiar sight in the midst of the column was a truckload of German PWs, who had been captured at JEANNE D' ARC. The division had moved out so hurriedly that no time was available to turn them in at the stockade. The men had been issued K rations for the trip and were warned that they would have to

(32) Personal knowledge

(33) A-6

(34) Personal knowledge

relieve themselves the best way they could from the moving trucks, for no stops would be made until the convoy reached its destination.

As darkness fell, the convoy moved into an assembly area in the vicinity of ARLON, arriving there about 2030 hours. The men were detrucked and the company kitchens arrived and started preparation of a hot meal. (See Map C) The men bedded down on the side of a hill. (Early the next morning it began to snow.)

On the morning of 21 December, the company officers were summoned to battalion headquarters where they were oriented on the situation that then existed in the ARDENNES. The first information sounded grim for it told of German paratroopers landing behind our lines and causing considerable damage and confusion; of Germans in Allied uniforms using American tanks and vehicles to ambush our columns. Rumor was rampant that the Germans were driving civilians ahead of their armored columns in the hope that the soft-hearted Yanks wouldn't shoot. Battalion issued orders that the troops would fire regardless. The company officers then returned and oriented the men.

Gas masks were brought up from the rear and issued to every man. This was to be a means of identification to differentiate our troops from the Germans wearing our uniforms. As an additional means of identification, each man wore his gas detector brassard around his shoulder. (35)

On 22 December, the company moved out at 0900 and marched to REICHLANGE where it again bivouaced for the night. (See Map C) The battalion still remained in regimental reserve.

(35) A-5, p. 22

At 1630 on 23 December, another move was made to FOLSCHETTE, where once again the company spent a cold, bitter night in the woods. (See Map C)

At 0400, 24 December, the 2nd battalion was taken from reserve and attacked the town of RAMBROUCH on the division left flank. (See Map C) This town had been in German hands since the 26th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop had been driven out on 22 December. E and F companies were to be in assault, G company in reserve. This was the first time the company had tasted combat, and it was to bitterly show the lack of training in the unit.

The company had no sooner jumped off in the attack than the fire from a lone German machine gun pinned the entire company to the ground. The officers and NCOs attempted to get the men to move forward but no amount of pleading or threatening was of avail. The men, petrified with fear, would make no attempt to fire their rifles. Finally the company commander, Lt. Larkin, and a group of non-coms made their way around the flank and wiped out the machine gun nest, but not without the death of one of the platoon sergeants. During this episode, the company executive officer, who was trying to get the men to return the fire, discovered that many of them did not know how to load the M-1 rifle.

The company reorganized and moved into RAMBROUCH only to find that it had already been taken by E and G companies. [Several men had been wounded and five more were suffering from frostbite, having lain motionless in the snow for over an hour.]

The battalion then moved out at 1530 for the town of

KOETSCHETTE and occupied it without resistance. The battalion bivouaced for the night. (See Map C) (36)

On Christmas morning the battalion moved out at 1100 to attack the town of BILSDORF. Only a few Germans were encountered and the town was occupied without difficulty. (See Map C)

F company remained in BILSDORF while the rest of the battalion moved on to ARSDORF. (37) (See Map C) The company had hardly entered and occupied the town, when the company kitchen showed up with Christmas dinner. The mess personnel had been cooking it on the kitchen truck in order that they could serve it at the first opportunity that presented itself. Well filled with roast turkey, potatoes, carrots, peaches, raisin bread, coffee and cigars and settled in warm quarters, the morale of the company soared. This was the last hot meal the company was to receive until the 4th of January. (38)

The company remained in BILSDORF throughout 26 December, and the men took advantage of the inactivity to wash and shave. Then word was received from battalion that an attack was to be made the following day on the town of MECHER-DUNKRODT, (See Map E)

NARRATION

THE ATTACK ON MECHER-DUNKRODT

The battalion moved out at 0700, on the morning of 27 December, for the line of departure, which was the village of LIEFRANGE now held by the 3rd Battalion, 101st Infantry. (See Map E) The order of march was E, F, G, H and Headquarters. The battalion arrived at LIEFRANGE at 1530 and immediately deployed

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- (36) Personal knowledge
(37) A-5, p. 23
(38) Personal knowledge

for the attack. The battalion plan was for F company to move to HILL 365 and attack to seize HILL 395 on the west and dominate the town. E company was to attack generally astride the road from LIEFRANGE and assault the town frontally. G company was to be in reserve and follow E company. The 81mm mortars were set up in general support in the vicinity of LIEFRANGE.

(39) (See Map E) A platoon of the 735th Tank Battalion and a platoon from the 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion were supporting the 2nd battalion. Due to the terrain, the attack of these tanks and TDs were canalized along the road leading from LIEFRANGE. (40)

F company, with the 2nd platoon of H company in direct support, moved out from LIEFRANGE in a column of platoons, forded the DUNKRODT RIVER and moved up the steep, wooded slopes to the summit of HILL 365. The 60mm mortar section went into positions on the west slope of the hill.

The company plan of attack was for the 1st and 2nd platoons to move out of the woods at the summit, cross the draw and move up to the top of HILL 395. The 3rd platoon was to follow as soon as the leading platoons had reached the bottom of the draw. The machine gun section was to move with the 3rd platoon. The heavy machine gun platoon was to support by fire from the top of HILL 365. (41)

The attack jumped off at 1630 after a five minute artillery and mortar preparation on the town. The 1st and 2nd platoons started down, and upon reaching the bottom, were followed by the 3rd platoon. Immediately after their departure, the executive

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- (39) A-7
(40) Personal knowledge
(41) A-7

officer who had remained behind on HILL 365 noticed movement on HILL 395. Focusing his field glasses, he could make out Germans in white camouflage suits moving into positions on the crest. He immediately tried to contact the company commander on the 536 radio to warn him but was unable to do so. Turning to the H company platoon leader who was nearby, the executive officer requested fire of the platoon on the enemy. The machine gun platoon leader, attempting to pick up the target with his field glasses, could not discern any Germans so refused to fire. He stated that his platoon had to hand carry their ammunition and he wasn't going to fire on any mirages.

(42)

Realizing that the Germans might open fire at any moment and catch the company on the exposed slopes, the executive officer shelved the argument for the time being and made an attempt to contact the 60mm mortar section. Communication was established on the 536 radio and he rapidly explained to the section sergeant the situation, range and target. The executive officer would act as observer and adjust from his position.

The mortar section was made up entirely of untrained personnel with the exception of the section sergeant who had been a heavy mortar gunner. Moments seemed years, as the lieutenant waited for the first round to burst. It was an over on the far side of HILL 395. He made rapid adjustment and crept the fire onto the German position. When the last round had struck approximately 50 yards over, he made one final correction for range and ordered, "Fire for effect". The entire section, having followed the corrections made on the one gun, poured

(42) Personal knowledge

round after round down the hot tubes of their mortars.

The entire concentration began falling in the midst of the German position. Several figures could be seen scurrying to rid themselves of their white snow suits, so as not to be so visible in the brush. Two men, getting up to run to the rear, were seen to vanish in a blast of flame and smoke as a round struck directly between them.

(By this time faint radio contact was made with the company commander and the situation was explained to him. He immediately ordered a rush on the enemy held positions and the Germans were caught by intense rifle fire as they attempted to retreat from their positions down the reverse slope of the hill. Only five prisoners were taken out of an enemy strength of two squads armed with machine guns. Upon questioning, these men were found to be from the 5th Paratroop Division. (43) They stated that they didn't open fire sooner because they were waiting for the company to move farther up the hill where there was no cover and the possibility to withdraw was limited.

Meanwhile, the rest of the battalion was encountering considerable resistance. Three of the supporting tanks, which had moved to the high ground to the east of the road, were knocked out by German tanks. (44) [A P-47 flying over the area descended and strafed the battalion column as it moved up the road from LIEFRANCE, knocking out one of our tank destroyers. (45)(46). Whether this plane was piloted by an American or German was unknown, but it caused considerable

(43) A-2, p. 206

(44) A-7

(45) Personal knowledge

(46) A-7

confusion amongst the battalion. (47) Against strong resistance E company was finally able to enter the town assisted by the fires of F company from HILL 395; and the battle for MECHER-DUNKRODT was over at 1800. F company moved down from the hill, followed by a very embarrassed and humiliated heavy machine gun platoon leader.

THE NIGHT ATTACK ON NOTHUM

F company had just entered the town when the company commander was summoned to battalion headquarters. During his absence, ammunition was resupplied to the mortar section. When the company commander returned, orders were given that the company was to move out immediately for a night attack on the little town of NOTHUM. One of the company platoon leaders was to be assigned to battalion headquarters to form a new battle patrol.

No time was available to properly orient the platoon sergeants and squad leaders. The executive officer received only the bare essentials of information that was needed to set the company in motion for the move. Men had to be routed from buildings where they had gone seeking billets for the night. The battalion plan of attack was this: F company would attack on the left of the road leading to NOTHUM and G company on the right of the road. E Company would be mounted on tanks and TDs and proceed directly down the road into the town. F and G companies would guide on E Company. A platoon of heavy machine guns from H company would join F company somewhere en route.

(See Map D) (48)

(47) A-2, p. 208

(48) Personal knowledge

With this skimpy plan and no co-ordination having been effected between units, the battalion moved out at 2100. (49) Visibility was fair, the bright moonlight on the snow furnishing a degree of illumination but also making everyone stand out very clearly against the white background. A great need was felt by the company officers for white camouflage suits of the type the Germans wore.

1st and 2nd platoons were again in assault with squads in wedge formations. The 3rd platoon followed at 100 yards with the machine gun section. The mortar section brought up the rear of the company. The company commander was somewhere in the vicinity of the two leading platoons.

There was no indication that any enemy were in the area as the company approached the high ground overlooking NOTHUM. As the leading scout of the company started down the ravine, about 100 yards from two houses located on the crest of the ridge, there was a tremendous explosion. The scout had stumbled over the trip wire of a booby trapped Teller mine and the blast killed him instantly. As if this were a signal, heavy German fire began coming from positions on the ridge. (50) (51)

A German tank concealed behind one of the buildings, opened fire with its 88 and the first shell struck near the leading tank carrying E company. The tanks immediately stopped and the infantry dismounted. The leading tank fired one round in return, which missed both the German tank and the building. Then it and the remaining tanks pulled back in defilade. E

(49) A-7
(50) A-7
(51) Personal knowledge

company on dismounting had spilled off on both sides of the road causing an intermingling of their personnel and the troops of F and G companies.

The support platoons, thinking the firing was the assault of their companies on NOTHUM, continued advancing in the dark until they ran into the forward echelons of their companies which had halted. Needless to say, all control was lost. (52)

The 1st platoon of F company had not halted when fired upon, but had continued forward until they were on the same ridge occupied by the Germans. The company commander, who was with them, not knowing that the rest of his company had halted, attempted to contact the 2nd platoon on his left. He soon became cognizant of the fact that the only other personnel on the ridge were extremely hostile. A furious fire fight took place as he attempted to retain his position.

Meanwhile, the executive officer, moving forward, rapidly became aware of what had happened. Not finding the 1st platoon, he surmised that it and the company commander had continued moving forward. Gathering a group of men together, he started to move to the aid of the 1st platoon. As he started down the ravine, the group ran headlong into the 1st platoon which had decided to pull back, finding their position untenable. By this time the men were so intermingled that the company commander ordered them to move back to the bulk of the company where an attempt would be made at reorganization.

Enemy mortar and artillery fire, falling into the company position, made the task of regrouping impossible. Small arms and tank fire continued to come from the ridge. The battalion

(52) Personal knowledge

CP having remained in MECHER-DUNKRODT, there was no one to issue orders or supervise. [It was impossible to dig in the rocky, frozen ground, so the men took what cover was available and waited.] Attempts to get the tanks to move up and engage the enemy met with little success.

Orders were finally received on the SCR 300 from battalion to pull back and reorganize the companies. By the time that this was accomplished, it was so late that the attack was postponed until the following morning.

At 2300, the battalion drew back about 1000 yards into some woods and dug in. (See Map D) [Trucks were sent up with blanket rolls which offered some protection against the freezing chill of the night.] The men were suffering considerably from the cold. [Most of them had been supplied with the woolen overcoat but these proved too bulky for rapid movement and were of insufficient warmth.] [It was so cold that night that the water froze in the jackets of the heavy machine guns.] (53)

THE SECOND ATTACK ON NOTHUM

A cold breakfast of K rations was consumed by the shivering men the following morning. Ammunition was issued to those individuals needing it. The battalion plan of attack for this operation was as follows: F company would attack on the left of the road leading to NOTHUM, bypass the town on the left and seize the high ground where the cemetery was located. They would then continue the attack to cut the highway leading to MON SCHUMANN crossroads by occupying HILL 475, just to the north of it.

E company would attack, guiding on the road, enter and

clear the town of NOTHUM.

G company would attack swinging to the right (east) of the town and seize the roads of MON SCHUMANN. (54)

The platoon of tanks and TDs would support the attack by fire from the ridge south of NOTHUM.

The 2nd platoon, Company A, 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion would be in direct support of the 2nd battalion from positions $\frac{1}{2}$ mile NE of MECHER-DUNKRODT. (55)

The 81mm mortar platoon would occupy firing positions on the reverse slope of the ridge and would be in general support. (56)

The 1st battalion, 101st Infantry would attack on the left and the 3rd battalion, 101st Infantry on the right. (See Map D)

The attack, preceded by an intense mortar and artillery preparation, moved off at 0700.

F company was disposed with the 2nd and 3rd platoons in assault and 1st in support. The 60mm mortar platoon was emplaced in the woods on the left of the road. The machine gun section accompanied the 1st platoon. (See Map F)

When the attack reached the crest of the ridge, intense fire from small arms and machine guns came from the town and the high ground beyond. The Germans had pulled back from the positions they had held the night before and occupied new ones. These offered much better fields of fire across open ground over which our troops must pass.

As the two assault platoons of F company came to a fence line at the edge of the woods, they came under intense machine

(54) Personal knowledge
(55) A-8
(56) A-7

pistol fire from reverse slope positions which the Germans had organized. (The enemy had cleverly concealed their positions and were almost invisible in their white snow capes and helmet covers. The fire was so intense that the company was unable to move beyond the edge of the wood line.

The company commander reasoned that if he could occupy the two houses directly to his front, fire could be brought directly down into the German positions. Taking a squad from the 2nd platoon, he made his way into the right house. He found as he suspected that fire could be delivered on the Germans. Before this could be done, a German tank, located at the edge of the woods 500 yards to the front, placed three shells into the house. This fire killed or wounded 6 members of the squad. The company commander and the remainder of the squad were forced to retreat back to the fence line, dragging the wounded with them. (57)

The entire battalion was now halted along the general crest of the ridge. Observers from the mortar platoon were endeavouring to bring fire on the enemy positions. The 4.2 chemical mortar platoon laid down a smoke screen in the vicinity of MON SCHUMANN crossroads in an attempt to screen the attack and reduce the effectiveness of the enemy fire. (58)

Arriving back from effecting contact with the 1st battalion on the left flank, the F company executive officer was approached by the 2nd platoon sergeant. The sergeant informed him that the company commander had been wounded and the situation in the 2nd and 3rd platoon areas was critical.

(57) Personal knowledge
(58) A-8

Upon moving to the fence line where the platoons were disposed, a shocking sight met his eyes. About 16 men of the 2nd and 3rd platoons were sprawled along the fence in grotesque attitudes of death or the yellow pallor of shock caused by severe wounds. Rifles, bazookas, grenades and all the impediments of battle littered the scene. The company commander lay under a tree with a medical aid man applying a bandage to a gaping wound in his head. From the shattered branches overhead it could be deduced that the fire from the enemy tank had caused tree bursts which had riddled the men with fragments as they lay huddled along the fence. (59)

Calling battalion on the SCR 300, the executive officer informed them that Lt. Larkin had become a casualty and requested litter bearers to evacuate the wounded. The battalion CO ordered him to take over command of the company and promised litter bearers.

The new company commander then set about reorganizing the two platoons and evacuating the wounded. The other officer in the company, in command of the weapons platoon, was notified that he would take over as executive officer.

At this time heavy firing could be heard coming from the direction of the 1st battalion. Knowing that a gap of several hundred yards existed between the two battalions, the company commander ordered his platoon sergeants to hold fast while he made a personal reconnaissance. Moving to the area of the 1st battalion, he found that they were meeting a vigorous counter-attack. (60) Moving back to his own company, he had the 1st

(59) Personal knowledge
(60) Personal knowledge

platoon move to the left to fill the gap and secure his flank. He reinforced the platoon with a section of heavy machine guns.

Upon moving back to the fence line, the company commander could find neither the 2nd or 3rd platoons in the positions he had left them. On scouring the area, three men from the 3rd platoon were found. These men were disposed in the most logical approach to the company positions while the company commander went to search for his missing platoons. He soon found them crouching in the brush at the bottom of the draw. Upon questioning the platoon sergeants, it was found that the shock of the intense fire that they had experienced and the sight of the dead and wounded had so unnerved the men, that when the heavy firing and shouting from the 1st battalion was heard, they had deserted their positions. The men were taken back to the fence line and the executive officer was summoned and told that he would so place himself in the rear of the platoon positions that a reoccurrence of the situation could be halted by him personally.

While this was occurring, it was found that a group of three Germans had infiltrated into the company area. These enemy were allowed to approach within 20 yards of the concealed position held by the three men of the 3rd platoon before they were eliminated by several well placed bursts of a BAR. (61)

The resistance offered by the Germans had detained the battalion attack well into the afternoon. It was then planned to continue the attack at 1630 after the area had been well saturated with artillery and mortar fire and another smoke

(61) Personal knowledge

screen laid down by the chemical mortar platoon. (62) The tanks and TDs were ordered up to the crest of the ridge to support the attack after having failed to do this previously. (63)

The company commander of F company planned to continue the attack with the 1st and 2nd platoons since the ranks of the 3rd platoon had been decimated in the attack of the morning. The 3rd platoon would remain on the ridge until it was ordered to move forward by the company commander. This would constitute his support.

The tanks had moved up to the crest of the ridge and the 1st and 2nd platoons of F company were disposed along the fence line to their left ready to move. An intense artillery preparation was laid on NOTHUM and the attack jumped off again at 1630.

Just as the leading tank was pulling over the crest of the ridge, two Panzerfausts were fired at it by two Germans who had made their way up to the cover of the two buildings. The tank immediately threw two tank shells into the houses and started to spray the area with machine gun fire. Firing but-
toned up and traversing its turret, the tank began firing di-
rectly down the fence line where the 1st and 2nd platoons were poised for the jump off. Before the company commander could stop this fire by kicking the barrel of the machine gun and hammering on the hull with his carbine, six or seven men of the platoons became casualties. (64)

In addition to everything else, this about ruined the

(62) A-8

(63)

(64) Personal knowledge

morale and spirit of the company. Only by threats and cajoling were the platoons lined up and readied to move forward. E and G companies had already moved out in the attack. Looking down into NOTHUM, crisscrossed by bands of tracers and exploding shells, was like looking into the bowels of the Inferno. Realizing that the men would never move into this without an example, the company commander and his radio operator dashed down the slope shouting, "Follow me" / Upon reaching the bottom, he found that he still had no company with him. Returning to the company position, he found his men still crouched there staring at him with fear filled eyes. The radio operator, Sgt. Fortune, then volunteered to lead the attack if the company commander would get behind and push. This was then tried and met with success. With Sgt. Fortune leading and the company commander behind, booting the laggards, the company attack moved forward. (65)

Once the attack got underway, it moved smoothly, in fact, much faster than either E or G companies. The men were extremely anxious to get out of the exceedingly heavy fire. The enemy were driven off CEMETERY HILL and the platoons overran these positions, moving out to the road to seize HILL 475.

As the platoons reached the low ground in the vicinity of the road, they were subjected to exceedingly heavy fire from the high ground to the front and from ²⁴⁷MON SCHUMANN. (See Map F)

The platoon sergeant and several men of the 2nd platoon, which was on the right, were wounded and the platoon was beaten back into NOTHUM. The 1st platoon was pinned down in the

(65) Personal knowledge

vicinity of the road unable to move. The company commander and six men were trapped behind the stone wall of the cemetery.

Seeing that the 1st platoon would be butchered if action was not taken to relieve them, the company commander attempted to reach the 3rd platoon by 536 radio but could not make contact. He then asked for a volunteer to carry a message back and one of the men accepted. The plan was for the 3rd platoon to move through the woods on the left flank of CEMETERY HILL and flank the German positions. The messenger started out but was killed as he started down the hill. Sgt. Fall, platoon guide of the 1st platoon, then volunteered and made a dash down the hill. Both his canteen and the handle of his trench knife were shot off but he made it safely. Meanwhile, the company commander contacted the heavy weapons CO on his SCR 300 and requested mortar fire on the enemy positions. Sgt. Fall returned in about ten minutes with the light machine gun section, the 60mm mortar section and a section of the heavies. These guns were set up in the woods on the left of CEMETERY HILL; and under cover of their fire, the company commander and the remaining men made a dash to the safety of the woods. Fire from the light machine gun section, the section of the heavies, and the 60mm and 81mm mortars was laid on the enemy position. Under cover of this fire, the 1st platoon was pulled out of their exposed position and a final assault was made on HILL 475 which drove the enemy from their positions. F company had accomplished its mission. (66)

(66)

Sgt. Fall was asked why he hadn't brought back the 3rd platoon. He stated that it was nowhere to be found so he had gathered together everything he could lay his hands on. It was later found that a member of the battalion staff, seeing the platoon in its original position, had ordered it into the town of NOTHUM to assist E company in mopping up. (67)

The attack of E company was successful in driving the enemy from the town but the attack of G company had failed. G company had to attack across open snow covered ground being exposed to enemy fire almost from the time they had left their attack positions. Upon approaching a small group of woods to the right of MON SCHUMANN crossroads, they were met with heavy fire from enemy positions located here. The company was driven off to the left and then attempted to assault the buildings at the crossroads. They were likewise met here with exceedingly heavy fire and, after sustaining heavy casualties, were forced to move back to the cover of the town as dusk was falling. (68) (See Map F)

The company commander of F company, sizing up the situation as it then existed, realized that his 1st platoon was in a very vulnerable position. It was in a salient in the enemy positions, vulnerable to attack from the front, rear and either flanks. The strength of his company was such that the position could not be strongly held. Battalion was notified and permission was requested to move the platoon back across the road into the woods where a better defensive position could be organized for the night and still fulfill the mission of

(67) Personal knowledge

(68) Personal knowledge

blocking the road. Permission was granted and the platoon was moved back across the road and defensive positions were dug in the cover of the woods. The 2nd platoon would defend CEMETERY HILL. Of the two houses on this hill, one was allotted to each platoon as a place where those men not actually manning the positions could go to get warm, eat and get some rest. The company CP was set up in the northern edge of NOTHUM and the remnants of the 3rd platoon were located nearby to act as a mobile reserve to be rushed to any spot where danger threatened. The 2nd platoon of H company was attached to F company to assist in the defense of the positions.

That night there was little rest for the battalion as the Germans continued to pour extremely heavy artillery and mortar fire into the town. Afraid that this fire presaged a counterattack, the men were on their toes all night peering into the darkness for the enemy. Numerous casualties from this fire were sustained by all the companies, particularly G company which was outposting the east part of the town. Shrapnel from one artillery shell, which struck outside of the CP of F company, tore the entire front out of the field jacket of the artillery forward observer who was standing inside the building talking to the company commander. Several of the buildings had been set afire by the shelling and the illumination made movement practically impossible due to small arms fire from MON SCHUMANN. (69)

At this time the battalion CP was still located at MECHERDUNKRODT. (70)

(69) Personal knowledge

(70) A-7

THE WITHDRAWAL FROM NOTHUM

Early in the morning of 29 December, orders were received from battalion that a withdrawal would be made at 0400 to the line held on the ridge the previous day. Information had been received from higher headquarters that the Germans were preparing to counterattack and it was felt that the present location of the battalion was not conducive to the best defense.

(71) (72) (73)

The F company commander accompanied by his platoon sergeants made a prior reconnaissance of positions to be occupied. The company, as part of the battalion, moved out at 0400 and dug in and occupied these positions. The remainder of the morning was spent waiting for the counterattack which never materialized.

At 1200, orders were received that the battalion would attack again at 1300 and reoccupy the town. This attack would follow the same plan used the preceding day. The attack jumped off at 1300 and occupied NOTHUM without incident, taking up the positions so recently vacated. All evidence pointed to the fact that the Germans did not know that the battalion had withdrawn. If they could credit their eyes, two battalions now occupied the town. (74)

The remainder of the day was spent in adjusting mortar fire on targets that presented themselves to the front of the battalion. From observation posts on CEMETERY HILL, fire from the 4.2 mortars was adjusted on German ski troops who were seen moving three mountain howitzers in the vicinity of BERLE.

(71) Personal knowledge
(72) A-7
(73) A-8
(74) Personal knowledge

The accurate fire of these weapons forced the troopers to abandon their weapons. (75) Fire from the 81mm mortars was adjusted on a German mortar, which could be seen firing from a clearing beyond MON SCHUMANN and the weapon was destroyed. (76)

In the afternoon cries could be heard coming from the area over which G company had attacked the previous day. These were believed to be from wounded men who were still lying where they had fallen. A smoke screen was laid down at 1700 by 2nd platoon, Co. A, 3rd Chemical Mortar Bn. and a patrol from G company, under cover of the smoke, searched the area, but could find no one. (77) The battalion settled down for the night in defensive positions.

THE ATTACK ON MON SCHUMANN

At 1115, 30 December, the F company commander was summoned to the battalion CP, which was now located in one of the two houses on the ridge overlooking NOTHUM. There he was informed that the battalion planned to attack MON SCHUMANN crossroads at 1150. The plan of attack was for F company to attack and seize the crossroads and continue the attack to occupy the high ground on HILL 490. E company was to move around to the left flank of the battalion and attack generally along the line of the woods so as to strike MON SCHUMANN in the flank and then to continue the attack on the west of the road so as to occupy that portion of HILL 490 in their zone. G company was to move on a compass azimuth generally along the MON SCHUMANN-WILTZ road and move into a position on the left

(75) Personal knowledge
(76) A-8
(77) A-8

flank of the third battalion to relieve the pressure I and K companies were meeting. (78) At this time a gap of over a 1000 yards existed between the 2nd and 3rd battalions. (See Map G)

This BASTOGNE-WILTZ road was one of the main supply routes for the German forces attacking the beleaguered defenders of BASTOGNE. It was believed that the Germans would fight tenaciously to hold it.

No tanks or TDs were to be used in the attack, although it has been shown that G company had been severely mauled on the 28th in attempting to seize the crossroad, which was strongly held. (79)

It was 1140 by the time that the F company commander got back to his company positions on CEMETERY HILL. Realizing that he had only ten minutes before the attack was due to jump off, he issued rapid orders for the assembling of the company. Making a swift visual reconnaissance of the area, it could be seen that the company would have to move over open snow-covered ground which offered not the slightest bit of cover and concealment. Remembering what had happened to G company, the company commander devised a plan of attack that if not sound was at least unusual. It was as follows: the 1st and 2nd platoons would attack in a column of files on each side of the road leading to MON SCHUMANN. The bank on the right side of the road would offer some cover almost to the first building. The 3rd platoon would be used to make a feint on the east nose of CEMETERY HILL and would withdraw to

(78) A-5, p. 29

(79) Personal knowledge

cover as soon as fired upon. The 60mm mortar section would go into position on the reverse slope of the hill to support the attack by fire. The light machine gun section would initially support by fire from the hill and then displace forward to the crossroads upon the company reaching that point. The 1st platoon of H company would support the attack by fire from positions on the hill.

The preparatory artillery concentration had already started before the company could be assembled and moved out for the attack. By the time that the leading elements of the 1st and 2nd platoons were on the road, the artillery fire had ceased. The company commander radioed battalion and requested the fire to continue and be lifted on his order. This was granted and the platoons moved out when the first shells again began to fall.

The move was made at a run down the road with the men crouching low in an attempt to remain concealed behind the low embankment. An interval of about 10 yards was maintained between men. When the lead man was about 50-75 yards from the first building, the order was radioed to battalion to lift the fire so the final assault could be made on the buildings. At the same time, the 3rd platoon was signaled to make their feint.

The 1st platoon hit the buildings. The first two men to enter the village were T/Sgt. Hall, platoon sergeant of the 1st platoon and a BAR man, Pfc. Green. Sgt. Hall threw grenades through every available window while Pfc. Green was spraying each window with bursts of fire to keep any defenders down.

As they dashed around the second building in the village, they encountered two Germans setting up a machine gun to engage the 3rd platoon which could be seen moving across the open ground from CEMETERY HILL. Pfc. Green emptied an entire magazine into the gun crew, practically cutting one German in two at the waist. (80)

By this time both platoons were in the buildings, firing and throwing grenades. The fire from one of the heavy machine guns on CEMETERY HILL was about shoulder high across the road; and in order to assault the last building in the village, it was necessary for some of the men to crawl under the tracers. Since no radio contact could be made with this platoon, it was necessary for the company commander to send a runner back to order them to lift their fire.

With the crossroads in their hands, the company began to clear the buildings and found that they had bagged an entire German company in the cellars. The second difficulty was then encountered. With the road packed with both German and American soldiers, the great American love of souvenir-hunting took possession of the men. Germans were relieved of Lugers, P-38s and Iron Crosses, while the company commander stood in the middle of the road screaming and trying to restore order. After about ten minutes, the Germans were herded together and sent back under guard to the mortar platoon positions where they could be further searched and sent back to battalion. The mortar platoon later found the pockets of the first group of Germans sent back overflowing with grenades and knives

(80) Personal knowledge

which had been overlooked by the men in the looting. (81)
One English speaking German was kept and sent out into the clearing back of the buildings to shout at any Germans in the woods to come out and surrender as they would get fair treatment. This produced 8 additional prisoners.

The F company commander could see and hear the progress of E company as they attacked along the edge of the woods, leaving a trail of dead and wounded behind them. He then gathered his company together and moved into the woods on the right of the road and waited for E company to come abreast so a coordinated attack would be made on HILL 490.
(82)

Being unable to see or hear any sign of G company, a patrol was sent to the northeast to attempt to contact them. This patrol soon returned and reported that they were unable to get through as they had encountered Germans in strength and received considerable fire about 400 yards to the northeast along the WILTZ road. (83)

At this time contact was made between E and F companies and E company occupied the crossroads village while the two company commanders talked over the situation. E company had met considerable resistance all along the edge of the woods but had managed to capture about a platoon of Germans while sustaining numerable casualties themselves. F company had completed the attack without the loss of a single man. While they were talking, their command group were narrowly missed by a rifle grenade, fired from the rear by a German making his

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- (81) Personal knowledge
(82) Personal knowledge
(83) Personal knowledge

way into the neck of woods south of the road. The group took cover and the F company commander ordered the 3rd platoon to move down and occupy this stretch of woods.

With the outlook of enemy on both flanks, to the front, and with the possibility of attack from the rear, the two company commanders discussed the advisability of continuing the attack without G company to secure their right flank. It was decided to leave the decision to battalion; so a call was made over the SCR 300 and the situation was explained. Battalion advised to hold in place until the location of G company could be determined. About an hour later, word was received from battalion that G company would not be available and to dig in and prepare to repel a counterattack on the present position. F company set up a semicircular defensive position in the woods bordered by the WILTZ-BASTOGNE highway.

(84) (See Map G)

It was later learned that G company had missed making contact with the 3rd battalion, 101st Infantry and had wandered into the area of the 328th Infantry on the division right flank. When ordered to move back to their assigned position, the G company commander had broken down with advanced combat fatigue. Upon seeing their commander break down, the one person who had held the badly mauled company together, the men went to pieces also and some went so far as to break their rifles and refuse to go back to the front. Only rapid and stern measures by the regimental commander, Colonel Walter T. Scott, saved this unit as a fighting organization for the rest of the ARDENNES campaign. (85) A group

(84) Personal knowledge

(85) Statement by Captain Bernard De Roller on 4 April 1950

of volunteers of the company was organized under a replacement officer and sent back to the 3rd battalion. (86)

The area in which F company was disposed for defense was thickly wooded with coniferous trees of from 12 to 20 inches in thickness. Between these larger trees were small seedlings about 3 feet in height. Visibility was limited to about 10 yards in any direction. The BASTOGNE-WILTZ highway which bordered the position on two sides was a paved road about 6 meters wide. This road sloped gradually from MON SCHUMANN crossroads until it disappeared over HILL 490 in the vicinity of BERLE, being bordered on both sides by woods. This road, because of the observation it afforded the enemy, was a definite barrier to any lateral movement between E and F companies. The road that went northeast from MON SCHUMANN to WILTZ was bordered on the north by woods but on the south was generally clear and offered very little concealment. The buildings at the crossroads were stoutly constructed of stone with thick walls and two of these buildings had deep reinforced cellars which offered good protection from artillery fire. A gap of almost a thousand yards separated F company from the 3rd battalion on the right flank. A similar gap existed at this time with the 1st battalion on the left. (87)

F company had dug themselves in well and had camouflaged their foxholes with pine branches so that they were almost invisible. Overhead cover was constructed on the majority of these foxholes, utilizing beams and timbers from one of the wrecked buildings at MON SCHUMANN.

(86) Personal knowledge

(87) Personal knowledge

E company dug defensive positions in and around the buildings at the crossroads.

THE DEFENSE OF MON SCHUMANN

Darkness was falling and the job of improving the defense continued. During a casual conversation with the company commander, a squad leader happened to mention that a platoon from G company had just moved by on the road in the direction of WILTZ. This startled the company commander for he had just received information from battalion that the elements of G company wouldn't be expected for another hour. Upon checking, it was found that some of the men from E company had noticed the same group but hadn't paid any particular attention since it was dark and it was impossible to differentiate the uniforms. It was finally deduced that this group was a German platoon, who not knowing that MON SCHUMANN was in American hands, had moved blithely and ignorantly in complete safety through the positions occupied by two rifle companies. Men from both companies were alerted to challenge and use countersigns. For the remainder of the night it became exceedingly difficult and dangerous to move around the battalion area. (88)

About 2000 hours, exceedingly heavy shelling was concentrated on the company areas and the units met their first taste of Nebelwerfers or "Screaming Meemies", as they were termed by the riflemen. These rockets proved to be hard on the nerves but not particularly dangerous, relying on blast and concussion effect rather than fragmentation.

(88) Personal knowledge

About 2200 hours, Germans began attempting to infiltrate through our positions. Two of these men were captured when they fell into foxholes occupied by members of F company. All during the remainder of the night, squad-sized attacks were made on F company positions. Most of these groups were allowed to get almost within the company perimeter before they were eliminated. It was believed that these were patrols feeling out the company positions. All men were alerted for a counter-attack at dawn and were warned not to fire tracers that would give away the location of positions. A special detail was sent back to pick up extra ammunition and grenades to be distributed amongst the squads.

As had been anticipated, at daybreak on the morning of the 31st December, the Germans counterattacked, preceded by an intense mortar and artillery concentration. The attack was through the sector of F company, as it was the only covered route into the battalion position. Artillery fire from the 101st Field Artillery battalion was called down in defensive barrages. The 81mm mortar fired nearly 700 rounds in an hour, and the frozen hands of the gunners stuck to red hot mortar tubes. It was necessary to cool the guns with burlap soaked in water. (89)

The company commander was apprehensive as to how his company would react to this attack in view of what had happened on the preceding days. But his fears were groundless for the men seemed to have changed overnight into hardened combat veterans. This was the first time that the men had an oppor-

(89) A-7

tunity to see at close range the enemy that had been giving them so much hell for the past week. When the rifleman found out that the German was no nebulous creature but a human being that fell and screamed when shot, he lost his fears and settled down to dish out a little return vengeance of his own. The company was magnificent and the enemy beat himself to annihilation on the smoking, spitting muzzles of M-1's and BAR's. No prisoners were taken and, as suddenly as it had started, the counterattack stopped.

Men raised stiff sweating bodies from foxholes and went to view the shambles in front of their position. Dead Germans were scattered everywhere, attesting to the efficacy of the artillery, mortar and small arms fire. Men immediately began discussing ways to improve their positions and new means of inducing an even higher casualty rate on the next attack when it should come. Sgt. Hall of the 1st platoon determined that better penetration of the trees could be made if armor-piercing ammunition was used. This was accepted with wise nods by the men and feverish activity was underway to load all clips and magazines with the black-nosed cartridges. (90)

After one squad leader died of shock brought about by a bullet-shattered arm and the extreme cold, it was found that immediate evacuation had to be made of the wounded. Since no litter bearers were forthcoming from battalion, a small sled was located to evacuate the more seriously wounded and improvised litters were constructed for those not so seriously injured.

(90) Personal knowledge

Some men with superficial but painful wounds refused to be evacuated but desired to remain with the company.

Enemy artillery and mortar fire continued all throughout the rest of the day but no further enemy attacks were received. The elements of G company had arrived and been attached to F company. They were incorporated into the company defense. Rocket and artillery fire falling in NOTHUM had caused heavy casualties amongst the mortar and machine gun platoons which were located there. (91)

At about 1800 hours, the battalion communication section had run a wire line into the E and F company CP's. The situation was serious in the 101st Infantry area. Co. A, 101st Engineers was alerted to go into battle if the need should arise. (92) All excess personnel from regimental headquarters and service installations were set to work digging defensive positions in the vicinity of MECHER-DUNKRODT in case the Germans should break through the thinly held line of the infantry. (93) Only two Bailey bridges were available if the division should have to retreat beyond the line of the SURE RIVER. (94)

As darkness drew on, the German mortar, artillery and Nebelwerfer fire increased in tempo. A surprise night attack was made suddenly on the F company positions in about platoon strength. Again the artillery and mortar barrages were called down and it was the same repetition of the attack that morning. No sooner had this attack been beaten off than a new one

(91) A-7

(92) A-5, p. 29

(93) Statement by Captain Bernard De Roller on 4 April 1950

(94) A-5, p. 23

was launched by the Germans. Furious fighting was taking place all through the woods. E company, not being engaged by the enemy, was attempting to support by fire, as best they could, the attack against the F company positions. This attack was finally halted when a third one was launched which seemed even more fierce than the preceding two. Ammunition was beginning to run low. Several of the NCO's crawled out and returned with German weapons which were used to supplement the fire of their own. Many individual feats of heroism were demonstrated. When the M-1 of one rifleman jammed, a wounded man in an adjoining foxhole threw him a carbine just in time for him to shoot a German who had broken through the perimeter. (95)

On this final attack the Germans had moved through the defensive artillery barrage and were almost on the perimeter of the defense. Contacting the battalion artillery liaison officer on the radio, the company commander requested the artillery fires to be moved in closer to the perimeter. At first the artillery officer refused, stating that it would be inside the safety limits for artillery. The F company commander finally convinced him that if the fire was not delivered the positions were in danger of being overrun. He used as an additional argument the fact that his men were in foxholes while the Germans were not. This fire was delivered, breaking the spirit of the German attack; and they withdrew. It was later found that this fire, which had fallen at the edge of the perimeter, had caused only one casualty in the company. One man had received a piece of shrapnel in the buttocks. (96)

(95) Personal knowledge
(96) Personal knowledge

During this attack the company commander had been in direct contact with the battalion and regimental commanders, keeping them informed of the situation. He had also spoken briefly with Brigadier General Hartness, the Assistant Division Commander.

Later in the evening, a German plane flew over and dropped several small fragmentation bombs which fell harmlessly in the field south of the MON SCHUMANN crossroads. He had also strafed NOTHUM and wounded in this attack the artillery forward observer, who was going forward to E and F companies. Severe counter-mortar fire had caused 3 casualties in the 81mm mortar platoon.
(97)

Due to the numerous casualties sustained by the company, the 60mm mortar section was moved into the company defensive positions to act as riflemen. The 60mm mortar had proved to be practically worthless in the heavy woods and the section had been used to keep the company supplied with ammunition and rations. (98)

No further attacks were experienced that evening.

The following morning on the 1st January 1945, a half-hearted counterattack supported by SP guns was experienced but was driven off by artillery fire. (99) By now, the woods in and surrounding the F company positions were so shredded by mortar, artillery and small arms fire, that visibility for about two hundred yards was now possible.

A survey of the scene of the attack of the night before

(97) A-7
(98) Personal knowledge
(99) A-7

revealed utter carnage. The scene resembled a graveyard with the grave diggers on strike. A five-man German machine gun squad was found in a line along a trail where they had fallen, still carrying their weapons and equipment. One burst of machine gun fire had accounted for all of them. Another German machine gunner was found with his gun poked around the bole of a tree and his hand frozen in the act of pulling back on the cocking lever. A well placed rifle ball had opened the door to Valhalla. Another German was found still living but with the entire top of his skull missing where a piece of shrapnel had penetrated his helmet. He died before being evacuated. These scenes were repeated many times. Some enemy were found with their legs frozen in the attitude of flight.

The company commander had a count taken of the platoons and found that his company was down to about 40 men. (100) The rest of the day was spent in cleaning weapons and wondering what would come next. In taking stock of his remaining automatic weapons, the company commander found that three BAR's had been fired so incessantly that the overheating had warped the mechanism and rendered them useless. Many men had acquired German machine pistols and carbines when their own weapons had broken down or run out of ammunition. The BAR's were sent back to battalion with a request for immediate replacement.

At about 2000 hours that night, the company commander was told to report to battalion headquarters. There with the E company commander, he was told that the battalion would attack the following morning at 0600, to seize the high ground at HILL

(100) Personal knowledge

490 overlooking Berle. (101) The two company commanders informed the battalion commander that their companies had been whittled down to the size of platoons and the men were in no condition to attack, for many of them were suffering from trench foot and exposure after spending so much time in their foxholes. The battalion commander agreed but stated that the attack must be made. E, F and the remnants of G company would attack on a 200 yard front on the right of the road leading to BERLE. C company of the 1st battalion would attack from the buildings at MON SCHUMANN and take the left of the road. F company would guide on the road making the main assault on HILL 490 in the battalion zone, with E and G companies on its right flank. Since the heavy machine gun platoons had been reduced by casualties to a single platoon, this would be held in general support on CEMETERY HILL. (102) The artillery would fire a fifteen minute preparation, starting at 0545, walking this preparation by 100 yard leaps up both sides of the road to HILL 490 and then back again. It would then move forward again and pound the entire area up to HILL 490. The battalion was to advance behind this rolling barrage. (103) After receiving this order, the company commanders moved back to their respective units.

The company commander called all platoon sergeants to the CP to orient them on the coming attack. The men were so dazed, from sleepless nights and shock from the attacks and artillery pounding, that it was necessary to repeat the order two and

(101) A-5, p. 30
(102) A-7
(103) Personal knowledge

three times before it seeped into their consciousness. He then made each man repeat it to be sure it was understood. The company commander then contacted E company commander and the coming attack was discussed. It was decided not to attempt to hold out any reserve due to the smallness of the companies, but to have as many men as possible in line to add weight to the attack.

THE ATTACK ON HILL 490

The following morning, 2 January, the companies began to dispose themselves along the line of the road at 0530. The artillery concentration started promptly at 0545 with the entire 101st Field Artillery Battalion firing. The preparation was awe inspiring as it thundered and rolled its way along. Wounded Germans could be heard screaming in the woods to the front. Promptly at 0600, the attack jumped off with C company moving out on the left flank. No resistance was met until the clearing about 150 yards to the front was reached. A hail of small arms and machine gun fire met the battalion, killing the machine gun section sergeant of F company and wounding several men. C company was caught in the open ground north of MON SCHUMANN and its dead and wounded began to litter the ground. A tank or SP gun located at the far edge of the clearing began to fire on the troops and soon this was augmented by fire from a 20mm Flak multiple mount located in the same vicinity. This fire drove the 2nd battalion back into the woods. Fire was requested from the battalion on these positions and tanks were asked to be sent up to knock out the self-propelled gun. About the time that friendly artillery began firing, German

mortar and artillery began falling in the battalion position. This confused the battalion, and, thinking it their own artillery falling short, ordered it to cease firing. The battalion was soon driven back into their previous positions suffering heavy casualties from the fire. (See Map G) The F company commander, returning to the road to get the tanks to move up, was wounded by fragments from an artillery shell. (104)

The battalion remained in that position the rest of the day taking a terrific pounding from the artillery and SP guns. Soon both the E and G company commanders were wounded, and battalion sent up several replacements to take command. The battalion remained in a defensive position for the remainder of the day and night.

THE RELIEF

The following morning, 3 January, the battalion was continually subjected to artillery and mortar fire. The replacement officers, sent up the previous day from battalion, had been either wounded or killed. Lt. O'Donnell, a platoon leader from H company, was sent to take over command of the three companies and prepare to be relieved. (105)(106) The 3rd battalion of the 328th Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel A. C. Tillson, began moving into the positions under extremely heavy mortar and artillery fire. [At 2100 hours, the remnants of the 2nd battalion were ordered to withdraw from MON SCHUMANN crossroads and assemble in NOTHUM.]^{ct} The dazed battle weary troops were marched back, lead by the H company commander, Lieutenant Bernard DeRoller. As they moved

(104) Personal knowledge

(105) Statement by Captain Bernard DeRoller, 4 April 1950

(106) Statement by Captain J. A. Seab, 15 April 1950

past the battalion CP in NOTHUM. not one member of the battalion headquarters came out of their cellar to cheer them on or commend them on a job well done. (107) Out of a strength of over 200 men on entering combat, F company had been reduced to a meager 27 riflemen. The entire battalion strength was 65 men. (108)

In conclusion it can be said that: F company 101st Infantry, while failing in its final attack on HILL 490, did succeed in cutting the BASTOGNE-WILTZ highway, an important German supply line. All of the company objectives had been taken and at no time was the company forced to withdraw from their positions by an enemy attack. The stand taken by the company at the cross roads sided materially in the pressure being placed against the 3rd battalion 101st Infantry.

The fiercest fighting in the entire combat history of the 101st Infantry took place in and around the crossroads at MON SCHUMANN.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. PERSONNEL

In any discussion of the actions of the company, it must be kept in mind that the bulk of the unit was composed of untrained and untried personnel. The majority of these men had been drafted from relatively safe, rear echelon jobs and had no desire to be fighting as Infantry. The adverse frame of mind caused by this factor coupled with the low morale brought about by the weather, terrain, and enemy operations, induced a defeatist attitude in the soldier. It wasn't until

(107) Statement by Captain Bernard DeRoller, 4 April 1950
(108) Statement by Captain J. A. Seab, 15 April, 1950

he found himself in a seemingly impossible situation at MON SCHUMANN crossroads and bound together with his comrades in adversity, that the inherent fighting spirit of the American soldier came to the fore. This sudden soaring of morale was the primary factor that enabled the company to beat off the savage German counterattacks and retain their positions.

Any criticism leveled at the Army Commander for throwing these green troops against some of the best remaining German divisions, has no basis in fact or results obtained. The 26th Division was one of the three divisions available at the time, and speed in striking the ARDENNES counteroffensive in the flank outweighed all other considerations. The division was able to fulfill all missions assigned to it and gained considerable experience and tempering which was to stand it in good stead in future operations.

2. COMMAND

a. Throughout the battles for NOTHUM and MON SCHUMANN, the battalion commander should have been so located as to better control and fight his battalion. Some of the resulting confusion in the night attack on NOTHUM would have been eliminated if the battalion commander had been on the spot to supervise. During the day attack on NOTHUM, it was necessary to transmit through a relay station on the SCR 300 to reach the battalion command post at MECHEK-DUNKRODT. At no time during the attacks did the battalion commander visit his companies to ascertain the situation or influence the action. What visits were made were accomplished by members of the battalion staff. It is believed that his actual presence on the battle position, where

he could be seen by the riflemen, would have had a decided morale effect.

b. The actions of the battalion staff officer in moving the 3rd platoon of F company into NOTHUM, without the knowledge of the company commander, was a serious error. When this unit was urgently needed to flank the enemy position on HILL 475, it was not available. Only quick thinking and positive action by Sergeant Fall, in gathering together an alternate force, averted possible serious consequences.

c. The assignment of the platoon leader from company F to battalion seriously handicapped the company on the eve of entering combat. As events later proved, the battalion battle patrol was never a functioning unit. Better use could have been made of the platoon leader by allowing him to remain with the company.

d. In two instances, insufficient time was allowed the company in preparing for an attack. In the night attack on NOTHUM, orientation of men of the key non-commissioned officers had to be made as the company was moving forward to the attack. No time was available for reconnaissance or planning and as a result the attack was a dismal failure. The second instance was the attack on MON SCHUMANN. Approximately twenty minutes was available to the company commander, after returning from battalion headquarters, for issuing his attack order and assembling his unit for combat. As a result the preparatory artillery fire had ceased before the company was ready to move forward.

3. CONTROL

a. Due to the shortage of officers and combat exper-

perienced personnel. A plan for control had been devised by the F company commander and the executive officer. The company commander would lead and fight the two assault platoons, acting in both the capacity of a company commander and platoon leader. The executive officer would control the movement of the support platoon and the weapons platoon, since there was a likely eventuality of the company commander being pinned down with the assault platoons. The weapons platoon leader would choose positions for the weapons and maintain liaison with the rifle platoons in his support mission. The latter had to be modified somewhat due to the inexperience of this officer. This plan worked very well but had the disadvantage of unnecessarily exposing the company commander. At the time, no other alternative could be seen. Upon the loss of the company commander, the entire burden fell on the executive officer with a resulting loss of control.

b. The SCR 536 radio proved to be not well adapted for operations in extreme cold. Fair operating results could be obtained by keeping the batteries in a pocket, where they would keep warm, just prior to use.

4. MANEUVER

a. It is believed the plan of maneuver for the attack on MON SCHUMANN was not sound. The flanking maneuver of E company gained nothing but heavy casualties for the company. The unit was subjected to fire from enemy positions in the woods along the whole length of its attack. It had to move such a great distance that it arrived in MON SCHUMANN after F company had occupied the buildings. The attack by G company the previous

day had been beaten off with heavy losses, yet the attack by F company was entirely unsupported by tanks which were available. Cutting the BASTOGNE-WILTZ highway was one of the main missions of the regiment but the attack itself was insufficiently weighted.

b. In the attack on MECHER-DUNKRODT, the executive officer used poor judgement in allowing the support platoon to displace forward to positions where they could not assist the attack of the remainder of the company. This platoon should have been held on HILL 365 in the eventuality a flanking position on the enemy positions had to be made.

c. In the attack on MON SCHUMANN the formation of a file of men on each side of the road was dangerous tactics to adopt. A machine gun located in one of the buildings could have enfiladed the column causing heavy casualties. But the exigencies of the moment dictated that this formation was the only practical one. The company commander believed that the Germans would expect an attack across the open field and the location of the enemy machine guns later proved this to be true. The bank on the right side of the road offered some protection and the very audacity of the movement down the road might have confused the Germans. Full advantage of advancing under cover of the artillery preparation was made, and the Germans were caught seeking shelter in the cellars.

5. SUPPORTING FIRES

a. Fires from all supporting weapons were well utilized. The 4.2 Chemical Mortar platoon did excellent work in screening the attack with smoke. At this time the heavy weapons

company did not have mortar forward observers operating with the rifle companies but as a result of the lessons learned in the ARDENNES campaign, this change was later put into effect.

b. The actions of the heavy machine gun platoon leader in refusing to fire in the attack at MECHER-DUNKRODT, was the result of misinterpreting instructions issued him by his company commander. He had been told to be certain of his target before firing, due to the difficulty of resupplying hand carried weapons, and had taken his instructions literally. This mistake was never repeated by any subordinate unit of H company.

c. The machine gun platoons in their direct support role had a tendency to remain too far to the rear, making communication exceedingly difficult. In the defensive positions occupied at MON SCHUMANN, these guns should have displaced forward and been integrated into the defensive fires. Instead, the platoons remained behind in the vicinity of NOTHUM, where it was impossible to utilize them in final defensive fires.

d. Lack of reconnaissance by the tanks resulted in their not knowing the location of the Infantry and caused them to inflict unnecessary casualties on F company. No means of communication with the tank crew was available to halt the fire. The resulting casualties disrupted the company attack.

LESSONS

1. Inexperienced troops, capably led, can achieve success in combat but at the expense of heavy casualties.

2. Unit commanders in combat situations should be close enough to the assault echelons to influence their action and their presence will also act as a morale factor.

3. Staff officers and commanders should never interfere with the movement, location and disposition of subordinate units without first contacting the unit commander.

4. Combat units should not be robbed of key personnel, prior to entry into combat, to make up shortages in the headquarters of higher units.

5. Commanders should issue orders to subordinate units in sufficient time for them to make full preparations for forthcoming operations.

6. A supplementary plan of control should be devised in a unit where there is a minimum of subordinate leaders.

7. Supports and reserves must be so located that they can be rapidly committed to influence the action.

8. Audacious and unusual tactics, carefully planned, can oftentimes catch the enemy unawares.

9. Heavy machine guns should be integrated into the rifle company plans of defensive fires.

10. Tanks and Infantry operating together should effect immediate co-ordination as to each others plans and locations.